

INTERNAL
DISCUSSION
BULLETIN

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DSP discusses major initiative for left unity

By John Percy

On September 2, the Democratic Socialist Party's national executive agreed to propose to the party's membership that the DSP cease to operate as a public organisation from January 2003 so as to devote much more resources to building the Socialist Alliance.

If the proposal is adopted by the party's 20th Congress, to be held December 28-January 1, DSP members will devote all their efforts to building and recruiting to the Socialist Alliance rather than the DSP. The DSP will seek negotiations with the Socialist Alliance national executive about taking as much of the party's political and organisational assets into the Socialist Alliance as is possible.

DSP members will continue to organise as an internal tendency within the Socialist Alliance in order to organise a transition that ensures that the gains of its three decades of work as a party will not be lost to the left as a whole, including their dedicated efforts in producing and distributing *Green Left Weekly*.

We are confident that this will be a big step forward for left regroupment in Australia and that we will be able to agree, in stages, on concrete steps forward for the Socialist Alliance.

This confidence is based on the substantial political consensus and comradely collaboration on the left achieved since the founding of the Socialist Alliance.

Face of socialist unity

In just a year and a half the Socialist Alliance has managed to establish itself as the "face of socialist unity" in Australian politics. While we should not exaggerate its impact and visibility, it certainly enjoys, as a result of its electoral registration, election campaigns and overall work (including a presence in activist campaigns), much greater profile than any of its affiliates or any other left organisations.

Its modest but solid initial election results (around 1.4% at best in contests with the Greens, up to 4% where the Greens have not been present), its 2200 members and broader periphery confirm this judgement.

The Socialist Alliance has to one degree or another drawn around itself a large part of those who view themselves as socialists and left-wingers in Australia. These amount to roughly three times the membership of the founding affiliates. It has begun to extend socialist organising into new regions (like northern Tasmania) and it has the potential to repeat this sort of regional growth in other states.

Many working-class militants are looking seriously at the Socialist Alliance as their possible new political home. Further growth of the Socialist Alliance electorally and/or as a campaigning vehicle in the unions and communities will draw many more such militants into its ranks.

These gains have been won on the foundation of successful collaboration among the affiliates. Both at the founding conference and through the ongoing work of the Socialist Alliance national executive, we have been able to find — despite some disagreements — a correct and reasonably timely response to all the main political challenges of the day.

The Socialist Alliance has shown that the left can work together, a fact that is appreciated well beyond the ranks of the affiliate organisations themselves.

This experience tells us that the real political basis of the Socialist Alliance extends beyond its formally adopted founding platform and constitution to a consensus around a principled class-struggle approach to international and Australian politics.

The alliance's successes aren't the result of Australian political trends alone. The rising wave of resistance to neoliberal globalisation and the spread of alienation from labour and social-democratic parties — experienced as enforcers of austerity by millions of workers — opens up the possibility of creating mass revolutionary socialist parties in country after country.

Australia has yet to experience popular mass mobilisations as powerful as those in Barcelona, Paris and Rome or a vote for far left candidates as high as that achieved in the first round of the French presidential elections (over 10%) or the 8% the Scottish Socialist Party is currently polling.

Nevertheless, the unity expressed in the Australian Socialist Alliance has its roots in the same basic social and political trends — the rise of the (still very heterogeneous) movement against neoliberal globalisation and the emergence of class-struggle trends in the trade unions (like SUD in France, Cobas and SinCobas in Italy or the Victorian left unions in this country).

The Australian Socialist Alliance is also part of a global trend toward revolutionary left regroupment, especially in the advanced capitalist countries.

With due regard to all that is specifically Australian about it, the emergence of the alliance parallels the rise of the Socialist Alliance in England, the Scottish Socialist Party, the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda, Denmark's Enhedslisten, as well as the "left turn" of Rifondazione Comunista and the recently launched proposal of the French Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire for a new mass party of the radical anti-capitalist left.

These organisations and others like them have been meeting for several years now at the level of a European anti-capitalist left and their latest gathering in Madrid has produced a comprehensive statement of position on the burning issues of world and European politics.

Within all of these organisations the issue of what degree and form of unity it is necessary and possible for the radical left to achieve has been at the centre of discussion and debate.

Constraints

The Socialist Alliance has large unfulfilled and as yet untested potential. However, the constraints under which the alliance is presently labouring, if not lifted, will leave much of this potential unexploited.

The rise of the Green vote means that even less than previously can the Socialist Alliance hope to grow as a purely, or mainly, electoral formation. However, we have been unable to progress much beyond electoral work even though that was the express intent of all affiliates at the founding meeting and first national conference.

While the affiliates are maintaining and building their own organisations, this places an unavoidable constraint on what they can do to build the alliance. They are playing important roles in mass movements like the struggle for refugee rights (mainly outside of the framework of the alliance), but this also means that every rise in movement

activity has the potential to lead to a reduction in commitment to building the alliance.

The Socialist Alliance has no publication except its web page and issues-based leaflets and irregular broadsheets. These have been invaluable in giving the alliance profile on the issues of the day but they are no substitute for a regular paper putting a comprehensive alliance position and building its presence in all sectors of the population.

While the alliance has developed a majority non-affiliate membership, those who bear the burden of its work are still mainly members of the affiliate organisations.

The existing alliance “apparatus” is struggling to maintain the basics of membership records and finances, let alone responding in a timely way to national and international political issues.

Inspiring a bigger contribution from existing Socialist Alliance members and further extending its membership will, in the short run at least, require a bigger contribution from the members of the affiliates. There are local groups to be organised, hundreds of members whose concerns and areas of interest the alliance must get to know, especially in those regions where branches do not yet exist.

The DSP national executive is convinced that this growing impasse cannot be broken by affiliates applying a “more of the same” approach to building the Socialist Alliance. While it is up to each affiliate organisation to decide on its course, we are confident that DSP members will be prepared to radically increase the resources devoted to its construction.

Our collective experience in building the alliance has revealed its actual political basis. There is a significant amount of shared socialist program among the Socialist Alliance affiliates. While this is not formally outlined as a

program of the alliance, the founding documents refer to the fact that there is more common ground than that sketched out in the initial alliance platform.

This has been confirmed in practice by the actual experience of having to take a stand on such testing issues as the “war on terrorism”, Palestine and the current attacks on the most militant union leaderships in Australia.

When we reflect on the success of the alliance in developing positions of consensus or by very large majorities on such issues and add to this the high degree of unanimity reached over practical work, it is obvious that there is great potential for transcending or repositioning some of the traditional differences among the alliance’s affiliates. The democratic culture that the alliance has established can only help this process.

Rising to challenge

Our experience in working together surely confirms that left regroupment and unity will come about, and can only come about, on the basis of our rising to the objective challenges that are being posed by an intensifying class struggle and movement of anti-capitalist resistance. It will be our success in meeting these challenges — including the challenge of giving concrete and credible form to the socialist alternative at every turn — that will provide and strengthen the alliance.

In this context, existing differences among affiliates will have increasingly less weight and the grounds for the maintenance of the existing minimalist organisational form of the Socialist Alliance increasingly less operative. How important our existing differences really are and what organisational form they really justify should be tested out by serious debate in the context of ongoing joint work within the framework of the alliance. ■

ISO welcomes debate on regroupment of the left

By Sue Johnson

[The following is the text of a talk given at a session on the Socialist Alliance at the International Socialist Organisation’s Marxism 2002 conference held in Melbourne, September 6-8.]

Let me start by saying that I’m pleased to be in the Socialist Alliance and that my personal experience as candidate for the federal seat of Grayndler in last year’s election has convinced me that the Socialist Alliance does fill a political need.

Being in a party running in the elections gave a gravity to my work on the street and in campaigns. People were prepared to consider much more seriously what I was saying on issues, much more than if I were just selling *Socialist Worker*, arguing for or against a political party during an election.

Given the foul actions and disgusting racism whipped up by the major parties in the federal election campaign last year, this was a perfect start for the Socialist Alliance to campaign strongly for an alternative.

I should also start by saying that the International Socialist Organisation has approached the Socialist Alliance as an electoral front with the aims of attracting disaffected Labor voters, those to the left of Labor, union activists and people inspired by the anti-capitalist movement. And as

Dick [Nichols] outlined, in our work recently we have had some successes and Dick is absolutely right when he says that gains such as these are inspiring.

However, I do feel that the Socialist Alliance has failed to make real roots within our communities and within trade unions. We haven’t attracted a huge layer of disaffected Labor voters in NSW; and we haven’t attracted the anti-capitalist vote nor large numbers of non-affiliated militants to our ranks.

The reality is that we are good on propaganda, but weak on building local campaigns. In Sydney there are several campaigns that I know we haven’t been involved in to any great extent, such as the Save Callan Park campaign, no nuclear reactor, save our schools campaigns, and save Erskineville housing estate. These are grassroots campaigns that directly challenge the neo-liberal agenda of the privatisation of housing, education, and our urban environment, and of Australia’s role in the nuclear cycle.

While the Socialist Alliance has to be present at the large demonstrations against war and for closing the detention centres, we also have to be present in campaigns where people intersect at a very personal, community level with the rotten priorities of the system.

But the Socialist Alliance is a long-term project and I think we'll get better at it as time goes on.

As a united front to intervene electorally and as a place where the left can campaign on issues during elections, the Socialist Alliance has had some success and generally the groups within the alliance have shown cooperation and good comradeship. Overall, I would argue that its been a step forward for the left in Australia.

To consider the Democratic Socialist Party's proposal seriously and in a non-sectarian way, we have to consider what will best advance the struggle.

This period of international mass mobilisations around the big questions thrown up by anti-capitalism demands that we look for common ground on which to build the biggest opposition to the system. And in Australia this may be by regroupment as a socialist party.

But Alex Callinicos is absolutely right when he argued in a recent article (see "Regroupment, Realignment and the Revolutionary Left" at <http://www.swp.org.uk/INTER/INTER.HTM>) addressing the issue of regroupment that the lines of demarcation between left groups are no longer drawn along differences in theories, but in terms of how we respond to the challenges and concrete tasks thrown up by the period.

The success of regroupment, therefore, depends largely on how well the groups respond to the new movement in a united front. Otherwise, such regroupment would degenerate into a highly factionalised bun-fight.

The DSP's proposal, based on unity, cooperation and solidarity as it is, therefore begs the question of why such solidarity and unity is either not required or not possible in Sydney in the two most important political campaigns — those of refugees and against war.

The Free the Refugees Campaign was set up by the DSP after disagreements within the Refugee Action Campaign and has been defended by a leading DSP comrade on the basis of "welcoming diversity as a strength for a new and growing movement and safeguarding the movement's political independence from the major parties".

More recently, two campaign committees have emerged to organise against the war in Iraq — one with the DSP and the Workers Communist Party of Iraq called No War in Iraq, and one with the ISO, Greens, People for Nuclear Disarmament and Anti-Bases Coalition called the No War Coalition.

Further, I believe that on campuses throughout Australia the DSP is running on their own ticket called Free the Refugees, while other activists including those from the ISO are running on the broad left ticket. If an election calls for broad left unity, then why not these campaigns?

This situation presents a serious challenge to the question of regroupment, and requires strategic thinking and much debate by those in the alliance.

And there are other issues which will inform our final decision. With regard to the Greens, I think Dick is overstating their influence upon those whom we see as our constituents. While its true that they have been very successful in recent elections, they are not anti-capitalist and I believe that they are not the party that unionists and disaffected Labor Party members necessarily look to when they break from Labourism. I don't see the Socialist Alliance's success is limited by the success of the Greens, especially outside of NSW where the Greens have had much less electoral success.

Dick and Workers' Liberty have referred to the Scottish Socialist Party as a model which we could adopt. The SSP has been hugely successful and recently their MP, Tommy Sheridan, was included in the *Sunday Herald's* top 150 most influential people in Scotland.

However, as Alan McCombes, a leading member of the SSP, admitted, the experience of Scotland won't automatically be replicated in other situations. Some of the factors which have contributed to this success include the impressive profile of Scottish Militant Labour since the late 1980s, the high profile struggles led by the Scottish Socialist Alliance, the fact that the Labour Party has been the major party for decades locally and nationally while the Tories are marginalised, and by no means least the high profile of Tommy Sheridan as a mass leader of the SSP.

To simply transpose this model onto our experience in Australia is naive and one which requires careful consideration. The DSP cannot present this model to their national conference in January for a vote by their members, and adopt it if successful. This is not the way of groups premised on solidarity and cooperation, and the issue must be debated openly among Socialist Alliance members and voted on by Socialist Alliance members for a new party to be formed.

To finish up, the ISO recognises that anti-capitalism has meant generally that the left here and internationally has much more unity than it had five years ago, and looks for common ground more often than not. Because this is what the period has demanded. A perfect local example of this is the Sydney Social Forum, where about 30 progressive organisations and many individuals will come together to seriously discuss how we can change the world. And this will feed massively into the organising for actions against the Sydney World Trade Organisation meeting in November.

We need a flexible approach to build the largest possible left, but also to build the largest Leninist grouping within this. We do need to build a mass revolutionary party to take the class struggle forward when it requires it. So I welcome debate on this issue and encourage all Socialist Alliance members to get involved. ■

ISO national executive reply to DSP

September 29, 2002

To: John Percy, national secretary, DSP

Dear comrade,

The ISO's national executive and national committee have now had an opportunity for a first round of discussion about your party's proposal for the future of the Socialist Alliance.

We agree that the changing, challenging but largely more favourable conditions under which the far left is operating internationally raise questions about the best form(s) of organisation to take the struggle forward and build the influence of socialism within given national conditions.

We also share your pleasure at the modest but real successes recorded by the Socialist Alliance. In the space of

just 18 months, it has begun to establish itself among hundreds of non-aligned working class activists, and has contributed to a much more comradely atmosphere among affiliates.

We look forward to a genuine and open debate about the suggestions raised in your proposal. We will seek to facilitate that in our publications and our forums, as well as in the forums of the Socialist Alliance itself.

There are, however, a number of positions we hold that need to be clearly flagged.

First, we continue to be for the building of a mass revolutionary socialist party in the Bolshevik tradition as a prerequisite for a successful seizure of power by the working class. We therefore disagree with the DSP's approach of seeking to eventually wither away within a broader formation. While it would be sectarian to make disagreement around reform and revolution a barrier to wider left unity in action, these questions cannot be simply swept under the carpet. At some point, real challenges in the struggle will bring such arguments once more to the fore.

Second, we believe that the Socialist Alliance is not, and should not be transformed into, a revolutionary party. This would be to take a short cut of the most damaging kind. The many non-affiliated people who have joined have done so precisely because they see the Socialist Alliance as a place where revolutionaries and non-revolutionaries can work together around an agreed program. Any conference declaration that the Socialist Alliance had become a revolutionary party would likely see an exodus of many of those people, and set back the project for a political generation.

Our support for the Alliance project was premised on establishing an electoral united front that could attract those who were disillusioned with Labor and were looking to the left, with the likelihood that this situation would continue as Labor moved further to the right.

This involved establishing a platform that substantially embraced the best of "old Labor" values, such as opposition to privatisation and support for unions, as well as giving a clear alternative to those disgusted by Labor's stance over refugees. At the same time, the platform was designed to attract and influence those radicalised by anti-capitalism.

Our experience – and the Green vote in the last election – confirms that there is such a constituency. Any proposal for the future of the Alliance needs to be judged on how well it advances the original conception of being able to provide a home for those looking for a left alternative to Labor.

The points above do not mean that we reject discussions about a possible broad left party out of hand. But such a party cannot be declared by constitutional means, from above. And because such a party should not, and would not, be a revolutionary party, it would need to afford clear and permanent platform rights for revolutionary currents such as ourselves – and we would say, you, too.

What flows from the above is also a strongly held concern that a unilateral decision by your party to dissolve

into the Socialist Alliance from January would be a forced march which would not only fan the flames of cynicism but risk the future of the Alliance.

The Alliance has relied enormously on constructive collaboration and the development of areas of common ground. Your proposal would have been more constructive and less open to cynical interpretation had the initial discussion been able to take place without the sort of ultimatum created by the prospect of your decision to dissolve in January.

The decision creates immediate problems that reflect our wider concern over the kind of political formation envisaged by your proposal. Should you dissolve in January, the Alliance would have a substantially different composition in real terms (composed almost entirely of the members of one of the initiating groups, selling *Green Left Weekly*), yet with a leadership elected on very different basis.

Our position is that any discussion must be open-ended in subject matter and timeframe. We are anxious to ensure that as much of the Alliance and its periphery as possible are involved in the discussion and have already suggested specific meetings to encourage this.

The project we initiated together 18 months ago requires patience and persistence if we are to establish the Alliance as a credible, principled feature of the political landscape, capable of attracting those breaking from Labor (including those who have to date seen the Greens as that alternative).

We are also convinced that unity must be strengthened from the ground up, as well as from the top down. While we invite members of your leadership in Melbourne and Sydney to meet members of our NE for general discussions, we also hope to see progress on building greater collaboration to overcome the damaging and unnecessary divisions in our work around refugees, the war, etc.

The immediate future holds a number of challenges. In NSW (and probably Victoria) we face elections. The refugee campaign continues to grow, with Labor incapable of responding. The prospect of Australia joining the US war on Iraq will divide Labor supporters and raise issues for the Greens while offering further possibilities for developing collaboration on the broad left.

Our work in the next period will be judged by how successfully we relate to those who are looking beyond the ALP for an alternative to a system of war and racism.

We look forward to continuing discussions,

Yours in struggle,

David Glanz, for the ISO NE

cc ISO NC members

SA NE members

Alex Callinicos

Please note: while this correspondence is between the ISO and DSP national executives, we are happy to have this letter published in the next SA bulletin as a brief, initial ISO response to the DSP's proposal. ■

Talk to Marxism 2002 on DSP proposal

By Dick Nichols

Each and every time a revolutionary socialist organisation like the DSP or the ISO meets, a question always hangs over the gathering, a question so obvious that

there's hardly ever any need to pronounce it — how best can we strengthen the socialist, the Marxist, cause in the coming period?

Ninety-nine times out of 100 the answer to that question is simple — by strengthening ourselves. Discussion then passes on to improving revolutionary work in the movements, the unions and the communities, to sales of the press and to the distribution of literature, and to educating ourselves better for revolutionary work.

But there are rare times when that natural-enough answer is not the right answer to the question, or when we have to ask what “strengthening ourselves” really means, when unearthing the right answer requires more thought, more investigation. Who is “ourselves”, after all?

This is especially the case when there is a rise in interest in socialism, or a vaguer search by sections of workers and students and other parts of society in general for an alternative to standard capitalist politics. Then it’s our responsibility to ask what impact the answer we give will have on them — those curious but still sceptical human beings with which our socialist cause will be built or it won’t be built at all.

More specifically, what impact will that answer have on our ability as socialists and Marxists to link up with the natural leaders of working class, community and movement struggles, to convince them that the Marxist viewpoint is necessary and valid and, by strengthening this connection — this vital link — help us build a broader social and political base for socialism?

This is the case in Australia today. There are scores, if not hundreds, of working-class militants who are disgusted with the ALP, and we have to be sure that we have lost no opportunity to help them pass permanently out of the camp of Laborist politics and into that of socialism.

There are hundreds if not thousands of opponents of capitalism, who appreciate left unity and who would think more about joining if the socialist pole could be strengthened. Many of these are already members, if largely still passive members, of the Socialist Alliance.

DSP NE proposal

The national executive of the DSP, basing itself on an analysis of the present political conjuncture in Australia and on the experience of participating in the building of the Socialist Alliance — and after quite a deal of agonising — is convinced that we cannot, if we are to serve the socialist cause as well as we possibly can, just give the same old answer to the question: how to strengthen the socialist cause today?

If we are to “capture” as many of the potential recruits to socialism that are out there as we possibly can, we can only do it by strengthening our best recruiting instrument — and that’s the Socialist Alliance.

So for us the answer to the question “what is to be done?” certainly cannot be: “Just build the DSP!”, dropping the Socialist Alliance. That is discounted from the outset and would be a criminally sectarian error which would toss away many of the invaluable gains that have been achieved.

But nor can it be: “Carry on building the DSP together with the Socialist Alliance”, because our experience of the last 18 months is that neither job can be done properly.

We are convinced that our answer has to be: “Use the accumulated resources and strength of the DSP to help strengthen the Socialist Alliance as the primary organisation for socialism in this country.”

That’s the essential political meaning of the letter sent to the Socialist Alliance national executive by the DSP NE

on September 3 (available at <http://www.dsp.org.au>). The DSP national executive is convinced — and we hope to convince DSP members who will vote on this proposal at our 20th party congress at the end of this year — that through ceasing to build the DSP as a public organisation we can help construct the Socialist Alliance as a bigger, more powerful alternative for socialism in this country.

Now that it’s out in the light of day, it’s clear — and confirmed by the overwhelmingly positive reaction it has received — that this is a step that has been crying out to be taken. And we hope our example will lead other affiliates to review their own relation to the Socialist Alliance project.

What will happen if the DSP NE proposal is accepted at our party congress? I quote from the letter: “If a majority of our members accept our proposal the DSP will cease to operate as a public organisation and begin to operate as an internal tendency in the Socialist Alliance from January 2003. Our members will, from that point, be building and recruiting to the Socialist Alliance rather than the DSP.

“We will then commence negotiations with the Socialist Alliance about taking as much of the political and organisational assets we have built up through the DSP into the Socialist Alliance as is possible. We undertake to pursue this process within the democratic framework of the Socialist Alliance and in a thoroughly open, consultative and inclusive manner.

“The objective of our tendency will be to pursue the transition while ensuring that the gains of our three decades of work as a party will not be lost to the left as a whole.

“We are confident that this will be a big step forward for left regroupment in Australia and that we will be able to agree, in stages, on concrete steps forward for the Socialist Alliance. This is based on the substantial political consensus and comradesly collaboration achieved since the founding of the alliance.”

What would be the purpose of the Democratic Socialist tendency? We do not envisage it as a permanent faction, to which we would be seeking to recruit people from within the Socialist Alliance. Rather: “Our proposal would make the Socialist Alliance and its bodies the political framework governing the work of former DSP members and the organisation that they would work to build. Within this framework the goal of the Democratic Socialist tendency would be to make itself redundant in step with the further development of the alliance.”

In short, the tendency would be a construction tool for the Socialist Alliance and not a permanent repository of historical DSP positions.

Revolutionary organisation

Now I would like to explain why the DSP NE thinks this “shock move” of ours is practicable, why we have made this proposal now and how we think the process of strengthening the alliance can best proceed.

The first question that must occur to anyone who is acquainted with the DSP and the Socialist Alliance is: “The DSP aspires to be a revolutionary socialist organisation. Yet how can you possibly dream that this alliance, whose platform is just a series of immediate demands, can be transformed into a revolutionary organisation, supplanting the DSP?”

Let me begin my answer to this question with a question. How will the socialist cause in this country achieve most rapid increase in relevance and political profile?

It certainly won't be by building the left of the ALP, or of the Greens (although socialists will always seek to collaborate as closely as possible with good people in those organisations).

And it won't be by the growth of any one of the affiliates within the alliance at the expense of any other affiliate. Already the alliance enjoys greater visibility and presence than any of the affiliates. It is the face of socialist unity that has given it this status.

This is the first part of the answer: the natural growth path for the socialist cause in this country is to strengthen what we've already got, to build on what we've already built.

But what about its political basis? Here we have to grasp the real, operational foundation of the alliance, as opposed to its formal basis as adopted at its founding conference.

I can do no better than quoting the DSP NE letter on this point: "Our collective experience in building the Socialist Alliance has revealed its actual political basis. There is a significant amount of shared socialist program among the Socialist Alliance affiliates. While this is not formally outlined as a program of the Socialist Alliance, the founding documents refer to the fact that there is more common ground than that sketched out in the initial Socialist Alliance platform.

"This has been confirmed in practice by the actual experience of having to take a stand on such testing issues as the 'war on terrorism', Palestine and the current attacks on the most militant union leaderships in Australia."

This last, particularly the offensive by AMWU national secretary Doug Cameron against the elected Victorian AMWU leadership, was a particularly important test for the alliance. We could easily have taken refuge in that old coward's formula that parties don't interfere in "internal union business", but that would have destroyed our credibility with some of the best working class fighters in this country at a stroke.

Our experience has also shown that, while the alliance doesn't have an in-principle position in favour or against the disaffiliation of unions from the ALP, we have been able to relate concretely to union politics and can be confident of finding a correct case-by-case orientation, based on the most important principle of all, union democracy and the reclaiming of the unions by the membership.

The level of collaboration achieved has only been possible because of implicitly shared program. Had the Progressive Labour Party, for example, joined the alliance that would have become even clearer, because it is highly likely that the PLP would have been on the other side of the fence on many of the issues we have had to face.

As soon as we can manage, the DSP will draft a popularly written socialist perspectives document, which we believe would make explicit the real, operating basis of the Socialist Alliance. We will submit it for discussion and adoption by the May 2003 second alliance national conference.

This document will make clear that we are looking to build the alliance as a revolutionary socialist and not a left-social democratic organisation. But it will be written in the

language of ordinary life and struggle and not in "Cominternese".

Nor will it be a complete revolutionary program. As the DSP NE letter says: "Our experience in working together surely confirms that left regroupment and unity will come about, and can only come about, on the basis of our rising to the objective challenges that are being posed by an intensifying class struggle and movement of anti-capitalist resistance. It will be our success in meeting these challenges — including the challenge of giving concrete and credible form to the socialist alternative at every turn — that will provide and strengthen the programmatic basis of the alliance."

This process will also set existing differences in the right framework.

"In this context, existing differences among affiliates will have increasingly less weight and the grounds for the maintenance of the existing minimalist organisational form of the Socialist Alliance increasingly less operative. How important our existing differences really are and what organisational form they really justify should be tested out by serious debate in the context of ongoing joint work within the framework of the alliance."

Behind this analysis lies our conviction that at the political centre of the alliance is a revolutionary core, a working-class core, an internationalist core. The affiliates certainly don't agree on everything, we certainly need to discuss thoroughly and in an informed way — and not as an exercise in set-piece battles — many of our differences, but these discussions will be set in the existing context of rising class confrontation and greater opportunities for our side, opportunities which we must gear ourselves up to meet.

Why now?

Why do we propose to take this step now? The answer to this question comes in three parts.

Firstly, because the alliance is falling increasingly short of its potential. There is, for example, a weird contradiction between how well known the Socialist Alliance is and the joke of a "national apparatus" with which we have to do its work. Examples of untapped potential abound, especially in rural and regional Australia. We have 200 members "at large" in NSW alone. Some 10 days ago I received a call from a comrade in Castlemaine who wants to help organise for the alliance in the Castlemaine-Bendigo region.

We don't have basic literature on a whole range of issues. Our policy development process is slow, at the same time as interested people are not getting organised to participate. What things are done well usually have to be done as emergency operations (witness the Victorian electoral registration campaign).

The longer this goes on, the worse it will get. Then we will not be even be able to make use of our electoral potential, because that is increasingly linked to the work Socialist Alliance does in the sphere of campaigns and protests, the sphere where we are most failing.

Secondly, because there has to be a thorough discussion and debate on the DSP NE proposal within the DSP itself. Contrary to the view of an autocratic, top-down DSP peddled by some, the DSP NE proposal has to be thoroughly discussed by our party's members and a lot of DSP comrades will have questions, doubts and even counter-

positions. They will, for example, ask: “Are we, the DSP, about to throw 30 years of accumulated effort away on a piece of wishful thinking? What’s the guarantee that the strengthening of left unity we’re envisaging won’t fail like the attempts at left regroupment we were involved with in the 1980s?”

Thirdly, because what we propose cannot possibly work without a thorough, clarifying debate involving all Socialist Alliance members. We will need until the May 2003 conference (and beyond) for relevant documents, amendments to constitutions and practical questions around asset transfer to be worked out.

Moreover, this time is also necessary because everyone has to be convinced from their own reflection that what is envisaged is a real turn to strengthen the socialist cause and neither a “DSP takeover”, as some bizarrely refer to it (when the DSP has a maximum of six people on a Socialist Alliance national executive of 17), nor an attempt to capitalise on real or imaginary divisions in other organisations (when we want every last socialist and left-winger to participate in the Socialist Alliance).

In short, for the restructuring of a bigger common home to take place, as many as possible will have to feel secure that they have a space.

Next steps

Where should we go from here? Firstly, let’s construct a real, serious debate on the entire left, and not just among Socialist Alliance affiliate organisations and members. *Green Left Weekly* will open its pages to this debate. We will propose to carry it on the Socialist Alliance web site. We would also hope that Socialist Alternative, the Socialist Party and the Communist Party engage in the debate.

Secondly, let’s all put much more effort into giving the Socialist Alliance profile, including covering its (often under-reported) success stories, such as the Western Australian trade union forum and the public meeting done jointly with the Skilled Six Committee last week.

Thirdly, we need boosted effort in forthcoming election campaigns, even in the knowledge that the first port of call for most disaffected voters will remain the Greens in the short term. However, the Tasmanian election campaign showed us how election campaigns are invaluable to opening the road to the expansion of the alliance as a truly national organisation, with a presence beyond the capital cities to which the left has traditionally been confined.

Lastly, let’s see more joint work by Socialist Alliance affiliates and members. The DSP will argue for greater use of Socialist Alliance caucuses in the unions and in the movements. These, of course, can’t be imposed on anyone and their decisions can’t be binding. Nor, in many cases, should they replace broader left caucuses. The important point is for us all to strive to carry out joint work and to achieve a united approach.

The DSP NE is convinced that with this approach most of the existing differences will disappear. Where they don’t we’ll just have to agree to disagree and await the test of experience.

Comrades, Australian left politics isn’t like European left politics, marked by general strikes and millions in the streets. But our discussion here is common to all the revolutionary left in the advanced capitalist world. Everyone is discussing forms of regroupment. That opening exists here too, not in the form of a collapse of mass working-class support for the ALP but in that of a break of important and precious sections of the working class vanguard from the ALP, combined with the growth of an important layer of anti-capitalist activists who like and appreciate left unity.

In this context we should be wary of the argument that left regroupment requires a certain predetermined level of mass movement activity and break from social-democracy. While this is true in the sense that a rise in revolt and political disaffection is a precondition for reviewing old positions and tactics, it’s not true to say that we can only seriously talk about left regroupment once the class struggle has reached some preconceived level of intensity.

More likely, indeed, the truth is the other way around. The missing link in driving the class struggle and the mass movement forward in this country is the existence of a sufficiently strong, sufficiently unified revolutionary socialist organisation with real — if still minority — implantation in the unions, the movements and the communities and with the capacity and authority to provide leadership and support to those in struggle.

The DSP NE believes we have a chance, through channelling our resources into radically strengthening the Socialist Alliance as the site of left unity, to help build just such an organisation. We fervently hope that we can persuade as many as possible to join us in that effort. ■

‘Socialist Alliance must lead fight for democratic rights’

By Alison Thorne

[The following is the text of a talk given at a panel at the International Socialist Organisation’s Marxism 2002 conference held in Melbourne, September 6-8. Alison Thorne spoke on behalf of the Freedom Socialist Party, one of the eight organisations affiliated to the Socialist Alliance.]

The Socialist Alliance is 18 months old and this is something to celebrate. We’ve achieved a phenomenal amount — several thousand members, branches in every state and territory, agreement around a basic platform, a web page which continues to improve, federal electoral registration, electoral registration in NSW, Tasmania and soon, we hope, Victoria and other states.

Our biggest achievement has been putting socialism on the ballot in every possible federal, state and local election and by-election held during the last year and half!

We need to understand and appreciate what we have achieved together, and on what basis we have achieved this, in order to look ahead and make wise decisions about the next step.

Right from the start the Freedom Socialist Party conceived of the Socialist Alliance as a socialist electoral united front. In practice, that is what it has been with branches blossoming during election campaigns.

What is driving the Freedom Socialist Party — and we believe all the affiliates and independent activists who

joined Socialist Alliance — is an appreciation of the urgent need for a vibrant socialist electoral alternative.

The ALP — like social democracy around the globe — is incapable of challenging the neoliberal agenda and now operates completely within a pro-market ideological framework. It has nothing to offer when faced with a ruling class in no mood and no shape to grant concessions to workers.

The Coalition has moved further to the right absorbing many of the policies of One Nation. The experience of Hansonism itself posed all too clearly the potential for right-wing populism to tap into insecurity and discontent.

In this climate, the best elements of the working class are breaking with a discredited Labor Party and casting around for alternatives.

The Greens — having managed to shake off their single-issue image — have positioned themselves to appeal to this layer with a host of progressive policies. But, as they freely admit, they are not anti-capitalist. And, unlike the Socialist Alliance, they see that a solution to the problems of people and the planet can be achieved through parliament.

Broad agreement about the need to put clear socialist solutions before the population and to be the working class pole of attraction which the Greens cannot be has been the basis of our unity to date.

But can the Socialist Alliance achieve more?

The Freedom Socialist Party and our sister organisation, Radical Women, believes the Socialist Alliance has a vital leadership role to play in this period.

We live in dangerous times. The world today is in the grip of United States imperialism. The bosses are on the rampage creating desperate conditions and provoking a backlash against corporate globalisation which reached Australia's shores in an inspiring way with our S11 in 2000.

Already before September 11, 2001, the ruling class was cracking down on the anti-corporate movement, but the attacks on the World Trade Center one year ago, gave the ruling class internationally the pretext it needed to implement some of the most draconian measures seen in the history of bourgeois democracy.

Democratic rights are under sharp attack in this country too:

- Stripping refugees of basic human rights, the Howard government's obscene border protection measures, coupled with the interference of the executive arm of government in the judicial arm of government are all alarming trends.
- The "anti-terrorism" laws are downright dangerous — resisting both their passage and their use must be a top priority.
- The appearance of patriarchal and homophobic vigilantes in Nazi regalia highlights that the right wing can tap into any form of grievance or insecurity in its quest to build a mass fascist movement.

The erosion of the democratic component of bourgeois democracy is not a new phenomenon. In the Marxist movement we call this type of development Bonapartism. If fascism is capitalism's solution of last resort, then Bonapartism is what it will try before resorting to fascism.

Faced with this scenario, the response of the organised working class is absolutely key. Which is why defence of democratic and militant unionism is a fundamental task

which must be linked to resisting the broader attack on democratic rights.

The Socialist Alliance has been taking a stand on these issues, but our work has been patchy. We need to broaden the basis of our united front to explicitly make providing leadership around the defence of democratic rights a core part of our Socialist Alliance work right up there with running in elections.

As well as this, the Freedom Socialist Party advocates that the Socialist Alliance:

- Run in elections every time we get the opportunity.
- Give attention to further policy elaboration and development to produce materials which make the idea of socialism really live. Our policy material needs to be concrete and show that socialism is not only a great idea but an eminently achievable alternative to the horrors of late capitalism.
- Prioritise getting to know the membership of the Socialist Alliance and foster their active involvement.
- Branch meetings need to be interesting, well-organised and democratic — activists need to teach skills to members who are not already activists.
- Look for opportunities to intervene jointly as the Socialist Alliance in unions where we have several members, for example, the current dispute in Centrelink.
- Have public discussions and work with the Greens as a mechanism to distinguish ourselves from them while orienting to those who vote for them.

So, in summary, our perspective is to build on our achievements and explicitly expand our united front to incorporating leading the fight to defend democratic rights.

Finally, I couldn't speak today without making some kind of comment on the DSP's recent announcement that it is discussing dissolving itself into the Socialist Alliance. I'm afraid I can only be brief.

In our discussions with the DSP they conceived of this proposal as regroupment of the revolutionary left. The Freedom Socialist Party does not agree.

What is urgently needed in the next period is discussion and a common understanding about what regroupment is. The Freedom Socialist Party has favoured regroupment of the revolutionary socialist movement since we were formed as a tendency in 1966.

Boiled down to its essence, regroupment is about revolutionaries engaging in programmatic discussion to explore if there is sufficient political basis to regroup a number of smaller groups into a larger group. The emphasis here is on revolutionaries and programmatic discussion.

Our key concern with the DSP's new orientation is that the Socialist Alliance is not a revolutionary organisation and many of its members have not been won to the need for a revolution if we are to achieve the desired outcome — socialism. Where do these members fit in the DSP's schema?

Revolutionary regroupment must be based on discussion between revolutionaries. It takes tenacity and patience and it is unlikely to be a quick process. The Socialist Alliance belongs to all of its members and affiliates and should not be rushed headlong into making hasty decisions by the DSP leadership's change of perspective.

In the meantime, we've achieved an enormous amount and with a "steady as she goes approach". The Socialist Alliance could build on our work popularising socialist ideas by playing a decisive and much needed leadership

role in the important fight to defend democratic rights. I

look forward to the discussion. ■

Towards a new workers' party

[The following is the editorial from the September issue of *Workers Liberty* magazine.]

Workers' Liberty has been arguing that the Socialist Alliance needs to become much more than an electoral alliance if it is to succeed at enlarging and mobilising support for working-class socialist politics.

From its very founding we argued for a platform for the Socialist Alliance that is far more than a set of dot points derived from current political campaigns. We have argued for the Socialist Alliance to commit itself to socialism as nothing like the socialism of the old USSR, but to socialism based on production publicly owned and democratically managed by workers and the community. We have argued for the Socialist Alliance to be a voice for working class struggle, the struggle out of which socialism can be created.

During the formation of the alliance we argued for a democratic alliance which would encourage open discussion of ideas about socialism, in the pages of its own web sites, email discussions, and broadsheet. More recently, we have put the case for the Socialist Alliance to work towards deeper left unity, and specifically we have made concrete proposals for mobilising the membership to build rank and file militant caucuses in unions and a serious attitude to union work.

Now the DSP leadership has announced its intention to propose to the DSP conference in December that the DSP should operate as an internal tendency of the Socialist Alliance and negotiate for the SA to take "as much of the political and organisational assets we have built up through the DSP into the Socialist Alliance as is possible".

Workers' Liberty welcomes the DSP's new allocation of resources to the Socialist Alliance. This opens up new possibilities which could see the Alliance make great strides forward. Our proposals for the alliance now gain greater immediate relevance.

We propose that at its May conference the alliance should commit itself to:

- a more comprehensive class struggle platform;
- a publication that can support the alliance to become a party rather than a federation;
- developing joint work at least in unions, campaigns and on campus; and
- a new constitution to support moves from an electoral alliance to a working class socialist party, and to guarantee free and unfettered discussion of political issues.

Platform

We take political agreement seriously, and the political basis for left unity very seriously. The DSP argues that more substantial political agreement than currently exists as per the SA platform has been demonstrated in practice. This agreement "in practice" falls a long way short of being a basis for a cohesive and consciously committed SA membership.

A clear, conscious political agreement *must* be the basis for unity, not an organisational swamping that might force out other left groups without political clarity.

Workers' Liberty will be renewing proposals for a more comprehensive and explicitly working class and so-

cialist platform for the SA, to be debated up to and at the May 2003 SA conference. We propose that the platform of the SA as a party should include:

- A commitment to socialism as the creation of the working class, self-organised in struggle, overthrowing the power of capital, and democratically managing production.
- Linking our aim of socialism to the present by basing ourselves on support for working-class struggle.
- A platform that translates into perspectives for the SA to put forward for how the union movement and campaigns can win reforms and demands, and that moves the SA beyond the rituals of protest politics.

Publication

We propose that the alliance will need a publication that is both agitational and has space to address deeper theoretical issues. It must guarantee space for all points of view within the alliance and the editorial board composition must reflect the variety of the opinions in the alliance.

We are for the alliance to commence its own weekly publication from the May conference onwards, once there has been time to consider and discuss the editorial policy and nature of the weekly publication.

Campaigning and branches

We propose that the SA should proceed to immediately discuss the only concrete proposals for developing a unified approach to trade union work that have been put forward — the trade union work proposal of Workers' Liberty comrades.

We are also concerned that the DSP (and some others in the alliance) take a sectarian attitude to the labour movement, especially the ALP, seeking unnecessary organisational splits from the ALP rather than organising support for a socialist platform throughout the labour movement.

We also propose that SA branches should be encouraged to shift their emphasis from organisational details to political discussion and education.

Constitution

We propose that the constitution of the SA should provide for increased accountability of elected bodies, rights of recall, guaranteed representation on elected bodies for minority viewpoints and methods for making constitutional changes.

All tendencies within the alliance are currently guaranteed the right to organise as caucuses. Additional provision should be made for guaranteeing caucuses or tendencies within the alliance, the right to publish and distribute their own material.

The DSP's motives

Whatever the DSP's motives, the alliance has to date operated on a comradely and democratic basis, and DSP comrades have carried a significant workload in the alliance. There are hundreds of non-aligned members, many of whom are relatively inactive, but many of whom could be mobilised and enthused at the prospect of the alliance becoming a more effective political force.

We look forward to the immediate opening of a vigorous discussion on the way forward for left unity and the development of working class socialist politics, and to the

May 2003 Socialist Alliance conference taking some bold steps towards these goals. ■

Talk on left unity to the 2002 national Resistance conference

By Dick Nichols

Comrades, Two important events are taking place in Melbourne today. Both will produce their dosage of passion and controversy, but we can be confident that only one has any chance of leaving a lasting imprint on Australian society and politics.

That's our discussion here about left and socialist unity and how best to push it forward. Whether "maggies" or "lions" prevail over at the MCG isn't likely to have a huge impact on the course of the Australian class struggle.

In the time I have I would like to outline how the Democratic Socialist Party National Executive envisages some ways our proposal to cease operating as a public party after the DSP's next Congress would actually work to strengthen Socialist Alliance as a site of left unity and as a stronger voice for socialism. In part I will do this by addressing some of the misinterpretations and fears about the proposal that are doing the rounds of the left.

However, let me first stress the starting point for our proposal. It's this: that our experience of working together with other affiliates in the Socialist Alliance has reinforced our conviction that the Alliance's political core is that of an alliance of revolutionary socialist organizations and individuals, whose political approach has been consistently socialist and Marxist.

The Alliance's founding platform is "only" a series of immediate demands, but its practice and the responses it has made to the challenges of national and international politics have only been possible because of a much larger community of program and outlook than that explicitly expressed in this platform. So if we ask ourselves the question: "Who are the revolutionary socialists in Australia today?", the answer has to be "the Socialist Alliance affiliates", but also, of course, organizations like Socialist Alternative and the Socialist Party who still lie outside the Alliance. This is true, irrespective of the many differences of analysis and tactics that still-inevitably-prevail among us.

Now if this is the reality — I stress reality and not just wishful thinking — then it produces, like it or not, a number of unavoidable conclusions.

The first is that we all have to revise any view of our own organisation as embodying "the real revolutionaries". That is, we have to reinvestigate the very *raison d'être* of our separate currents. What was absolute and perhaps justified splits and a separate existence becomes relative, raising the question of whether our separate existence, or our actual minimalist form of collaboration, can be still be justified. This truth is well expressed by British Socialist Workers Party leader Alex Callinicos when he writes: "Rather than simply reiterate old arguments we need to judge, in the light of the demands of a new period, what differences, old and new, really matter today."

If we find ourselves, in general and not without hiccups and problems, collaborating in anti-war and refugee work

and beginning to collaborate in union work, then this very fact reweights our differences-over, for example, state capitalism, permanent revolution and Cuba. As a result, when people ask us in this new context the old question "why can't the left get together?" are we really sure we can answer them convincingly?

This is not an easy adjustment to make. When we have spent, as so many of us have, decades standing behind stalls and on windy wet corners trying to win people to our particular view of what revolutionary socialist politics should be-and we've spent the same time trying to persuade interested people that we are the true faith and not those others over there-then the pressure to regard our differences as still the basic determinant of how we can and should relate to each other remains very strong.

Saying otherwise can even seem like an admittance (false) that all those years, all that energy spent building separate organizations was a waste of time, a waste of a life.

This is an instinctive defensive reaction which we must learn to contain. It's not easy as I can recall from my own reluctance to recognise, back in 1976-7, that there really were no differences between the old Communist League and the Socialist Workers Party that remotely justified our separate existence. The second unavoidable conclusion we have to face if our practice is consistently socialist is that the path forward to realising the potential for greater unity is something objective, standing outside us all and waiting to be discovered and developed by our collective analysis and action.

That is to say, the growth potential for the left and socialist movement is not decided by our will or any pet schemas we may have, but by that specific course of action which actually will draw as many people as possible into active socialist politics.

The course may not correspond to our preferred view of how left and revolutionary unity is going to come about. But we can be certain that if we try to impose our own "preferred model" for left collaboration against the grain of real potential and real opportunities, then we will actually retard and even extinguish the chance of realising that potential. There is treatment that can grow the tree of unity and treatment that can stunt it. This thinking is what led the DSP NE to its proposal to our party and our letter to the Socialist Alliance NE. We're convinced that continuing to build the DSP as a public organization undermines the potential for building Socialist Alliance as the site of socialist advance in this country. Because we are confident that the Alliance isn't suddenly going to nosedive into opportunism or reformism, we're convinced that swinging the DSP's accumulated resources into building the Alliance is the best way forward for the socialist project in this country.

Obviously, there's a challenge here to all other affiliates, to individual Socialist Alliance members, and to all socialists, whether organised in formations outside the Socialist Alliance or not. Do you share our view of the way forward? If not, and you think you know of a better way to strengthen our common socialist cause, please tell us about it.

That should be the core of our discussion within the Socialist Alliance over the coming months.

Immediate revolutionary party? I next want to address a few of the arguments that have already emerged in the discussion stimulated on the left by the DSP NE proposal.

The first is that any attempt to equip the Socialist Alliance with a revolutionary program must be self-defeating. If the program were to be revolutionary nobody much beyond the existing Marxist left would be interested. The corollary is that for people to be drawn to the Socialist Alliance our program must be explicitly non-revolutionary.

First, a clarification. The DSP NE is not proposing to the Socialist Alliance that it leap from having a platform of immediate demands to adopting an exhaustive revolutionary program at its May 2003 national conference, thereby converting itself into a "revolutionary organisation" in one hit. That would be a recipe for blowing the Alliance to smithereens.

Rather, what we are proposing is that the Alliance adopt a socialist "vision statement" that makes explicit the foundation on which the Alliance has actually worked in the real world, an articulation of the basis on which we have been able to collaborate, usually by consensus, sometimes by large majority. Any development of the program beyond this level should proceed on the same basis as that on which we have worked to date-in the light of increasing levels of practical collaboration in building the movements and democratic, class-struggle currents in the unions.

When the DSP NE talks about Alliance as a revolutionary organisation, we mean this as a perspective, a goal-through our interventions and discussions progressively advancing the process of collecting, organising and educating a bigger socialist leadership for the ongoing class struggle.

I think there are two types of error in the argument I am addressing here. There is a misjudgement of the actual state of consciousness and potential level of interest in socialism "out there"-both among young people involved in the movement against neo-liberal globalisation as well as in a small but precious section of the working-class movement.

There is also a misconception as to how program actually functions-of its real, material role-in a period of upturn as opposed to one of ebb of class conflict, typical of the periods that gave birth to the Trotskyist movement and various currents within it.

Take the first point. It's certainly true that a lot of disillusioned Labor voters long for a return to "true Labor", a return that is generally impossible in a world where capitalist politics is driven by the imperatives of global competitiveness. That's why, for instance, left Labor's dreams, say, of including an increase in company tax rates in a federal ALP election platform is so much pie in the sky.

It also follows, then, that Socialist Alliance should be alert and quick to pick up those planks on the "old Labor" platform that the ALP has abandoned, simply on the basis

that all gains of the welfare state, be they ever so minimal, have to be defended.

But it emphatically does not follow from these points that Socialist Alliance should restrict itself to presenting "old Labor" demands in a purely electoral way. That was recognised right from the beginning of Socialist Alliance.

Why? Firstly because every affiliate in Socialist Alliance knows that the only way any of our demands are going to get on the political map is through building mass struggles and campaigns. That means that Socialist Alliance politics have to be different from "old Labor" politics even to stand a chance of winning "old Labor" demands.

The "immediate demands" of our platform never were purely for elections. They constituted a summary action program based on the principle of making the rich pay.

But our approach here implies another task we have not yet taken up-to provide a popular explanation of what socialism is and how it can be achieved, of how immediate struggles to make the rich pay yield anticipations of the society of equity, solidarity, democracy and sustainability that socialism is. The Alliance has to think about how-in building campaigns of resistance-it also becomes an instrument for creating socialists.

In my opinion the time is approaching when we should do "Why Socialism?" seminars with contributions from affiliates and aimed at countering all the prejudices, slanders and doubts in circulation about the socialist cause. The result could be published as the beginning of a Socialist Alliance pamphlet series. The argument I have just covered here means that the DSP NE envisages the Socialist Alliance after May 2003 as still being an alliance-a pluralist organization of socialists within which some may agree with and follow our example (i.e. not seek to build themselves as a public organization) while others will decide to retain their public face as independent parties.

The real political content of that alliance-what elaborations of program, what steps towards higher degrees of unity will be possible-all will be determined by the Alliance debate itself and by the Alliance's own democratic culture and functioning.

DSP takeover? Here we move directly to a second fear that is in circulation about the DSP NE proposal-that it's a takeover. This fear persists and is being stirred up by some who believe in the "original sin" of the DSP, despite the simple fact that the DSP is in a small minority on the Alliance National Executive.

Some comrades are afraid that if the DSP Congress votes for our party to become a tendency within the Alliance there will be a period-from January to May 2003-when Green Left Weekly will be the de facto paper of the Alliance, but will not be under the control of any elected Alliance body.

This fear is unfounded. If the DSP Congress votes for the DSP NE proposal, one option we are discussing is that the DSP will immediately approach the Alliance to negotiate an agreed form of representation of the Alliance on the Green Left Weekly editorial board as well as for ways in which Alliance members as a whole might participate in the production and distribution of the paper. At the same time, should any other Alliance partner wish to discuss the entrance of their paper, say Socialist Worker, into a united publication, then that could be negotiated appropriately.

How would DSP assets like Resistance Centres become available to the Alliance? While detailed proposals have still to be worked out, the DSP Political Committee

view is that Resistance Centres could become multi-tendency bookshops for Alliance affiliates—places where any interested person could find out what the Alliance and its affiliates think and activist organising centres where everyone can feel at home. Of course, people who are determined to find a sinister manoeuvre in everything the DSP proposes will not be placated by my words here. They will be determined to view any proposal as bait under which there must be a hook, even if no-one has yet managed to locate it.

To any Socialist Alliance member who is doubtful and suspicious we say: “Hold each and every proposal that comes from the DSP up to the light. Scrutinise it as carefully as you can. Raise your doubts in all forums—the Socialist Alliance discussion bulletin, Green Left Weekly, Socialist Worker, wherever. We are totally confident that you will discover—in our words but most of all in our deeds—that the DSP’s proposed turn is simply what we say it is, a move to strengthen the Alliance as the face and reality of socialist unity in this country. And remember, such a result can only come about by making our tendency a proportionately smaller current in a bigger, more active Socialist Alliance.”

Grasping the potential Socialist Alliance has done a lot of good work in its brief 18-month existence. As we meet it is turning the Cunningham by-election into a referendum on Howard’s war frenzy. We are beginning to create and participate in left caucuses in a number of unions. We will be a major participant in and builder of the movement against the impending war on Iraq.

But there remains before us a large and growing unfulfilled agenda. Imagine, if the necessary resources could be made available to the Alliance, what might be achieved by May next year. We could: — Have local organizations in regions across Australia and, given the interest that is “out there”, develop real state branches in all states; — Consolidate the extensive contacts and sympathisers the Alli-

ance has in a number of migrant communities into active Alliance collaborators; — Consolidate an active presence and pole of attraction in many more unions, beginning with the need to help organise a national opposition to the Cameron apparatus in the AMWU; — Thoroughly test out and build support in elections; — Complete the business of obtaining electoral registration in the states where we do not yet have it; and — Begin to develop a stock of Alliance pamphlets, leaflets and literature.

In short, we could make serious inroads into the fundamental fight in Australian politics—the struggle for hearts and minds, the struggle to create more socialists, the struggle to make socialism a real, operational factor in Australian politics.

Such a perspective is not a fantasy. If the last 18 months of building Socialist Alliance contain any message it’s that socialism has an audience in this country. It’s not as active as it should be, it doesn’t give as much of its time and money as it should, it not as conscious as it should be, it doesn’t yet express itself as a broad and active socialist culture in which all the issues of the day are vigorously discussed. And, partially as a consequence of these failings, the Alliance simply doesn’t yet mean all that much to young people who are becoming radical—a shortcoming that urgently needs to be addressed.

The Socialist Alliance has the potential to advance on all these fronts. But that potential will never be unless we begin to turn it into an instrument capable of reaching out to every potential sympathiser, capable of intervening in struggles at all levels, capable to explaining the socialist approach and solution to every interested person.

The DSP proposal is aimed at unleashing the energy needed to carry out this work. And we will devote all the time necessary to persuading anyone who wants to listen that this is the way forward for building Socialist Alliance into a weapon for socialism strong enough to be hated by its enemies and loved by its supporters. ■

The Tasmanian election campaign

By Kamala Emanuel (Tasmanian representative on the National Executive)

Comrades will recall that the Tasmanian state elections were called on June 21, and held July 20, 2002. Labor has increased its majority in government, the Liberals have been routed, and the Greens are on a roll. Labor now has 15 (of 25) seats, the Liberals are down to six (their worst result, and cause of much breast-beating and back-biting), and the Greens will have 3 or 4, depending on the final count (4 looked certain on election night, but preferences may change that).

This report will make an assessment of the Socialist Alliance campaign, and offer a preliminary contribution to the discussion of the lessons learned. The Tasmanian branches are yet to have out this discussion, and we will need to make sure the results of discussion are written up for the internal discussion bulletin.

What did we do? In March we held a state conference to start the discussions about the political issues to raise in the election, and what scale of campaign we would run. We drew a balance sheet from the federal election campaign, prepared our campaign to get state electoral registration, made tentative plans to run in 3 electorates, preselected two candidates and put out the call for 4 more.

We joined some members in the course of supporting M1, the campaign against the Southwood wood-fired power station and timber mill, the refugee solidarity campaign, and Palestine solidarity work, so that coming in to the election campaign period, most of our activists hadn't been through the state conference discussions. The Hobart Socialist Alliance meeting on June 16 gave us our most thorough discussion of our rationale for running in the elections, four of our policy statements, and our priority pledges. It was a well attended meeting, a lot of comrades had prepared written contributions, there was some intense, comradely debate, and it was clear the comrades took seriously our collective responsibility to put forward a principled platform that both spoke to the economic needs and concerns of working people, and didn't shy away from "harder" questions like refugees' rights, drug decriminalisation and abortion access.

By the time the election was called on June 21, we had preselected our candidates, and were working on propaganda production. The leaflets and posters took about a week to finalise, so we campaigned hard for three weeks. During the first week, we used photocopies of our priority pledges and state newsletter (with 4 policy statements) to give us something to distribute, and photocopies of "candidate quote" posters, of which we produced around 10 versions, each taking up a different angle on some of our priority pledges, to make a start raising our profile. We also produced Socialist Alliance stars, which we photocopied onto red paper, and stuck them up with all our posters, to be bright and eye-catching, and a bit iconic.

In Hobart, we used a weekly meeting to organise the campaign, and found the work was better organised when we had daily meetings of whoever was available to tackle specific tasks.

In Launceston, where we held our first ever meeting on May 25, we were able to hold all-in meetings with supporters and members two or three times during the campaign.

The very first week-end of the campaign was the national week-end of action for refugees. We had played a

significant role in organising the rallies held in Hobart and Launceston, and had speakers on each platform, and also the chair in Launceston. Our contingents, banners and placards were quite prominent, and our call to make Tasmania a refugee safe haven in defiance of the federal government's mandatory detention policy was well received. It also gave us the first of many pieces of media coverage, in both the Hobart and Launceston press, as well as radio and tv.

A highlight of the campaign was the launch, which was held on June 6, at Salamanca lawns near the state parliament house. We borrowed a red ute, which we decked out with red flags, a red Socialist Alliance banner, and on the tray, a big particle board Socialist Alliance sign. We used the tray as our platform, and had five of the candidates speak to launch the campaign. It was very upbeat. Socialist musician Peter Hicks sang, and to top it off, we launched our tv ad, screening it on a tv on top of the ute (more about the ad below).

At the launch we appealed for donations and help with the campaign, and distributed bundles of leaflets for letter-boxing and posters for putting up. So as well as feeling good, injecting socialist politics into the election campaign, and getting some media, we used it to consolidate the inspiration and commitment we've been building, and to further organise the campaign.

We received a lot of very positive comments about the launch, including from Labor "left" candidate for Denison, James Crotty, who commented favourably on the level of enthusiasm apparent amongst participants (and also wanted the comrade who had produced our TV publicity to do some work for him!) He also approached us to debate him (which we did) and invited us to speak at his launch (which we declined).

The TV ad was the brainchild of a Socialist Alliance comrade who is a film director, and who was able to organise cheap rates for production and screening. There was a lot of discussion about the ad's content, and we wound up with images of 16 comrades giving a very political motivation for supporting Socialist Alliance.

Around 60 people participated in the launch, and we picked up print and tv media coverage, notably, from the rival TV station we weren't planning on airing the ad with. We ended up getting a cheap deal from them for 3 advertising spots, as well (which turned out to be aired around the whole state, while the original one was screened in the south of the state only).

To finish with the subject of media coverage, we worked quite hard to get coverage in the bourgeois press, sending out 8 media releases, during the campaign. These included the call to nationalise the insurance industry and against the Southwood woodchip mill (both in response to local developments), a comment on preferences, announcement of our launch, debate with Labor "left" James Crotty, and a refugee speak-out held on the day of the election, in response to the return to Woomera of the Bakhtiyari boys. About half of these were picked up to a greater or lesser extent. In addition, we had 3 minutes for anything we wanted, on ABC radio in the north, and 100 and 200 words for anything we wanted (bio/policies) in the Hobart and Launceston newspapers. There were also write-ups about our campaigns in the newspapers. And we had a

couple of bites at talk-back radio, and one or more letters to the editor printed. This degree of publicity was modest, but unprecedented for us, and without question played an important role in raising our profile.

Our own medium we also used well – the Socialist Alliance web-site. I won't go into it at length, as comrades will have seen it, but we had a consistent approach of sending our media releases, photos, establishment media coverage, leaflets, posters, statements etc etc in.

Affiliates that could also covered the campaign in their press.

The excitement generated by the election campaign translated into inspiring, upbeat campaigning stumps. When we were able to (which was about 4 days each in Hobart and Launceston), we borrowed a ute in Hobart and trailer in Launceston, and decorated them with flags and banners and signs, took our campaign to where people are. Also, one comrade's yellow van was adorned with a rooftop "Socialist Alliance" sign. Comrades have a range of stories from these stumps – of spruiking from the platform on the back of the vehicle, at shopping centres, one of the university campuses – even spruiking on the megaphone out the window of the car as we were driving along, creating a bit of a spectacle. At some of the shopping centres, centre management would come out and have a go at us: while one comrade would argue the toss, the other(s) would dart around, giving out leaflets, talking to people. Even when we didn't do the whole trailer thing, our stalls were very upbeat. We held one or two or more stalls every day, with effective outreach outside the main "ghetto" of usual city, campus and market spots. We pioneered stumps in Hobart suburbs, and in Kingston (main population centre south of Hobart), Rosny (Hobart's eastern shore), Glenorchy and Moonah (working class areas in Hobart's north). In Launceston, we held stumps in two of the main shopping centres, two of the university campuses, two local markets, and the city mall. At all of them, comrades would be having discussions almost continuously. We collected assurances of support, donations, names on contact lists, and some new members.

We combined this with effective poster and leaflet distribution, putting up over 1000 posters, and letterboxing/ handing out almost 15,000 leaflets. (We ran out of the first print run of 10,000, and had an extra 5000 printed at the beginning of the last week of the campaign.) We produced signs for people to put up in their yards and had modest success at getting them out. We put up one Socialist Alliance banner on a local left pub, The Republic (which was also adorned with one of Labor's and one of the Greens'); and another on the Resistance Centre. Both are on major traffic thoroughfares.

We also did a range of networking activities. These included speaking at a campus meet-the-candidate forum, and responding to a questionnaire from Tasmanians for refugees, results of which they emailed to their list of over 400 members. There was also a questionnaire from Unions Tasmania, which was to be sent out to all the unions. (It's possible that was the impetus to the slanderous letter to the editor in the Examiner, written by a CFMEU sub-branch vice president in the north of the state. He alleged we weren't really socialists, that we'd stab workers in the back because we oppose woodchipping of old growth forests, and claimed the ALP to be the only real hope for working people. He also managed to imply we were both

Nazis and Stalinists, in the same diatribe! We had our letter in response printed a couple of days later.) We also responded to a questionnaire from the AEU.

There were a few things we'd hoped to do that we didn't pull off. We didn't organise the public meetings in Huonville or the northern suburbs (Glenorchy/Bridgewater) with the "forest activist and timber retail worker" Franklin team, that we had hoped to, nor the youth forum. And we missed one of the meet-the-candidate events we were invited to. Meeting with community groups and trade unions wasn't carried out systematically. But in the overall scheme of things, these didn't detract from the successes we notched up; and the main thing limiting our work was the number of hours in the day. We made very good use of the comrades on loan from "The Mainland"!!! Graham M, Andy G and Leigh H slotted in and were a real asset to the campaign.

So, with all this activity, how did we go? First, the raw numbers.

We look likely to achieve a state-wide vote of close to 800, the best result for socialists in a Tasmanian state election. As of Thursday afternoon (25/7), with around 92% of the vote counted, we had 436 votes (0.72%) in Denison, 204 (0.32%) in Franklin, and 99 (0.17%) in Bass, ie 739 votes out of 178774 in the 3 seats we contested, or 0.4% of the vote.

To put it in perspective, in Tasmanian state elections, socialists consistently poll lower than in federal elections. No doubt one of the reasons for this is the undemocratic legislation prohibiting the distribution of electoral material on polling day. In the 1998 state elections, the Democratic Socialists got a vote of 102 in Denison, the only seat socialists contested, compared to 754 state-wide with the name Democratic Socialist on the ballot paper. The table below outlines the votes for socialists in Tasmania in state and federal elections in the past 50 years. What it shows is that in 2002 we've achieved the biggest vote for socialism in a Tasmanian state election ever.

In the report I gave to the last NE, I said "500 votes for socialism would be good, 1000 would be fantastic," so on the raw numbers, we can be pleased.

But the real gains for us are measured by the kind of campaign we ran, the extent to which we have raised socialist demands and popularised the idea that socialism is the alternative to capitalism, that it is feasible, and that uniting on the basis of a common action platform is a necessary step to take in the struggle to build a socialist political project, capable of furthering independent working class struggle.

One real achievement was our political impact in making the question of refugees an issue in the state election, even though it's seen as a "federal" issue. Subsequent to our call to make Tasmania a refugee safe haven being picked up, it featured as a question in "vox pops" in the *Mercury*.

Another aspect of our gains is the extent to which we have built the Socialist Alliance and raised its profile.

What can we say on this front? Through the election campaign, we have consolidated our active membership base in and around Hobart and will establish a branch in Launceston.

New members took political and organisational responsibility for the Alliance's campaign. This was reflected in big turnouts (20 and 17) to the two very political Hobart

SA meetings just prior to and at the outset of the campaign.

The weekly Hobart campaign meetings were also well attended, and a range of comrades took responsibility for organisational and political tasks associated with propaganda production, phoning our contacts for assistance, planning the launch, organising letterboxing and stalls, poster, etc etc. In this sense, the Alliance gained a lot, because more people than usual were actively participating in raising and arguing for socialist ideas, raising the profile of a socialist alternative. We effectively used the election campaign to involve in socialist activism socialists who may not otherwise have had a vehicle for it.

And in Launceston, we are well on the way to establishing a branch. With five members paid up and another 4 promising to do so, we will be able to formally constitute the Launceston branch within the next few weeks. At every stall or stump we held, we met longstanding socialists, or made gains in arguing for socialist solutions to the problems of capitalism. At most of these, we got new names on our contact list, donations, and pledges of support – votes, membership, coming to meetings or campaign events, etc. It was a terrific opportunity for outreach and profile-raising, and we took it in both hands and made the best of it. We had new people attend the “global revolt” meetings with Dick in Launceston and Hobart.

60 people attended our election campaign launch, and more than 40 were directly involved in some other way as well (poster, letter-boxing, helping with stalls etc); and this is not counting those who contributed financially only (I’m not sure of the figure, but I know there were a reasonable number).

9 people joined or renewed their membership of Socialist Alliance during the course of the campaign. It’s

much lower than we had hoped, as we’d aimed for 10 times that number. But comrades were conscious of asking people to join, and it’s one of our next tasks to follow up those who’ve said they’ll join, get members to renew etc. It’s probably a function of having been asking so many things of people that membership dues has become something we’ll catch up on after. Since not all the people who helped us out and clearly identify with our success have joined yet, with a systematic follow-up, we can expect good results, if not the very ambitious 100 we’d projected.

Aside from Socialist Alliance membership and activism, the other gain we made is one that is probably the hardest to quantify. It’s about the fact that we sent out a message that “another world is possible” – and that right here, right now is the time and place to begin organising the political force that can lead the struggle for it. It’s reflected in the vote. It’s reflected in the anecdotes of people congratulating us for our campaign, (workmates, people in the pub, people down the street, movement activists or figures), recognising that swimming against the current is hard work, and that we’ve made a start in getting our name and ideas before the working class.

We have some outstanding tasks to finalise the campaign. We need to chase up the last of the donations. We need to do a follow-up round of contacting all our new contacts, asking them to join or renew their membership. We need to hold assessment meetings in the north and south, to bring together all the lessons of the campaign. It’s our ongoing work that will enable us to build on the base we’ve consolidated during this campaign.

We can draw an overall positive balance sheet from a state election campaign that signals the Socialist Alliance is here (is registered) and is serious about uniting the working class in the struggle for socialism. ■

Letter from Angela Budai to the Socialist Alliance National Executive

To the National Executive

Re: DSP Proposal to dissolve

I would like to take this opportunity, prior to the DSP National Conference to express my thoughts on this proposal as both an unaligned member of the Socialist Alliance and a pre-selected candidate for the Socialist Alliance at the NSW State election next year.

Firstly I think that you will not appreciate my concerns without a small amount of background information about who I am and my ideologies. I am an observant reform Jew, a Trade Unionist and a Socialist. I work in the union movement as an Organiser and am involved in a number of Jewish social action groups including "Jews for a Just Peace", a pro-Palestinian group of Jews that is against the Occupation and also perhaps one of the most marginalised groups within the Australian Jewish community.

I first experienced socialism in a manner familiar to many young Australian Jews – as a volunteer on a Kibbutz in Israel. It was here that I was first able to put into practice some of my socialist ideals. It was also while living in Israel that I was to experience the marginalisation of both Palestinians as well as Israeli Arabs, along with other minority groups – including reform Jews.

When I returned to Australia, and to university life I was unable to freely participate in the various Socialist groups on campus as their views were on the whole not only anti-Israel but also anti-Semitic. I do not want to debate the merits of my last statement or indeed the platforms that the different Socialist groups have on Israel/Palestine. It is enough to say that at any public meetings that I attended on the topic of Israel there was enough anti-Semitic talk to drive me away from any of these groups.

It was therefore with much excitement I followed the development of the Socialist Alliance – an umbrella group that brought together much of the left within Australia and was silent on the issue of Israel/Palestine. There finally existed a group on the left that I would be able to join and become an activist for. I would now not have to hide or defend my religion from my comrades and similarly would not have to defend my choice of party to my fellow Jews.

My understanding of the Socialist Alliance's silence on this issue is twofold; firstly that no consensus was reached amongst the feeder groups, and secondly that as the Socialist Alliance was primarily for electoral purposes and this was not an Australian issue there was no need for a platform.

This leads to my primary concern with the DSP's proposal to dissolve. In John Percy's statement he remarks:

When we reflect on the success of the Socialist Alliance in developing positions of consensus or by very large majorities on such issues and add to this the high degree of unanimity reached over practical work (witness the results of the August Victo-

rian and New South Wales state conferences), it seems obvious that there is great potential for transcending or repositioning some of the traditional differences among the Alliance affiliates.

And

...the real political basis of the Alliance extends beyond its formally adopted founding platform and constitution to a consensus around a principled class-struggle approach to international and Australian politics.

I believe that the Socialist Alliance is the organisation it is primarily because of the ability it has had to bring together a variety of "left" groups to form an electoral alliance despite their differences on a number of issues.

If the DSP were to dissolve and would attempt to reposition the Socialist Alliance then the Socialist Alliance would no longer exist as the organisation it is today. John Percy makes the very accurate remark that the involvement of unaligned members is very low, compared to those from the feeder groups, and that concerns me. In particular it is of concern that should there be a vote to change any of the Socialist Alliance platform or to add further platforms that unaligned members who are not involved in the day to day running of the organisation would not be adequately represented on any such vote.

There are numerous people like myself in the Alliance – who are not aligned to any feeder group - for any number of reasons that may or may not be apparent. If the DSP were to dissolve and in turn to mould the Socialist Alliance into a group that more closely resembled their own then the Socialist Alliance would certainly lose its attraction for me – and who knows how many others who are unaligned. If I wanted to join the DSP, I would have joined them, not the Socialist Alliance.

It seems to me, after reading John's proposal that this may well become a fait accompli after the DSP's national conference without any regard for Socialist Alliance members. I question the democratic nature of the Socialist Alliance should this be allowed to occur – and I plead with those of you on the National Executive who are DSP members to consider this point. Do you really want to create a political entity with such lack of consideration for the democratic process and the majority number of unaligned members? I most certainly do not.

Does the Socialist Alliance have a constitution? If we do, I would appreciate being emailed or posted a copy of it. What does the constitution have to say about the roles of the feeder groups? If not, why don't we have a constitution? I will propose that if we don't have one that one is adopted as soon as possible so as to make transparent these processes to all members.

Over the past week I have spoken to others in the union movement who are Socialists, but not members

of any organisation and they also have expressed concern that the Socialist Alliance would be “usurped” by the DSP. It would almost certainly lose its electoral attraction to many were this to happen.

Further, and arguably more important is the electoral appeal of the Socialist Alliance to the thousands of Australian’s who have not yet joined the party. The upcoming State elections will provide the Socialist Alliance with an enormous Organising tool to involve more of our unaligned members – and to attract more to the party. This is particularly true if we are to provide the voters with an attractive LEFT alternative to the ALP. Given the recent large Workers Compensation debacle with the NSW Government we CAN provide an alternative for trade unionists. I truly believe that if the Socialist Alliance is widely perceived in the broader left community as a creation of the DSP, it will lose this attraction. I then raise the question of why the Socialist Alliance was created? If it was to provide the electorate with a credible left alternative, surely this proposal is at odds with those founding ideals.

In previous correspondence with the National Executive I have sent a copy of a letter that I wrote, and was subsequently published in *the Australian Jewish News* (Sydney Edition) defending allegations that the Socialist Alliance was an anti-Semitic organisation. The journalist was, in fact, referring to one of the Socialist Alliance’s feeder groups, not the Socialist Alliance itself. If the DSP were to dissolve and the Socialist Alliance was to adopt a similar platform on Israel/Palestine to that of the DSP, I would have to disassociate myself completely from this organisation. I would also no longer have a Socialist organisation that I could be active in, or that I could direct my Jewish comrades to support. This would mean that I would

renege my nomination and my membership of the Socialist Alliance. I feel very passionate about this and do not want this to happen.

Please consider those unaligned members out there who have their own reasons for joining the Socialist Alliance. Consider that they are members of the Socialist Alliance and not the DSP and that the DSP’s stance on any number of issues could alienate those members.

I understand that in terms of financial and other resources this may seem like a good idea. In fact, in my eyes and who knows how many others, this would just mean that the Socialist Alliance becomes the electoral party of the DSP. I am sure that there are other ways and means of allocating better the resources within the left that do not involve what I perceive as essentially a “takeover” of the Socialist Alliance.

I would like to propose that the Socialist Alliance should not allow this to happen without convening a special conference of members to debate this issue. All members should be notified of this conference via mail and the notification should include some statements outlining the pros and cons of amalgamation. There should also be an agreed a minimum participation rate for all affected feeder groups (and unaligned members) at this conference.

Finally, I have been preselected to run as a Socialist Alliance candidate in the upper house in the 2003 NSW state election. I accepted this nomination to run for the Socialist Alliance. Should the DSP dissolve into the Socialist Alliance I will need to reconsider my acceptance of this nomination.

I thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts on this important issue.

In solidarity,
Angela Budai.■

Reply to Angela Budai from the Socialist Alliance National Convenors

Dear Angela,

Thanks for your letter. It is a welcome contribution to a very important discussion.

John Percy’s letter to the National Executive of the Socialist Alliance was written on behalf of the National Executive of the Democratic Socialist Party. Some of the concerns raised in your letter could perhaps best be directed to the DSP. (We have taken the liberty of forwarding your letter to John Percy.)

You raised a number of issues. Does the Socialist Alliance have a constitution? Yes, it was adopted at the founding conference and is available to all members. We have enclosed a copy for you. The constitution makes it clear that the structures and platform of the Alliance is democratically determined by the Alliance membership as a whole and not by any of the founding groups.

Any changes to the Alliance can only be made by the National Conference scheduled for May 2003. There will be no changes to the structures or political platforms of the Alliance until that conference. All

members will be involved in the discussion and the selection of delegates to the conference from all branches of the Alliance.

There is already an internal discussion bulletin that is open to all members (and will be placed on the public web site) to discuss any and all aspects of the Alliance, its campaigns, electoral stance, etc. Obviously the DSP proposal will be a significant part of the discussion between now and the conference.

As for New South Wales specifically, the Socialist Alliance platform for the NSW state election will be decided by the NSW state conference, which will be held in November.

We consider the involvement of the unaligned members of the Alliance to be absolutely crucial to success of the Alliance and regard the nomination of candidates such as yourself as particularly important. One of the indications of the potential of the Alliance is that the membership is considerably above that of the combined memberships of the founding groups.

The DSP's proposal will have implications for the future of the Alliance, which will need to be widely canvassed and discussed over the coming months. The National Conveners are absolutely committed to ensuring that the discussion is an open and inclusive as it possibly can be.

We would be happy to include your letter and our reply in the discussion bulletin, as a contribution to that discussion. Please let us know.

We would welcome any further discussion article(s) from you for the SA discussion bulletin. Also, both *Green Left Weekly* and *Socialist Worker* have stated that they are open for discussion articles about Socialist Alliance.

We note your concern about the Socialist Alliance position on Israel and Palestine. In response to events earlier this year, the National Executive did discuss the question and adopted the following slogans to encapsulate the Socialist Alliance position: Israel Out of the occupied territories; For the Palestinian's right to self

determination; For a fully independent Palestinian state; An end to Australian government support for the Israeli occupation; Support for the right of return for Palestinian refugees.

We would be happy to more fully discuss this issue or any other with you at your convenience. The platform of the Socialist Alliance and statements from the National Conveners and the National Executive are available on the web site: www.socialist-alliance.org.

Let us reiterate that the future of the Alliance is totally in the hands of its membership. We look forward to your involvement in the discussion. I hope that this letter has helped clarify the situation. Please contact us again if you have any further queries.

Yours in solidarity,

Ian Rintoul

Dick Nichols

Riki Lane

National Conveners ■

Reply to Angela Budai from DSP national secretary John Percy

Dear Angela,

Because your letter to the Socialist Alliance National Executive canvassed positions and perspectives of the Democratic Socialist Party towards the Socialist Alliance, the National Conveners forwarded a copy of it to me as DSP National Secretary. Hence I'm taking the liberty of addressing directly some of the concerns you've raised.

Firstly, let me assure you with all my heart and as strongly as I can state that there's not a skerrick of anti-semitism in the DSP, and if there was a hint of it, it would be the responsibility of every comrade to wage a fierce political struggle to stamp it out. Anti-semitism, or racism of any sort, has no place within a socialist organisation, in the DSP, or in the Socialist Alliance.

However, the DSP does have a clear position, and a long history, of standing up for the rights of the Palestinian people, against the enormous injustices, the crimes, that have been perpetrated against them. We're convinced that we've developed and defended a consistent position on this issue — a position that is consistently opposed to racism and anti-semitism, and consistently supports the rights of the oppressed.

We do recognise though that there are different positions in the broad socialist movement, and in the Socialist Alliance, on this question, and on many other questions as well. As our letter stated, we're convinced there's a significant amount of shared socialist program among the members of the Socialist Alliance, enough to take us forward and build a stronger organisation. But we look forward to many constructive and stimulating political discussions, on current differences, and future tactical and theoretical questions, in a strengthened Socialist Alliance.

I'd also point out that the Socialist Alliance won't be able to avoid taking a stand on international questions, and in fact has not remained "silent" on international issues.

World issues, issues of war and peace, for example, impact on us here of course. Australian workers are not unaffected by the bosses' wars — they've sent us off to fight their wars many times in the last century.

But more than that, we as socialists have to take a stand in solidarity with the workers and oppressed struggling in other countries. Socialists are internationalists. The original exhortation in the Communist Manifesto of "Workers of all lands, unite!" still holds today, even more so. Especially in an imperialist country like Australia, if we're "silent" on international issues, we're going along with our own ruling class which has an interest in exploiting the countries of the Third World.

And the Socialist Alliance can't be "silent" on issues relating to Israel and Palestine. It has in fact taken a position. It's a major issue of international affairs. Yesterday I was just browsing the web site of the Socialist Alliance in Britain, and their home page at the moment opens with a big advertisement for the demonstration being organised in London for September 28. The large headline slogans are: "Don't Attack Iraq. Freedom for Palestine."

Another issue on which you express concern is the low level of involvement of those members of the Socialist Alliance who aren't members of the original affiliating organisations. You fear that if the DSP's proposal went ahead, and we stopped campaigning publicly as the DSP and recruiting to the DSP, this would be exacerbated.

We don't think so. Many individual members of the Socialist Alliance had already been pushing the DSP to do more, and since our letter many others have responded extremely enthusiastically, positively welcoming the DSP proposal and indicating that this is what's needed, that this will inspire them to get more active.

In fact, part of the thinking behind our proposal was about how to encourage more of the not so active

membership of the Socialist Alliance to get more active, and have more of a voice. We look forward to a stronger, more active, Socialist Alliance, with the hundreds of inactive members inspired into action. With a stronger Socialist Alliance, there will be thousands more willing to join and get involved.

In regard to another of your concerns. The DSP is not proposing anything unilaterally or undemocratically for the Socialist Alliance. We want to improve the democratic functioning of the Socialist Alliance. All we are talking about so far is something for the DSP:

- How we function publicly — not as the DSP.
- And how actively our members build the Socialist Alliance — making a lot more energy and resources available for that task.

Everything that the Socialist Alliance does will of course be decided within the democratic framework of the Socialist Alliance and its constitution. I hope that by now the Northside comrades or the SA National Executive would have forwarded you a copy of the constitution, which was adopted at our very successful and very democratic national conference in August last year. A report on the conference and a copy of the constitution are posted on the Socialist Alliance web site www.socialist-alliance.org.

I was disappointed to read that you or others might be afraid that the Socialist Alliance was in danger of being “usurped” by the DSP if the DSP leadership’s proposal was adopted by our members and this course went ahead.

Although it was on the DSP’s initiative that the first meetings to form the Socialist Alliance took place, and although in the 18 months of its existence so far DSP members have probably been some of the most active and most generous with their time and money in support of the Socialist Alliance, the guiding hope of both the initial conception and of our recent proposal to our members has been to reach out to and involve the many thousands of unaffiliated socialists and other activists. In the limited work of the Socialist Alliance so far we’ve seen the great potential, from its election campaigns, and membership drives. We in the DSP also see the much greater potential for involving a broader range of left activists in the Socialist Alliance.

Please feel free to contact myself or other DSP members to discuss out your concerns further, or to find out more about the DSP’s political positions and our proposal. But I hope we’ll all be discussing within the framework of the Socialist Alliance itself how to build a stronger alternative to the capitalist parties in Australia, and how to build a stronger movement for socialism. Certainly the objective need for building that alternative grows sharper by the day. If the DSP membership votes in December to adopt the perspective put forward by the DSP NE, then I’m certain we can all work together to fulfil the tremendous potential of the Socialist Alliance.

Comradely greetings,

John Percy

National Secretary Democratic Socialist Party ■

Regroupment, Realignment, and the Revolutionary Left

By Alex Callinicos

[Alex Callinicos is a leading member of the Socialist Workers Party in Britain.]

It is clear that what in France is called the “radical left” or “the left of left” – the forces to the left of social democracy and of what survives of Stalinism – is undergoing a major process of renewal and of realignment. The mass mobilisations that have swept Europe and North America since Seattle, the development of a worldwide movement against global capitalism, the shift to the left of *Rifondazione Comunista* in Italy, the spectacular performance of the revolutionary candidates in the first round of the French presidential elections on 21 April 2002, the electoral challenge to New Labour mounted by a unifying far left in Britain – all these are signs of a major political sea-change.

Two political earthquakes

This process has to be set in the context of the two earthquakes to have hit the left in the past fifteen years. The first was the revolutions in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 and the collapse of the Stalinist regimes, culminating in the fall of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of the USSR itself in 1991. The immediate political impact of this world-historical upheaval on the left was negative, even for those political currents that had opposed Stalinism from the social democratic right or the revolutionary left. The disappearance of the only major geopolitical rival to the Western bloc – and the catastrophic collapse of what purported to be a planned economy-seemed to confirm the idea (most famously articulated by Francis Fukuyama) that there could no longer be any progressive alternative to liberal capitalism. At best, the more radical proponents of contemporary social democracy argued, we could choose which version of capitalism we were exploited by-Rhenish stakeholder capitalism rather than Anglo-American *laissez faire*.¹

The deeply pessimistic reaction that this situation could induce even on sections of the revolutionary left critical of Stalinism is indicated by the opening of a resolution passed at the 14th World Congress of the Fourth International in 1995 (more extracts from this document are published elsewhere in this Bulletin):

Since our 13th World Congress in 1991, the balance of forces has continued to deteriorate for the toiling masses, in the framework of the general trends noted and analysed in the resolution on the world situation that we adopted at that congress. The international dialectic of struggles has had a negative effect, bringing about setbacks, defeats or isolation of many emancipation movements. Our own current has been affected and weakened by this negative dialectic, a result that could hardly be avoided in an organisation unprotected by any sectarian shell to protect it from the contagion of the real course of social and political struggles... More

generally, all the social movements which are still developing at different rates in different countries-against imperialist oppression, austerity, the harmful effects of the market economy, environmental dangers, women’s oppression, militarism, etc-are still very fragmented. The project of a socialist society offering an alternative both to capitalism and to the disastrous experiences of bureaucratic ‘socialism’, lacks credibility: it is severely hampered by the balance sheet of Stalinism, of social democracy, and of populist nationalism in the ‘Third World’, as well as by the weakness of those who put it forward today. “In a large number of dominated countries, broad vanguard forces are now sceptical about the chances of success of a revolutionary break with imperialism; and sceptical about the possibilities of taking power and keeping it, given the new world balance of power. Other forces, and not the least important, have broken openly with this perspective.

Against this background, the prediction made, for example, in my *The Revenge of History* (1991), that, freed of the incubus of Stalinism, the authentic Marxist left could now take up again the unfinished business of confronting capitalism was undoubtedly excessively optimistic. Viewed from the perspective of 2002, however, it does not seem positively wrong. Because the driving force in the disintegration of Stalinism was, above all in the Soviet Union itself, more its internal contradictions than mass revolt from below, the immediate short term impact of its collapse was to strengthen Western capitalism in general and US imperialism in particular. But, in the longer term, the disappearance of Stalinism as a political force did liberate the left from having to dissociate itself from an obscene caricature of socialism. And, in part because of the very scale of market capitalism’s short term victory, which encouraged the worldwide imposition of neo-liberal policies, by the end of the 1990s a movement did emerge to challenge global capitalism. This is, of course, the second major earthquake – the rise of the anti-capitalist movement. There is no need to repeat here the extensive analysis of this development made by the SWP elsewhere (which has been thoroughly vindicated since its initial formulation in the aftermath of Seattle), but it may be helpful to resume the most recent developments.²

The combined effect of the radicalisation produced by the Genoa protests and 11 September 2001 was to shift the centre of gravity of the movement from North America (where activists were thrown onto the defensive after 9-11) to Europe. The scale of the protests at the European Union summit in Barcelona in March 2002 and the gigantic demonstrations against Le Pen in France in April/May 2002 indicate that this process is continuing. But, at the same time, the second World Social Forum at Porto Alegre in January/February

2002, attended by between 60,000 and 80,000 people, mainly Brazilian, underlined that the movement cannot be seen as a purely First World phenomenon, while the major demonstrations in Washington and San Francisco on 20 April 2002 – where opposition to neo-liberalism and solidarity with the Palestinian people fused in large, peaceful protests – are the most important sign to date that anti-capitalist resistance is reviving in the United States itself.

The significance of the anti-capitalist movement for the radical left is three-fold.

First, it is bringing a new generation into political activity. The youth and militancy of, for example, the anti-Le Pen demonstrations in France have been widely recognised.

Secondly, it is revitalising many activists from the 1960s and 1970s generation who, having grown tired and pessimistic after experiencing the defeats of the past quarter of a century, now see their hopes being renewed in these new mobilisations.

Thirdly, and most fundamentally, after the apparent triumph of neo-liberalism in the 1990s, the continued viability of anti-capitalist politics has been demonstrated very concretely. The regularity with which, for example, the Financial Times announces the decline of the anti-capitalist movement, only then to have to eat its words by reporting another massive protest or launching yet another defence of neo-liberalism, is an indication of the way in which a critique of capitalism from the left has once again established itself as a pole in ideological and political debates in the West.

Class polarisation in Europe

Revolutionary socialists are today swimming in a much bigger stream. Moreover, they are swimming with the stream. A large-scale process of radicalisation is drawing large numbers of people to the left. In Europe this radicalisation has its origins in the process of class polarisation that developed in the early 1990s. The impact of economic recession and of the neo-liberal policies demanded by European economic and monetary union (and still enforced by the European Central Bank and the EU Growth and Stability Pact) drove substantial numbers of people further to the right and to the left. This is what Tony Cliff called “the 1930s in slow motion”. It was reflected in the gains made by the extreme right throughout Europe during the 1990s, but also in the rebellion against neo-liberalism expressed industrially in the French mass strikes of 1995 and electorally in the sweeping victories won by social democratic parties in 1996-8.³

The first round of the French presidential elections on 21 April 2002 demonstrated that this process of class polarisation has reached a new phase. The social democratic governments brought to office by a rebellion against neo-liberalism have pressed ahead with neo-liberal policies. Lionel Jospin is the most spectacular victim to date of the resulting revulsion. But Le Pen and the Nazi National Front are not the only beneficiaries. Over 10 percent of those who voted in the first round backed revolutionary candidates. This is the most concrete evidence to date of the emergence of a “radical left” that repudiates social democracy. The

panic reaction of many on the liberal left to recent developments – summed up by Martin Jacques, ex-editor of *Marxism Today*, when he wrote, “Not since the 1930s has the threat of the irrational, of a turn towards barbarism, been so great in the West” – completely ignores this side of the picture.⁴ Millions across Europe are participating in a learning process. Disappointed by the experience of social democracy and encouraged by the development of the anti-capitalist movement, they are ready to look further left.

Whence the differences?

The development of the anti-capitalist movement represents a powerful challenge for existing left organisations: are they capable of relating positively and creatively to this new movement? It also poses the question of how important the theoretical and political differences that divided the left in the past still are. It is worth distinguishing between three kinds of difference.

First, there are the historic divisions on the Trotskyist left. Between the two main international currents—the Fourth International and the International Socialist Tendency—these stem ultimately from different interpretations of Stalinism, namely the orthodox Trotskyist analysis of Russia as a degenerated workers’ state adhered to by the FI and the theory of bureaucratic state capitalism developed by Tony Cliff, founder of the IST.⁵

Secondly, there is the far more important division between Trotskyism and Stalinism. This is the political expression of a world-historic process – the degeneration of the Russian Revolution of October 1917 and the rise of the Stalinist bureaucracy.

Thirdly, there is the equally profound antagonism between revolutionary socialism and social democracy. Once again, this is a reflection of world-historic events—in particular, the capitulation of the Second International to the First World War in August 1914 and the subsequent formation, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, of a new revolutionary Third International.

To pose the question of the contemporary pertinence of these differences is not to say that they don’t matter any more. For example, orthodox Trotskyism identifies a workers’ state with a state-controlled economy. Since a variety of social and political forces have carried through the statisation of an economy – Stalinist parties, Third World guerrilla movements, left wing army officers—the implication was that working class self-activity was not required to create a workers’ state.⁶

Cliff’s theory of state capitalism permitted us to reaffirm Marx’s fundamental idea that socialism is the self-emancipation of the working class. Even if Stalinism is moribund, what Trotsky called substitutionism – the belief that forces other than the working class can overthrow capitalism – is still alive and well.⁷ For that reason alone, the theory of state capitalism is an essential part of the intellectual heritage of revolutionary Marxism.

For all that, it would be mad now, when the Stalinist states have largely been swept into the dustbin of history and the surviving Communist regimes are (with

the exception of North Korea) busily seeking to integrate themselves into the world economy, to insist on dividing revolutionary socialists on the basis of their different interpretations of Stalinism. This would not have been true as recently as the early 1990s.

The intellectual clarity provided by the theory of state capitalism was critical in allowing the IS Tendency to resist the wave of pessimism that swept the left internationally after 1989—including most orthodox Trotskyist currents, as the passage cited above from the FI Congress in 1995 shows. It was indeed critical to the formation of some groups – for example, the International Socialists of South Korea emerged thanks to its success in winning activists from the predominantly pro-Stalinist left in the aftermath of the August 1991 coup in Moscow on the basis of the ability of Cliff's theory to explain the disintegration of "existing socialism".

But – with the revival of the left that began with the mass strikes in France in November-December 1995 – a new page has been turned. The position that a particular organisation took on the question of Stalinism is not a reliable guide to its orientation towards the new movement.

On the one hand, the International Socialist Organisation in the United States, historically one of the leading affiliates of the IST, reacted to Seattle and the subsequent international radicalisation with a sectarian dogmatism reminiscent of the worst aberrations of orthodox Trotskyism.⁸

On the other hand, FI activists have played a prominent role in the development of ATTAC in France and in the World Social Forums at Porto Alegre. Political tendencies must be judged not primarily on their theory or their past, but on their response to the challenges of the present.

To repeat, this does not mean the differences listed above no longer matter. As we shall see, the question of reform or revolution retains all its force today. But, rather than simply reiterate old arguments, we need to judge, in the light of the demands of a new period, what differences, old or new, really matter today.

Processes of realignment

This assessment is merely one version of a judgement being made much more broadly on the left internationally. There is an extraordinarily strong desire for unity among activists of all backgrounds and generations. This finds expression in a variety of different ways. To begin with the far left, in Britain we have seen the formation of the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales and of the Scottish Socialist Party, which have between them united most of the sane elements to the left of the Labour Party under the same roof. On a larger, primarily European, canvas there is the developing dialogue between the FI and the IST, which has found concrete expression in leadership discussions and some practical collaboration between the two currents' flagship organisations, the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire in France and the Socialist Workers Party in Britain. Overlapping with these two processes are the now regular Conferences of the European Anti-Capitalist Left, which bring together some major for-

mations from Trotskyist, left reformist and Stalinist backgrounds.

Somewhat analogous processes are at work elsewhere in the world. For example, in the Asia-Pacific region a number of organisations from a Stalinist (usually Maoist) background are engaged in a process of re-examining aspects of their politics and drawing together organisationally. For example, various groups that broke with the Communist Party of the Philippines are currently in a process of regroupment. Often with such formations (including the PRD in Indonesia), the most obvious way in which Stalinist ideas continue to exert a residual influence is in the acceptance of a stages theory of revolution that separates democratic and socialist revolutions as distinct phases of the struggle in Third World countries.

This helps to explain the role that the Australian Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) is playing as a facilitator in the realignment of the far left in parts of Asia. The DSP, an orthodox Trotskyist grouping in origin, broke with the FI in 1985 in large part because it came to reject Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution and accept a stages approach instead.⁹

It would, however, be a major mistake to reduce the processes of left realignment currently underway to these shifting relationships among currents on the far left. Much larger forces are in play. Two developments in Europe illustrate this. The first is the shift to the left by the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) in Italy. This began in 1998 when (at the price of a split) the PRC withdrew its support for the centre-left Olive Tree coalition government then headed by Romano Prodi. But the decisive stage in this process came when the PRC identified itself with the protests at Genoa in July 2001, and with the movement that subsequently developed in Italy against the war in Afghanistan and in solidarity with the Palestinian people. Secondly, and closely connected, is the development of a Europe-wide anti-capitalist network.

Organisationally the key forces in this network are the Italian Social Forums movement that emerged from the post-Genoa radicalisation, and ATTAC, which has now spread beyond France to over 40 countries, mainly in Europe, but the network embraces many others – Globalise Resistance in Britain and Ireland, the Movement for Global Resistance in the Spanish state, the Genoa 2001 Campaign in Greece, and so on. The network developed from the necessity of Europe-wide collaboration in the various summit mobilisations, starting with Prague in September 2000, and from the leading role played by French and Italian activists at Porto Alegre I and II. Preparations for the European Social Forum due to be held in Italy on 7-10 November 2002 are extending this network, but also putting it to a critical test.

Some on the Marxist left tend to be dismissive of these coalitions because many of the activists in them do not describe themselves as socialists (this is even more true of the North American networks). This apparent contradictory state of affairs – activists fighting global capitalism but denying that socialism is the alternative – is a consequence of the fact that resistance to the system revived in an ideological climate in

which not merely revolutionary Marxism but other socialist traditions had been marginalised. To exclude this layer of activists-numerically probably the largest grouping on an international scale-from the broader anti-capitalist left would be a disastrous sectarian error.

What sort of party?

This process of left realignment therefore takes place against a very different background from that assumed by the Fourth International when it discussed regroupment in 1995. Then the FI envisaged (in the resolution extracts of which are published elsewhere in this Discussion Bulletin) the possibility of different currents drawing together in a context that it saw as dominated by capitalist offensive and disarray and retreat on the left. Today, however, it is impossible to ignore the signs of revival. All the same, the growth of the far right underlines the scale of the challenge now facing the anti-capitalist left in Europe. Whether as members of political organisations or working in looser activist coalitions, they have collectively to offer an attractive and effective alternative to those radicalised by the experiences of the past years. To take the obvious example, what ongoing framework can be offered to the nearly 3 million people who voted for revolutionary candidates in France?

This takes us to the question of political organisation itself. A significant section of the anti-capitalist movement has a more or less hostile attitude towards political parties. This reflects a variety of factors – for example, the appalling record of the “official left” (social democrats, Communists and Greens) in office, negative experiences with far left organisations, and the influence of autonomism. The result is a movementism that, for example, has led to the formal exclusion of political parties from the World Social Forum and attempts to extend this ban to the European Social Forum. This position is very hard to sustain intellectually. Despite the ban on parties at the WSF, the Brazilian Workers Party (PT) was an informing presence (the concluding ceremony at Porto Alegre II felt at moments like a PT election rally). More seriously, there are systematic political differences within the movement – notably with the emergence of a strongly reformist pole around ATTAC that is challenged in particular by the Italian autonomists (the disobbedienti) on the basis of politics that chiefly emphasise the self-activity of already committed activists.¹⁰ These divergent currents operate like parties, organising on the basis of what amount to distinct political programmes, even if they spurn the name “party”.

The real question, then, is not so much for or against the party as a political form, but rather what kind of party we should be building? Here Murray Smith, a member of the LCR, but also till recently editor of *Frontline*, the magazine of the leading current within the Scottish Socialist Party (the International Socialist Movement, or ISM), makes an interesting contribution elsewhere in this Discussion Bulletin. He makes essentially two points.

First, the LCR should take the initiative in seeking to bring together a wide spectrum of activists from

different political traditions and social movements in a new anti-capitalist party in France.

Secondly, he argues against taking as the model of this party that provided by what he calls “traditional revolutionary organisations” such as the LCR and the SWP, that base themselves on a clearly defined revolutionary Marxist programme. A new party in France should, like the SSP, be “strategically non-delimited”, leaving open the question of reform and revolution. To call such a party “centrist” would be to remain trapped in “a period when the workers’ movement was characterised by a sharp polarisation between reformist and revolutionary currents”.

The rightward shift of social democracy (Smith calls them the “post-reformist left”) has, however, made such an approach obsolete: “In building a party with a class struggle practice (and an intervention by revolutionary Marxists) we create a framework that is unfavourable for the development of reformist currents. Besides, it is difficult to see how we could build a party on any other basis. Even to defend existing reforms and win new ones we have to employ the methods of class and mass struggle, in relation to which action in the parliamentary institutions would only play a supporting role. To fight for reforms has never meant you were a reformist, even still less so today when the so-called reformists don’t introduce reforms any more. A party built on these bases, especially with a conscious intervention by revolutionary Marxists, doesn’t constitute a favourable terrain for the development of reformist currents.”

Though the experience of the SSP is often cited in this context, the conception of a broad anti-capitalist party defended by Smith is shared by many who do not support the ISM – for example in the Fourth International. In order to identify what is wrong with this conception it is essential to start with the points of agreement. First of all, the history of the workers’ movement shows very clearly that mass revolutionary parties do not develop through a linear process in which a small Marxist group gradually grows bigger and bigger by recruiting more and more members. Like history more generally, the development of revolutionary parties involves qualitative leaps and sharp breaks. A classic case is the emergence of the French Communist Party from a split in the Socialist Party at its Tours Congress in 1920. There may well be cases where the way forward is to regroup a relatively broad spectrum of anti-capitalist forces in a party whose programme falls short of revolutionary Marxism. Moreover, this may indeed be what the LCR should be seeking in France. Certainly to make a larger realignment conditional on agreement with the deep-dyed sectarians of *Lutte Ouvrière* would be to ensure that the entire project is still-born. The idea that has been floated in the LCR of convening a broad Estates General of the Anti-Capitalist Left as a step towards a new party makes a lot of sense. But it does not follow from the fact that sometimes regroupment on the basis of a broad anti-capitalist programme is the right step to take that the aim of the process should be a party that fudges the question of reform or revolution. Smith is able to take a relaxed attitude to this because he seems to believe that classical

reformism is dead. But this is a big mistake, for at least two reasons.

First of all this belief involves a grave underestimation of contemporary social democracy. Of course, what Tony Cliff called “reformism without reforms” is a feature of the present period: a crisis-ridden capitalist globalisation presses social democratic governments to dismantle the reforms they had previously introduced. But this does not mean that the base of these parties in the organised working class has simply vanished. More to the point, there is no reason to believe that at least some social democratic parties will not, when driven into opposition by the present electoral revival of the European bourgeois right, to rebuild support by promising reforms. The French Socialist Party (PS) has already moved left in response to Jospin’s defeat. Jospin himself rebuilt the PS’s base after the debacle of the later Mitterrand years. Only a fool would confidently assert that this cannot happen again.

Secondly, the capacity for social democrats to recover from their failure to deliver reforms has an objective basis in the relative lack of self-confidence of workers—greatly reinforced, of course, by the trade union bureaucracy, which encourages them to look to others to improve their condition. This lack of self-confidence can only be overcome by the experience of mass struggle, and even then workers do not immediately or automatically shake off the influence of reformist ideas. All the great workers’ movements, from the Russian and German Revolutions to Solidarnosc in Poland, have involved an intense battle of ideas over different strategies for taking the struggle forward.

Though we are not in a revolutionary situation today, we see precisely the same process of differentiation at work in the contemporary anti-capitalist movement. The most powerful single force within the movement in Europe is a coalition of reformist forces, embracing significant elements within both ATTAC and the Italian Social Forums movement, who see either a revived nation-state or a reformed European Union (or some combination of the two) as a counterweight to global capitalism (which they often identify with the US). This is a much more militant reformism than that represented by contemporary social democracy, because it has emerged from a mass movement and has an activist orientation, but reformism it still is. The role that this current has played in resisting mass mobilisations and in particular blocking anti-war activity in different parts of Europe is documented elsewhere in this Discussion Bulletin.

The most prominent challenge to this wing of the anti-capitalist movement from the left comes from the autonomists. But this response is vague and diffuse on the extreme. Consider, for example, Michael Hardt on the polarisation between the so-called souverainistes—defenders of national sovereignty—and the supporters of more radical positions at Porto Alegre II:

It is certainly important, on the one hand, to recognise the differences that divide the activists and politicians gathered at Porto Alegre. It would be a mistake, on the other hand, to try to read the division according to the traditional model of ideologi-

cal conflict between opposing sides. Political struggle in the age of network movements no longer works in that way. Despite the apparent strength of those who occupied centre stage and dominated the representations of the Forum, they may ultimately prove to have lost the struggle... The leaders can certainly craft resolutions affirming national sovereignty around a conference table, but they can never grasp the democratic power of the movements. Eventually they too will be swept up in the multitude, which is capable of transforming all fixed and centralised elements into so many more nodes in its indefinitely expansive network.¹¹

Hardt’s reliance on the automatic development of the “multitude” is likely to be no more successful than earlier versions of the idea that spontaneity is enough to defeat capitalism. Like its predecessors, it represents a denial of politics, the refusal to recognise that the struggle against capitalism requires for its success the articulation of ideologies, the development of political strategies, and organised efforts to win support for them.

Challenging the influence of reformism within the anti-capitalist movement cannot be left to the objective logic of “network movements”. It requires the development of a coherent, organised revolutionary pole within the movement. But what is true internationally also holds on the national scale as well. An anti-capitalist party will be unable to negotiate the twists and turns of the class struggle – a class struggle from which reformism cannot be magically banished – without a clearly articulated revolutionary Marxist analysis that informs its tactical initiatives and practical activities.

Organising on the basis of a broader and more ambiguous programmatic basis may sometimes be a necessary phase in the process of building a mass revolutionary party but a looser party is no substitute for the real thing. More immediately, what Smith calls “traditional revolutionary organisation”, whether large or small, has definite practical advantages. The relative ideological homogeneity of a revolutionary Marxist party gives it a greater capacity for rapid and decisive action than looser, more programmatically ambiguous formations.

Consider, for example, the speed and determination with which the British SWP reacted to 11 September 2001 by starting, within less than 24 hours of the attacks on New York and Washington, a series of initiatives that led to the formation of the Stop the War Coalition and the emergence of one of the most dynamic anti-war movements in Europe. This was possible because the SWP, and the IS Tendency, had, over more than a decade, developed both theoretical analyses and a body of practical experience concerning contemporary imperialist wars and radical Islam that allowed us very rapidly to identify the key issues that were likely to emerge in the wake of 9-11. It is important to understand that the relative homogeneity of programme and analysis possessed by a revolutionary socialist party is not something arrived at by the mechanical repetition of sacred texts or the bureaucratic imposition of uni-

formity. Revolutionary Marxism can only continue as a living tradition by showing its capacity to respond creatively to historically novel developments. This means that an authentically Leninist organisation has to be able thoroughly to discuss these developments. Inevitably such discussion often involves major disagreements and vigorous polemics-particularly when the party has to deal with a sharp turn in the objective situation. The consensus that now exists within the IS Tendency over both contemporary imperialist wars and radical Islam emerged over sometimes strongly polarised debates in the late 1980s and the mid-1990s respectively.

Open discussion is therefore essential to a properly functioning revolutionary party. It is not, however, an end in itself, but is rather a means of clarification and therefore of enabling the party to act more effectively. Understanding this is the key to grasping the nature of democratic centralism. Daniel Bensaïd of the LCR makes the point very well:

What is often attacked in the notion of the Leninist party, or in 'democratic centralism', is plainly the verticalist centralism for a long time illustrated by the bureaucratic centralism of the Communist parties. We then run the risk of forgetting that a certain form and a certain degree of centralism are also democratic imperatives. Parties which are simple spaces of discussion, without decisions taken in common bringing together the activists as a whole, will be reduced to clubs where gossip and opinions are exchanged without any common engagement for action. They will then be playthings for the surrounding market mechanisms and for the co-optation of the leaders by the media (as often already happens).¹²

In an authentic democratic centralist party, then, open discussion is encouraged, but as a means of allowing the party to intervene more effectively. Discussion therefore terminates in a democratically arrived-at decision, after which all members, whatever their views on the issue, work together to implement the policy that has been agreed on. What this means organisationally is a matter of some controversy. The practice of the Fourth International is normally to permit the permanent existence of organised tendencies within their sections. Munyaradzi Gwisai of the International Socialist Organisation (Zimbabwe) also defends a conception of the Leninist party as a multi-tendency organisation in his contribution to this Discussion Bulletin.

The problem with permanent tendencies is that they institutionalise internal disagreements within the party. This often has the effect of turning the organisation in on itself and creating an introverted atmosphere in which the latest internal bulletin is a bigger event than developments in the class struggle. Even where this does not happen, the existence of permanent tendencies is likely to encourage a situation in which specific issues are viewed through the lens of the internal differences. Decisions emerge, less through the weight of the strongest argument, but as a result of the balance of forces between the different factions, a situation that

can encourage coalition-building and unprincipled deals. Bensaïd describes such a situation at the 10th Congress of the FI, which met in 1974, deeply split between two international factions: "the logic of factionalism set the boundaries and the Congress resembled a diplomatic meeting of delegations rather than a collective discussion. The important questions were settled separately and in private".¹³

Gwisai invokes the example of the Bolsheviks to support his approach, but the history of Lenin and his party offers a very different picture, one in which open and vigorous debates often took place but in which the alignments of the leading Bolsheviks constantly shifted on specific issues. Within the space of a few months, for example, Lenin and Trotsky moved from being close allies over the necessity of taking power in September-October 1917 to antagonists over the Brest-Litovsk treaty in January-February 1918, while Zinoviev and Kamenev, bitterly opposed to Lenin in October, became strong supporters of him over Brest-Litovsk.

A revolutionary party should seek to promote this kind of fluid, open debate rather than institutionalise factional differences. This conception of the Leninist party has important implications for how revolutionaries operate within the broader movement. The kind of sectarianism displayed by LO or the American ISO when they counterpose their organisation to the movement is utterly bankrupt. Participation in a broad range of united fronts is an essential feature of the present period.¹⁴ But these united fronts-which include movements such as the Socialist Alliance, ATTAC, and Globalise Resistance, which have a broad programmatic basis - are not ends in themselves.

While working constructively with a diversity of different currents, revolutionary Marxists have to be contributing to a process of ideological clarification that focuses on the question of strategy - of how to take these movements forward. Sometimes this may involve polemics with the reformists and the autonomists. Provided that these arguments are conducted in a comradely fashion, and pursued in a context where it is clear that the aim is to strengthen the movement, they need not have a divisive effect. Nevertheless the development of a strong Marxist pole within the movement depends on the willingness of revolutionaries to engage in ideological struggle.

First steps

The most obvious way in which such a pole could be constructed on an international level would be for the two main Trotskyist currents - the FI and the IST - somehow to draw more closely together. It may therefore be helpful to consider some of the obstacles that such a process faces. Two in particular stand out:

(1) Theoretical disagreements: Of these the most important is not the historic debate over the class nature of the Soviet Union. More current questions are also in dispute. For example, the conference of the European Anti-Capitalist Left in Brussels in December 2001 saw a debate between the LCR and the SWP over the movement against the war in Afghanistan. The LCR comrades argued the relative weakness of the

movement in France reflected objective factors – in particular, the legacy of French imperialism. The SWP delegates criticised what we saw as the subjective weaknesses of the French left, which led them evenhandedly to condemn US imperialism and Islamic fundamentalism. Behind this lies a larger disagreement over assessments of radical Islamism: the SWP tends to emphasise the potential of this (very heterogeneous) ideological and political phenomenon to express opposition to imperialism, while the LCR stresses its reactionary features.¹⁵ This is not simply a theoretical disagreement: the Stop the War Coalition in England (in which the SWP plays a leading role) has been able to involve leading Muslim organisations and activists in a united front against the war on terrorism.

(2) Differences in political culture: The two tendencies also have different political styles that, while not necessarily implying principled disagreements, sometimes present difficulties in working together. These differences reflect the divergent responses by the FI and the IST to the downturn in class struggle and the crisis of the revolutionary left that developed in the late 1970s.¹⁶ The FI was itself a major victim of this crisis, suffering the collapse, disintegration, or decline of many of its leading sections. Those that survived – including the most important in Europe, the LCR – did so as coalitions of activists involved in specific movements. By contrast, the IST was a far weaker international current when the crisis of the far left developed. It expanded both geographically and numerically during the downturn of the 1980s on the basis of a perspective central to which was general Marxist propaganda. The more activist orientation that the IST developed in response to the class polarisation that began to develop in Europe after 1989 still laid much greater stress on the development of Marxist theoretical understanding than did the FI groups.¹⁷

These divergent survival strategies mean that FI and IST groups tend to have quite different age profiles: the former dominated by middle-aged activists rooted in unions or other social movements, the latter much younger but (with some important exceptions – for example, the Irish SWP and SEK in Greece) much weaker connections with the organised working class. (The British SWP, because of its longevity as an organisation and the bursts of growth it has enjoyed since the mid-1980s, spans both sides of this divide.) FI comrades' involvement in activist networks means that they have been well placed to contribute to the anti-capitalist movement: LCR members played a leading role in ATTAC from the start, and their counterparts elsewhere have often been prominent in the movement's international extension. The IST, by contrast, has sought a much higher political profile starting with the large contingent it had at the Prague protests in September 2000. Its affiliates played an important role in initiating anti-capitalist united fronts – for example, Globalise Resistance in Britain and Ireland and the Genoa 2001 Campaign in Greece – but they have also openly intervened and projected themselves as revolutionary Marxist organisations in the movement. Meanwhile the LCR in particular sometimes gives the impression that its activists in specific movements operate

fairly autonomously while the Ligue itself till recently took a low profile outside elections.

These different methods of working have sometimes been a source of misunderstanding between the two currents; ways of addressing them would have to be found if the IST and the FI were to work together more closely. The decision of the LCR leadership after the French presidential elections of April/May 2002 to break with the longstanding FI tradition of making membership conditional of the attainment of a relatively high “political level” and to adopt a policy of open recruitment – something that has been, in different forms, part of the SWP's practice since the early 1970s – is therefore an important step towards reducing the gap between the practice of the two currents.

As this example indicates, the differences between the IST and the FI are not set in stone. Of course, the LCR comrades did not decide to practise open recruitment in order to reduce these divergences. Their decision was dictated by the practical necessities of relating to the wave of radicalisation since 21 April (thus, see Murray Smith's comments on the question of membership). But that is precisely the point: the development of the struggle on an international scale is forcing established revolutionary organisations to re-examine past assumptions and practices. This is the context that has put regroupment and realignment onto the agenda. This does not mean that these will simply take place spontaneously, as Michael Hardt suggests when he argues that reformism will simply dissolve into the “multitude”. The obstacles described above – let alone the much greater ones that separate the Trotskyist left from currents emerging from one wing or other of the Communist movement – are real ones that cannot simply be wished away. They will need to be addressed if they are to be overcome. Concretely this means three things:

(1) The different socialist tendencies being drawn together in the new movements against capitalism and war need to engage in positive and constructive united front work that involves not merely them but also the broader anti-capitalist left that does not regard itself as Marxist or even socialist.

(2) Where possible, revolutionary currents – in particular, the FI and the IST – need to achieve a higher level of practical collaboration: steps already have been taken in this direction – for example, the far left rallies during the protests at Nice (December 2000), Genoa (July 2001), and Brussels (December 2001) – but thought should be given about how to build further on these initiatives.

(3) Discussion of the political differences that exist on the far left and in the broader movement needs to be pursued in an open and comradely way: nothing is to be gained by pretending they do not exist or trying to brush them under the carpet. Since Seattle the revolutionary left has been embarking-along with many others, fortunately – on a new voyage. There is no map to guide us – no set of rules or obvious historical reference point to dictate what we should do. The potential rewards are enormous. History will not forgive us if we miss this chance.

Notes

1. W Hutton, *The State We're In* (London, 1995).

2. See especially C Harman, "Anti-Capitalism: Theory and Practice", *International Socialism* 88 (2000), A Callinicos, *The Anti-Capitalist Movement and The Revolutionary Left* (London, 2001) and *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto* (Cambridge, forthcoming).

3. See A Callinicos, "Crisis and Class Struggle in Europe Today", *International Socialism* 63 (1994), and "Reformism and Class Polarisation in Europe", *International Socialism* 85 (1999).

4. M Jacques, "The New Barbarism", *Guardian*, 9 May 2002.

5. See T Cliff, *Trotskyism after Trotsky* (London, 1999), A Callinicos, *Trotskyism* (Milton Keynes, 1990), and D Bensaïd, *Les Trotskysmes* (Paris, 2002). For the most recent round in the debate between defenders of these rival interpretations of Stalinism, see the exchanges between Chris Harman, Ernest Mandel and myself in *International Socialism* 47, 49, 56 and 57 (1990, 1992).

6. For a case study of the political acrobatics this logic produced comparatively recently among supporters of the FI, see A Callinicos, "Their Trotskyism and Ours", *International Socialism* 22 (1984).

7. T Cliff, "Trotsky on Substitutionism" (1960), in *International Struggle and the Marxist Tradition: Selected Writings Volume One* (London, 2001).

8. See A Callinicos, *The Anti-Capitalist Movement and the Revolutionary Left*.

9. See D Lorimer, *Trotsky's Theory of Permanent Revolution: A Leninist Critique* (Sydney, 1998) and J Percy and D Lorimer, *The Democratic Socialist Party and the Fourth International* (Sydney, 2001). For a critique of this kind of thinking, see J Rees, "The Socialist Revolution and the Democratic Revolution", *International Socialism* 2:83 (1999). Not all groups involved in the regroupment process promoted by the DSP accept a stages theory—for example, the Labour Party of Pakistan, which broke away from the Committee for a Workers' International, dominated by the Socialist Party of England and Wales.

10. For much further analysis, see A Callinicos, *An Anti-Capitalist Manifesto*, especially ch 2.

11. M Hardt, "Today's Bandung?", *New Left Review* II:14 (2002), pp117-18.

12. "Entretien avec Daniel Bensaïd", *Le Passant ordinaire*, May 2002: circulated by e-mail.

13. D Bensaïd, *Les Trotskysmes*, p105.

14. See J Rees, "Anti-Capitalism, Reformism and Socialism", *International Socialism* 90 (2001), and A Callinicos, "Unity in Diversity", *Socialist Review*, April 2002.

15. Compare, for example, G Achcar, "Le Choc des barbaries", *ContreTemps* 3 (2002), and C Harman, *The Prophet and the Proletariat* (new edn, London, 2002).

16. See C Harman, *The Fire Last Time* (London, 1988), ch 16. ■