

# Alliance Voices

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# NSW State Election Analysis

*By Kieran Latty (Sydney Central branch)*

The data used to compile this analysis was obtained from the NSW State Electoral Office website: [www.seo.nsw.gov.au](http://www.seo.nsw.gov.au).

This analysis attempts to illustrate what degree of correlation there is between ALP, Green and SA votes.

The graphs below rank the results from individual polls from the best to worst result for individual parties along the X Axis (labeled as "Rank" vote). The Y Axis shows the size of the vote for the particular party expressed as a percentage of its average vote across all booths (named "percentage of average vote"). Where the series indicating two parties tend to run in the same direction there is a strong correlation. Where they run in opposite directions there is a negative correlation.

The booths covered include all booths in Bankstown, Marrickville and Port Jackson, the three seats where we obtained the highest vote.

The first graph in this series is ranked on the performance of the ALP. As you can see, there appears to be a rather strong correlation between a high ALP vote and high SA vote. The thin black line, indicating the SA vote, tends to get lower as the white line (ALP) decreases.

The black straight line is a trend line for the SA vote calculated on the least square difference method. As you can see, the trend line is almost identical to the ALP vote line.

Furthermore, over the 44 best ALP booths SA got 124% of its average vote. Over the 44 worst ALP booths SA only got 76% of its average vote.

The next graph shows SA performance in comparison to the ranked results for the Greens. As you can see, the SA vote (thin black) increases as the Greens vote (white) decreases. The two trend lines make this readily apparent.

Across the 44 best Greens booths, SA got only 87% of its average vote. Across the 44 worst Greens booths, SA got 113% of its average vote.

## Conclusion

Across the three seats studied, there is a very strong correlation between the ALP and the SA vote. There is a strong negative correlation between the Greens results and the SA results.

This indicates that the best predictor of our electoral success in terms of voting behaviour is the ALP primary vote.

Where the Greens do very well we are likely to get less than average results. This could be to two reasons:

1. The Greens vote "crowds out" other progressive parties
2. The demographic population of strong Green areas is not conducive to SA.

Either way, the above results indicate that the best way to maximise the SA vote is to run in solid ALP areas.

It also suggests that our electoral "base" is more like the ALP's than the Greens. This means that to win more votes we need material that relates to sections of the population that tend to be ALP supporters, rather than those who tend to support the Greens.

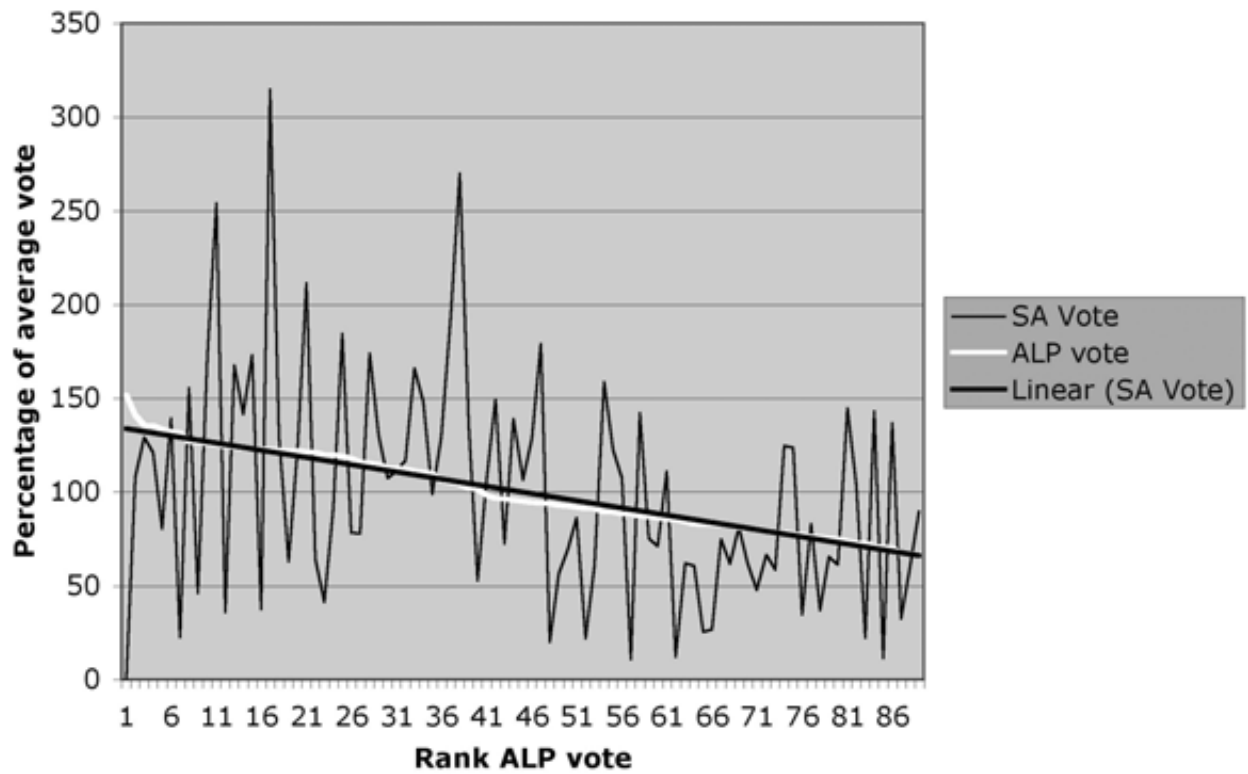
Concretely, this means we need to pitch ourselves as a left-wing alternative to the ALP, and a solidly pro-working class alternative to the Greens.

As the ALP is generally to the right of the Greens but more working class in its supporter base, our material does not need to compete with the Greens on being "more left", but needs to sensibly relate to working people.

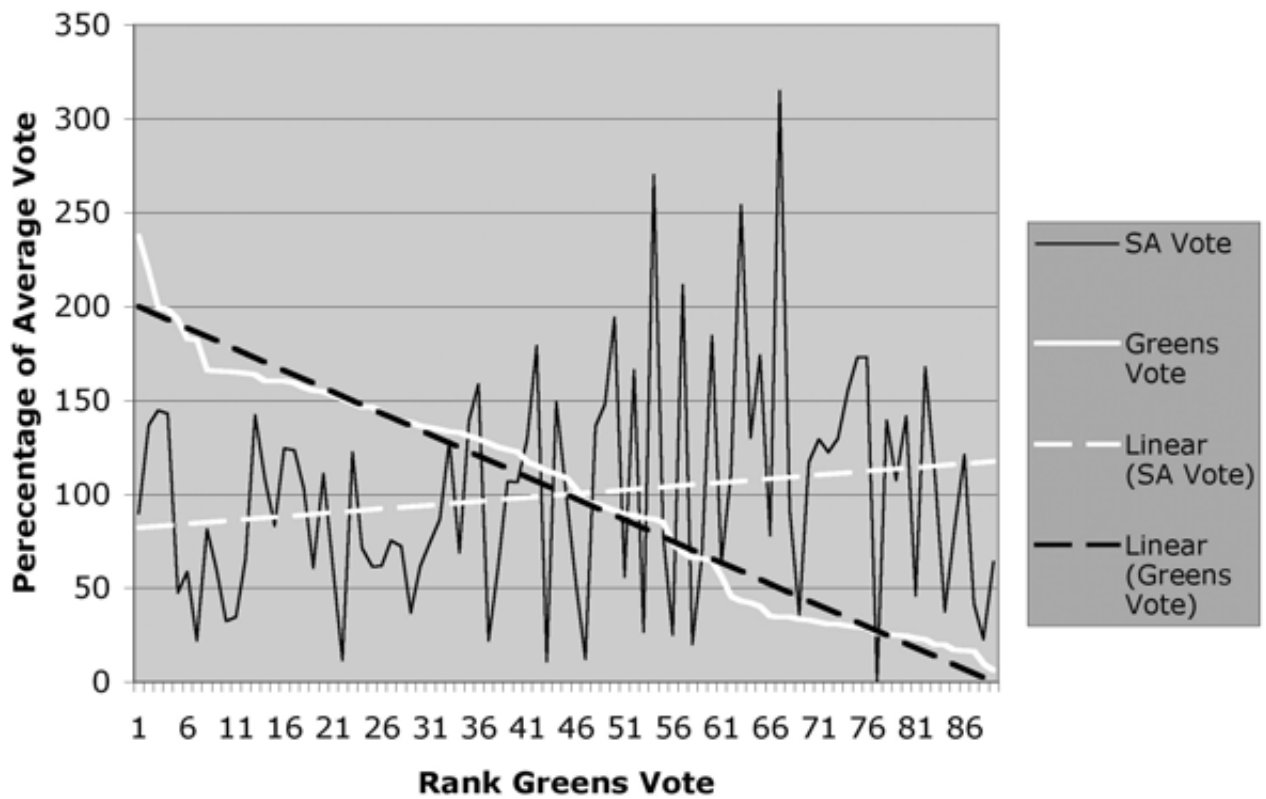
Concretely, this means a strong emphasis on the concerns of working people, in particular economic concerns. It does not mean shying away from "social issues" but it does mean we need to show clearly how they relate to people's lives and are not in opposition to raising the standard of living of working people.

[Please refer to graphs on page 4.]

### Vote Correlation ALP and SA



### Vote Correlation SA and Greens



# Advancing our Socialist Alliance in 2004

*By Graham Matthews (Melbourne North East branch and SA candidate for Batman)*

The fourth year of the Socialist Alliance (and they said it wouldn't last) promises to be the most exciting and fruitful to date. It will almost certainly contain a federal election, as well as opportunities for the Alliance to develop further political unity in action. The year will also allow the Alliance to assess the utility of developing a strong relationship with an independent socialist newspaper (*Green Left Weekly*).

Our fourth year together will undoubtedly be challenging. Developing policy, building organisational unity, extending our collaboration as a single multi-tendency socialist party, are struggles that are bound to tax us all at one time or another, particularly those of us who come from one or other of the affiliates, and are more used to having things our own way.

Nevertheless, if we are able to keep our attention on the main goals of the Alliance, then our fourth year promises to build on the gains of the previous three. It's only when we allow our particular differences to dominate our discussion, to cloud our assessment, that we risk losing the start we've gained.

In this contribution, I would like to particularly assess the possibilities for 2004 in relation to the discussion contribution by David Glanz "Why our federal election vote matters" (*Alliance Voices* Volume 3, Number 12, November 2003).

In his contribution, David argues against a (unattributed) position he says is "floating around" in the Alliance, "[T]hat the vote we get isn't important'. It's accompanied by the line that the election is simply an opportunity to make propaganda, and that success should be measured by whether or not we recruit to the Alliance."

Here it would seem David actually conflates two issues. I do not know anyone in the Alliance who thinks that the vote that we receive in (any) election 'doesn't matter'. To argue such a course would at least be insulting to the many hundreds of activists who participate in our election campaigns at all levels. It would also seem to be an expression of defeatism.

Certainly the largest possible vote, and a growing vote, does tell us something of our perception by the wider working class, even if David's conception that the "strength and maturity of a socialist party is measured at election time", is also just a little one-sided.

The second issue that David rolls in with the question of votes is that of recruits. Colin Fox's comment that he would give up the six MSPs if the SSP would grow from 3000 to 10,000 members reflected more than humility. It reflected an attitude to building a united socialist party as a *combat party*, in Fox's own words. "The MSPs came at the end of the process," Fox counseled in his November 15 address in Melbourne, as if warning that a strong and united socialist party was nothing to be taken for granted. And indeed, it is not.

Federal elections are among the best opportunities for socialists to make useful propaganda among masses of working people. It is a vital chance for us to canvass the whole of our policy, at a time when the whole of Australia is tuned-in (however jadedly) to politics. Our first task is certainly to convince as many to vote for us as possible, but would we not be neglectful if we did not also ask them to join?

As the Alliance, we have a struggle to differentiate ourselves from the Greens. If we were to reduce our election campaign to a left shopping-list, for instance, the choice for most progressive voters would be obvious. Why vote for the Socialist Alliance when the Greens have the same politics, and a far better chance of putting them into practice. Our only response to this can be to go beyond "issue" politics and highlight our socialist politics, our activism and our leadership in practice.

In the November 2002 Victorian election, our election leaflet achieved this to a minimal degree, integrating upcoming struggles, but also concretely raising our vision of socialism. For the 2004 federal election, we have to go even further in our attempt to win people to a vision that "a different world is possible", if we are even to compete with the Greens on the same basis as the 2001 election.

This is indeed one of the lessons that Colin Fox had to teach – electoral success for socialists only comes on the back of successfully leading mass working-class struggle. To affect this we have to grow, and grow as a united party. The federal election campaign should be seen as a step in that direction.

David has good advice for Socialist Alliance. If we are to increase our implantation in working-class areas, to increase our membership, and increase our vote, we should start now. However, why stop at letterboxing, letter writing and the drawing of rosters?

For decades the left has best reached-out to the working class on the streets. Stalls (Socialist Alliance campaigning stalls), rallies and speak-outs, even public meetings will also be essential to our winning the largest hearing in the forthcoming elections. They also give us the advantage of speaking directly to those who want to know more about what we think, and what we do.

In the 2002 Victorian election for instance, it was the Geelong branch, with an exemplary practice of political work in their community, which scored the biggest vote of any Alliance candidate, even though they only letter-boxed a fraction of the electorate, and failed to cover all the booths on polling day.

There can be no question that the 2004 federal election presents the Socialist Alliance with a massive opportunity. However, it is one that we must above all meet politically. While the election will be a chance for the Alliance to carve out a larger base of supporters in the electorate, success will only be achieved if we present a *socialist* alternative, one that builds on the support that we have won so far, and encourages people to actively join the struggle. Far from being a

chance to *either* maximise our vote *or* recruit to the Alliance, our election campaign must be aimed to do both, because only by succeeding in one will we succeed in the other.

## **Cuba: a response to Martin Thomas**

*By Chris Slee (Wills branch)*

In *Alliance Voices* vol 3, no 9, I argued that Cuba is a country which has made a socialist revolution; that the revolution was made by the mass of workers and peasants, not just by a few guerrillas; that the revolution has benefited the majority of people, particularly in areas such as health and education; and that, while there are bureaucratic distortions in Cuba, these have not reached the point where the only solution is a new revolution to overthrow the government. I argued that the limitations on democracy are mainly due to the government's need to defend itself against imperialist pressures and threats.

Martin Thomas, in his article "On Cuba" (*Alliance Voices*, vol 3, no 11), objects to my reference to Cuba as an "imperfect socialist democracy". He says Cuba is not democratic at all: "Cuba does not just fail to be a socialist democracy. On many counts it falls short of the minimum we expect from a bourgeois democracy".

Before dealing with Comrade Thomas's specific criticisms of Cuba, I would like to make a few general points.

Firstly, in a number of areas Cuban citizens have rights which are well in advance of most capitalist countries. They have the right to free health care and education, which we don't have in Australia.

Secondly, democratic rights are not absolute even in the most democratic capitalist countries. In Australia, freedom of speech is limited by the law of libel etc. The right to strike is not legally acknowledged except in very limited circumstances. Even that most sacred right - the right to sell one's labor power to the employer of one's choice - may be limited under certain circumstances. An example is military conscription, which is a form of slavery. This has been used by virtually all bourgeois democratic governments in time of war, and often also in times of relative peace.

Thirdly, the level of democracy that is possible depends on concrete circumstances. Trotsky analysed the bureaucratic degeneration of the Soviet Union as being due to the economic and social backwardness inherited from the Tsarist regime, the devastation caused by the First World War and the civil war/foreign intervention, and the isolation of the revolution in a capitalist world. The same factors apply to Cuba, except that Cuba has not been devastated by war to the same extent as the Soviet Union. (This could change - a US invasion of Cuba is a real possibility).

For over 40 years Cuba has been attempting to carry out a transition to socialism in a world dominated by capitalism. It is a poor and militarily weak country with a rich and powerful neighbour (the United States) that has attempted to overthrow the Cuban government using a variety of tactics, including an invasion attempt (at the Bay of Pigs in 1961), numerous terrorist attacks, chemical and biological warfare, economic blockade, and the funding of "dissidents" within Cuba. Given this objective situation, it is not surprising that Cuba falls short of being an ideal model of socialist democracy.

Nevertheless, Cuba does have elections to assemblies at the local, provincial and national level. Representatives can be recalled by those who elected them, and receive no monetary privileges. Most representatives at all levels continue to work in their usual jobs for their usual pay, with time off for their duties as representatives.

Comrade Thomas claims that: "The higher assemblies, above the municipal level, consist of candidates chosen by an election commission made up of members of the ruling party and its auxiliary organisations".

It is true that there are candidacy commissions which play a role in selecting candidates for the provincial and national assemblies. But these commissions do not have the final say on who will be elected.

Until the early 1990s elections to provincial and national assemblies were indirect - i.e. the members of these bodies were elected by the members of the municipal assemblies, who had themselves been elected by the voters of their municipality.

In 1992 the law was changed to require that the candidates put forward by the municipal assembly as proposed members of higher assemblies must be put to the voters of the municipality for approval.

This process is often criticised because the choice before the voters is limited: they can either accept or reject the candidates put before them by the municipal assembly. But this is only the final stage of a long process, which begins with potential candidates being nominated by meetings in workplaces, mass organisations and neighbourhoods. These nominations are collated by the relevant candidacy commission, comprising members appointed by mass organisations such as the union movement, the peasants association and the women's federation. The candidacy commission comes up with a recommended list of candidates which it puts to the municipal assembly. The municipal assembly makes the final decision on which candidates to put to the voters for approval as members of higher assemblies.

Comrade Thomas claims that: "...those assemblies have no real power. All real power lies with the Council of State and the Executive Committee". In fact the National Assembly is the highest decision-making body in Cuba. It elects from its own ranks the State Council, to which it delegates some of its powers between sessions of the National Assembly.

The Cuban political system has both strengths and weaknesses. The nomination process outlined above gives workers and peasants a form of participation that does not exist under bourgeois democracy. But the absence of an open political and ideological discussion and debate in the mass media means that some important issues are not thoroughly discussed and fully understood by the mass of the people. (For example, the bureaucratic degeneration of the former Soviet Union was never discussed in the Cuban mass media while the Soviet Union still existed. As a result most

Cubans had little or no understanding of the nature of the Soviet regime, and even today have a very inadequate understanding of what went wrong there).

The absence of opposition parties in Cuba means that the elections are not a focus for debate on the overall direction of the country. Instead the discussion focuses on the personal qualities of individual candidates.

However, as I pointed out in my previous article: “Under present conditions any significant opposition party would almost certainly be a pro-capitalist party”. Such a party would be heavily funded by US imperialism.

Comrade Thomas does not see any problem with this. He says: “If Cuba were socialist, why shouldn’t it allow pro-capitalist opposition parties?” In his opinion, the fact that such parties would be funded by the US is not a problem - after all, he points out, some capitalist countries used to allow the local Communist Party to receive funding from the USSR.

He criticises the Cuban government for recently arresting some people for “peaceful dissident political activity”. He does not mention that these people were funded by the US government and worked closely with the US embassy. To him this is not important and does not justify their arrest.

He ignores the threat of a US invasion of Cuba, which is very real. (There can be no reasonable doubt about this after the invasion of Iraq). The main deterrent to an invasion is the prospect that the invaders would face a strong and united resistance from the whole Cuban population. If the Cuban government were to allow well-funded capitalist opposition parties and media to exist, they would try to undermine this unity. To the extent that they succeeded, this would increase the likelihood of an invasion. Whether to take this risk is a decision for the Cuban government, not for Australian socialists.

The absence of opposition parties does not mean the absence of discussion. New laws under consideration by the national assembly are discussed in workplaces and mass organisations, often resulting in revisions to the proposals.

In my previous article I said that: “The limitations on democracy in Cuba are mainly due to the government’s need to defend itself against imperialist pressures and threats. This does not exclude the possibility that the government can make mistakes in how it deals with dissent”. The banning of the Cuban Trotskyists in 1962 would seem to be an example of this.

There has been an ongoing struggle between bureaucratic and democratic tendencies in the Cuban Communist Party and its predecessors. The banning of the Trotskyists was a victory for the bureaucratic current.

But the Cuban Trotskyists seem to have made it easy for the bureaucrats. It is my understanding that the Trotskyists were followers of Juan Posadas, an Argentinean who had been the leader of the Fourth International’s Latin American Bureau, but who split from the FI in 1962. He developed some bizarre views, including the idea that a nuclear war would prepare the way for a world-wide socialist revolution. This made it easy for the Cuban bureaucrats (in particular, those who had been leaders of the Stalinist Popular Socialist Party) to attack Trotskyism. It does not justify the banning of the Cuban Trotskyists, but it may have meant that defending them was not a high priority for most Cuban revolutionary activists.

Comrade Thomas admits that most “dissidents” in Cuba today are “centre-right”, and attributes the apparent lack of a left-wing opposition current in Cuba today to repression. He seems not to recognise that in a revolutionary society under siege there is a strong impulse towards unity amongst those who defend the revolution. I believe it is this, rather than repression, which explains the absence of any significant left-wing opposition movement.

Comrade Thomas also complains about the lack of “independent unions” in Cuba. Once again the main reason for this is not repression, but the workers’ consciousness of the need for unity in the face of imperialism.

Comrade Thomas claims that the Cuban revolution was not made by the workers, but “handed down to the admiring workers by a guerrilla leader from a podium”. He claims that: “The general strike in the first week of 1959...was a public holiday after the guerrillas had won. Batista had already fled”.

It is true that Batista fled before the guerrillas entered Havana, but as he left he handed over power to one of his generals, who aimed to keep the old state apparatus intact and form a new bourgeois government. These plans were thwarted by a general strike, called by Fidel Castro, that developed into a massive popular uprising that caused the old army to disintegrate.

It is strange that Comrade Thomas, a strong believer in the central role of the working class in making a revolution, emphasises the failure of the April 1958 general strike while denying the success of the January 1959 general strike.

Following the insurrection the old army and police - the key institutions of the bourgeois state apparatus - were dissolved and replaced by an army and police force drawn largely from the ranks of revolutionary fighters. Shortly afterwards a people’s militia, almost entirely composed of workers and peasants, was created.

Workers continued to play an active role in taking the revolution forward. They joined peasants in demonstrations supporting land reform and demanding the removal of government officials opposing it. As the revolution deepened the workers mobilised to support the expropriation of local and foreign capital. They joined the Committees for the Defence of the Revolution and the militia to defend these gains against domestic counter-revolution and imperialist attacks. The result of these struggles was a real socialist revolution.

Comrade Thomas notes that initially “a large part of the Cuban capitalist class and middle class” had supported the revolution. As the revolution deepened, the capitalists and much of the middle class turned against the revolution. But instead of welcoming the advance of the revolution from its bourgeois-democratic to its socialist stage, Comrade Thomas dismisses it as merely a “decision by Fidel Castro, announced by him to the crowds in Havana”. In fact the “crowds in Havana” were an indication of the growing radicalisation of the workers and peasants.

Comrade Thomas claims that the Cuban government “has done nothing to promote workers’ revolution internationally”. In fact the Cuban government has taken enormous risks and made enormous sacrifices in its efforts to spread the revolution.

Che Guevara’s unsuccessful attempt to spark revolution throughout Latin America by launching a guerrilla struggle in Bolivia is well known. Cuba’s role in defeating the US-backed South African invasion of Angola is less well known. Cuba sent troops to Angola in 1975, and kept them there until the decisive defeat of South African troops in 1988 - an event which caused shock waves in South Africa and contributed to the end of apartheid. In sending troops to Angola, Cuba knew it was not only putting an end to any hopes of “normalisation” of relations with the US but also risking US military retaliation. This action showed a high level of internationalism on the part of the Cuban government and people.

A government that came to power through a general strike, dissolved the old army and police, introduced free health care and education, and has attempted to spread the revolution should, at the very least, receive a fair hearing for its claim to be socialist. This does not mean we have to be uncritical of Cuba. Comrades should read widely on Cuba, watch Cuban films, talk to Socialist Alliance members and other leftists who have lived in Cuba, and form their own opinion on the basis of a high level of knowledge. If we all do this, there is a good chance we can eventually reach agreement on the nature of the Cuban state.

## **Socialist Alliance And *Green Left Weekly* - A Marriage Made In Heaven?**

*By Austin Whitten (Sydney Central branch)*

I would like to comment on three submissions on the subject of *Green Left Weekly* becoming the official newspaper of Socialist Alliance. Two appeared in the last issue of *Alliance Voices* and the third, an alternative motion, has been put forward by Greg Adler of Workers League, and released to Alliance branches for distribution.

Addressing the last first, Greg echoes a sentiment expressed by all three submissions, that "There are no organisational short cuts to building [Socialist Alliance] support". He proposes a "monthly tabloid of about 20 pages" that "should be a tabloid paper rather than a journal" and makes some excellent points describing a newspaper that remarkably resembles *Green Left Weekly*:

- \* "a paper that does not lecture but which reflects a wide variety of views", encouraging "a debate in the left and in the workers’ and mass movement" that will "take the form both of articles and a letters column which would be prominently featured".

- \* "international coverage" coming "from a variety of sources" and "news reports and photographs... of a high standard".

- \* "It will promote Alliance activities, but not in a triumphalist way and it will also promote non-Alliance activities".

- \* "It should cover cultural and artistic issues in a lively way with reviews, photos and interviews."

- \* "Alliance positions will be stated in editorials and lead stories but the paper should also carry regular interviews with workers and activists who do not necessarily agree with the Alliance. The aim will be to give a picture of the way the mass movement is actually developing rather than how we would like it to develop.

The remainder of Greg's submission addresses operational details on how an SA paper should be run. How a "monthly tabloid", covering the same territory in the same style as a weekly tabloid already in existence, can expect to establish itself and be viewed as other than what it is, a four-week-old, stale-dated version of *GLW*, is difficult to know.

Janet Burstall, of Worker's Liberty, writing in *Alliance Voices*, declares in her first sentence, that "The Alliance must maintain its independence from the affiliates" and opens with two self-described metaphors, the first equating the *GLW* offer to a patriarchal relationship and the second suggesting that one of the affiliates expects the others to perform its "old songs".

Running throughout Janet's submission is an unresolved question, one that is central to most relationships, whether they be political, tribal or personal in nature - how to maintain a separate identity within a group, or perhaps more accurately, when is it appropriate to do so. The general impression one gets in her article is that the level of suspicion as to others' intentions rules out any possibility for a successful relationship.

Janet fears, in the proposal to make *GLW* the SA paper, an endangerment of "the precious achievement of the Alliance - a new socialist organisation that is independent of the affiliates". Is this really what is precious about the Alliance or rather, is it special because of the number of different organisations who have agreed to work together for common cause? What is achieved, for instance, when affiliation members carry signs in rallies that represent their organisation rather than Socialist Alliance? Someone recently asked me why affiliates, ostensibly focused on the issues, feature signs of their group. I had no answer for them other than the obvious one.

From an unaligned perspective, it reminds me of countless demonstrations I have been at over the years attended by small socialist groups, distributing, or attempting to sell, material put out by their group. One returned home with a fistful of paper that seemed to be saying the same thing. It required someone from one of the groups, interpreting for you, to distinguish the finer nuances, invisible to someone from the outside.

In addition to her opening metaphors, Janet expresses other fears - that the bulk of editorial control will be under the "editorial control of one affiliate" and that it will be "a step towards the DSP establishing a broader sponsorship for its newspaper" and "An interim editorial arrangement that operates, even if by default, under the effective direction of one affiliate is not healthy for the development of an independent editorial group". There is nothing that has been proposed that would cause one to feel these points are not being addressed but it is good to have them raised and noted so they can act as guidelines to be kept in mind during the discussions.

Janet states that it is better to have the politics that would cause "angst and serious disagreements between the various tendencies" sorted out first than to "bring out a paper regularly". Can we really ever expect to have an Alliance paper, based on "independent affiliates" to not reflect their differences? As described by Greg and as currently on offer in *GLW*, an SA paper will need to reflect a wide variety of views, encouraging "a debate in the left and in the workers' and mass movement".

Janet finishes by saying that she does not want to "compromise the independence of the Alliance" [presumably meaning Alliance affiliates], its most precious asset, because that is what enables us to continue to attract new activists and reinvigorate left activists who have not chosen to join any of the individual affiliates".

From my perspective, it is not the "independence" of the component groups that will attract this audience but quite the opposite. The "unaligned" are waiting to see if the affiliates can act in concert, "keep it together", be united by the issues at hand whose successful outcome will be a benefit to the constituency. Personally, there are many people I know who are waiting to see if we can come to terms with the "independence" thing, but not in the way Janet imagines, perhaps.

David Glanz, identified as a National SA co-convenor in his *Alliance Voices* article, raises some very real concerns about the responsibilities involved in taking on a "24-page weekly newspaper", worrying about the "demands on its members", writing that it would take up a very substantial amount of activists' time and energy" and that it would "heavily distort the work of the Alliance". He also lists a number of good questions about the nature of an SA paper:

- \* should it be "a party paper" or a supporter of "debate between affiliates and individuals about the questions that divide us?"

- \* should it "agitate or should it be more reflective?"

- \* what name to be called by and why?

- \* the balance between overseas and Australian coverage

- \* "a stable editorial board that is broader than the existing main affiliates? Or is that aim itself utopian at the moment?"

David's focussed concerns and questions are precisely the ones that need to be addressed and that seems to be precisely what is happening at the moment and being planned for in the future.

Whilst caution is in order, what was not covered by the three contributors was the incredible potential in the offer of *GLW* as the Socialist Alliance newspaper, if the pitfalls can be avoided - a marriage made in heaven, perhaps, that of an established, respected, popularly supported socialist newspaper wedded to a broad-based socialist political party. True, at this point, it is mostly potential, but that is more than can be said for all those years of small groups, small newspapers and fistfuls of paper coming away from rallies and demonstrations.

Doesn't such an opportunity not deserve to be explored at length and not hastily consigned to the dustbin? I, for one, feel that *GLW* is an excellent newspaper that deserves all the support that I can give it. If it was also our Socialist Alliance newspaper, that support could go towards advancing the Socialist Alliance vision, which is a prospect that may be just a dream, but one I think is worth exploring to the hilt. Relationships require cooperation, an attention to relationship details and a degree of trust. No relationship is successful without them.

## **What sort of paper should Socialist Alliance have?**

*By Patrick McLiesh (Melbourne North East branch)*

In the rush to embrace the *Green Left Weekly's* offer of a formal relationship between SA and *GLW* there has been a disappointing tendency for comrades to ignore or at best gloss over the political questions. Perhaps this is understandable. For a new political party such as SA to be offered an existing paper, a weekly no less, it is an awfully tempting offer.

*Green Left Weekly* while nominally independent is well and truly established as the paper of the DSP. It is DSP comrades who sell it on the streets and DSP comrades look to it for their political direction. They are rightly proud of *GLW* and concerned to protect the political capital that it embodies.

On the far left there are a number of different styles of publications, *GLW's* style, its layout, the length of articles, the size of the paper, is quite different for example to *Socialist Worker*. Which is a smaller paper, has generally shorter articles and argues a consistent line. *SW* models itself on papers which try to intervene in struggles and argue a way forward. Papers that are associated with a revolutionary organisation and a particular political heritage. While there are elements of this sort of paper in *GLW* it is a paper that is attempting to reflect a broader range of opinions and presents more as the left's paper of record.

The question Socialist Alliance comrades need to ask themselves is what sort of paper do we want? Who is the audience for the paper? Is it the existing far left or should we be trying to build a readership among broader layers of society, unionists and those disillusioned with Labor but not yet won to the Alliance? Do we want a paper that reflects

the different opinions within the alliance, carries debates between affiliates and members. Such a paper would tend to be rather inward looking. But such a paper could be quite quickly achieved, perhaps by embracing the NE proposal. Or should the Alliance be trying to forge a new paper of the left. A paper that intervenes in the struggles in Australian society arguing a way forward and reflects what unites us rather than our points of disagreement.

All the publications of the left have their own baggage, they reflect their political heritage, strengths and weakness. The NE proposal is for a brief transitional period with a Socialist Alliance editorial board working closely with the *GLW* editorial board and then in less than six months a review with the clear intention being the transformation of *GLW* into the paper of the Alliance. Essentially this process is for *GLW* to become the Alliance paper. As such the Alliance would inherit *GLW*'s history including its very close association with the DSP and its political traditions. For anyone in the broader left, familiar with *GLW* that is how it would appear.

There is also the question what would we do with an Alliance paper? Those of us who are members of affiliate organisations are generally expected to sell our organisations publication. Would that be expected of Alliance members once we produce an Alliance paper? The N.E. proposal is silent on this question, however it only makes sense that Socialist Alliance members would be encouraged to sell the paper.

In a recent discussion in the Canberra SA branch on the N.E.'s proposal it was argued that we should embrace the proposal as a small first step toward establishing the Socialist Alliance's own paper. It was argued that in the process everything about the paper was up for debate. Later in the discussion the question of the name of the paper was raised. I was interested in the response, which was that the political capital that was represented by the name *Green Left Weekly* was much too valuable to consider a name change. I can understand DSP comrades feeling that way. But perhaps the Socialist Alliance should have a newspaper with the word Socialist in its title? We have spent considerable time and energy establishing our name, getting electoral registration etc. In discussions about the Greens and the overlap in our audiences comrades rightly argue it is the fact we are socialists that sets us apart. I raise this not to point score but to illustrate the need for further considered discussion around the question of a paper for the Alliance.

Comrades should read the latest *Socialist Campaigner*, No 5 Nov/Dec 2003, in particular the report on the progress that has been made toward producing the first issue of *Seeing Red*, the Alliance's new quarterly magazine. It is exciting to think we are about to produce a socialist magazine edited by such a broad editorial board. *Seeing Red* promises to be a concrete example of how we are beginning to forge a new left in Australia. It has taken a little time to bring it together, but that is part of the point. Socialist Alliance is all about working together, bringing people with us as we build a new force for socialist politics in Australia. Grabbing a quick fix without properly working through the politics is a throw back to the bad old days of the Australian left and we don't want that do we comrades.

## **Need not greed**

*By Jane Darcy-Burke (Perth branch)*

Mr Howard very kindly claimed no Australian would be worse off under the GST. I am on Disability Pension and before the GST I totally managed my expenses, but now I struggle to pay for essentials - food, phone, electricity, gas, etc., few luxuries or outings. I struggle to pay \$11.05 for my multi-rider bus pass to get to my volunteer work each week.

Meanwhile Mr Howard indulged in \$2.6 million in overseas travel expenses with a further \$90,800 on Comcars. The total travel expenditure for politicians was a mere \$13.2 million with former politicians and their wives accounting for further hundreds of thousands.

I have no house, while Mr Howard, at taxpayer expense, has two, Kirribilli and the Lodge.

We pay taxes for *services*, that is a return on our payments; most Australians are concerned with putting bread and milk on their tables. Meanwhile, certain families struggle to put food on their tables, educate their children, pay the mortgage and hospital expenses. We once were The Commonwealth of Australia; we now seem to be The Disparitywealth of Australia.

Has anybody noticed another irony regarding John Howard with his call over Robert Mugabe and Mugabe's human rights abuses? Howard piously pontificates about these abuses while, he allows innocent refugees to be inhumanely incarcerated in Concentration Camps isolated in the outback with no media access.

Imperialists are always motivated by greed of one sort or another. Mugabe too is motivated by the ballot box, as is Howard; remember the lies about the children overboard used to secure an election.

Whatever is expedient to the political call. We have our own Guantanamo Bay in Naru, but no breath of this reaches the public ear.

The Dark Ages were known for barbarism, ignorance and intellectual darkness. Are we descending into another Dark Age? Is this the scenario we face? No. The Socialist Alliance offers a viable and certain alternative. It is a simple philosophy: need not greed.

# **An historic moment to restore the socialist movement**

*By John van der Velden (Canberra branch and SA National Co-convenor)*

Comrades,

I recently did an extensive interview with *Green Left Weekly* outlining the political necessity for why the Alliance needs to move towards becoming a broad, united, multi-tendency socialist party. It is a continuation of the discussion and directions set by the national conference in May and includes an assessment of progress made in implementation of this decision.

For reasons of space, *GLW* was only able to print a heavily abridged version. Socialist regroupment and presenting a united socialist alternative is the most important issue for the Alliance and the socialist movement in the current political period. I consider this to be a crucial debate for the entire Alliance membership as we head into the next conference and submit the full interview as a contribution to this discussion.

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In May the Socialist Alliance national conference adopted a perspective proposed by a non-aligned caucus (NAC) of 160 SA members towards becoming a broad, united, multi-tendency socialist party. *Green Left Weekly's* Kerryn Williams spoke to SA national co-convenor and a key organiser of the NAC, John van der Velden, about his assessment of the political situation underpinning this perspective and the progress being made in its implementation.

## **Q. What do you see as the main political factors necessitating SA's transformation into single, broad, multi-tendency socialist party?**

There are several factors converging to make this an absolute imperative. It is partly a consequence of progress in the internal development of the Alliance since its inception, partly the consequence of the historical state of the existing socialist movement in which we all find ourselves as long-term socialists, whether in particular groups or not, and partly a consequence of the broader political environment that both demands, and thus allows for, creating a progressive alternative to global capitalism and the neo-liberal agenda of its main political parties. We really are in a very special conjuncture and the decisions we make as socialists, or fail to make, will have very lasting consequences for our movement and by extension for working people.

## **Q. Well, perhaps we could take each of these areas in turn.**

Sure. The immediate political significance of the conference decision was that SA had reached a logical point in its development from a predominantly electoral united front between eight foundation groups to its consequent growth where there are more non-aligned members of the Alliance than members of affiliates. With more people coming into the Alliance like myself, who are looking for something permanent and lasting as a broad socialist formation to the left of Labor, it has been a natural progression whereby a leadership voice and political role for members from outside the affiliates would emerge.

## **Q. How is that significant in relation to the socialist movement in this conjuncture?**

Non-aligned members are really only here to build the Alliance as a broad based socialist unity project in itself and the promise this holds for building socialism in this country. The socialist unity vision that the affiliates showed in forming the Alliance has been embraced and in some respects taken over and transformed by non-aligned socialists. While the Alliance started as an electoral united front of eight affiliates we now have a much more profound socialist unity convergence through the non-aligned socialists we're joining. Increasingly we are forming an important part of the core activist layers in the branches and now, since conference, as a core part of the leadership in the states and at a national level.

The other key aspect, from within the development of the Alliance itself, is that we have reached a crossroads in terms of the resources needed to further develop the Alliance as a united front. Continuing to produce separate affiliate publications, maintaining separate offices, organising separate events as the political priority for affiliates is no longer compatible with them also continuing to provide the financial and activist resources to building the Alliance. Affiliates are being forced by the circumstances of their own success in building the Alliance to make a choice. Either grab the expanding opportunities for developing the Alliance as the political priority or to pursue a minimalist, predominantly electoralist path still focussed on building themselves- at least as far as the weight and commitment of their own ongoing contribution to building the Alliance goes. A central debate resolved at conference was the need to allow for and encourage the greater integration of those affiliates who want to prioritise building the Alliance as the foremost political task of this current period in the socialist movement.

## **Q. That created a lot of debate. Have the differences subsided?**

No not entirely. It remains a subtext to a lot of our internal discussion on the steps forward to implementing the conference decision, particularly on infrastructure questions such as transforming existing affiliates assets (publications, offices, etc.) into Alliance assets. A minority of the Alliance, primarily from the smaller affiliates, remain anxious about retaining their identity and cling to their historical origins and their particular vision and model for realising the socialist mission they have been so committed to for so many years. But perhaps we can come back to that in the context of the broader political environment in which we find ourselves.

**Q. The other factors creating this special conjuncture we are in?**

Yes, that's right. The key backdrop to this is the current upswing in the political prospects for building a socialist alternative in this period after so many difficult years. The crisis in Labor has been building, especially in the last 30 years, and is part of the general crisis in Social Democracy across the advanced capitalist countries. Here the ALP went from the very mild "reform socialist" agenda under Whitlam, and all the inflated expectations that embodied, to even that being rapidly being ditched under Hawke and later Keating. It has been a spectacular evolution. From reforming capitalism for workers to reforming capitalism for capital. Howard's neo-liberal agenda is a follow on from measures inaugurated under Hawke-Keating. This has carried on to the present and to the point where Labor struggles to carve out a policy message that distinguishes it from the Howard government, never mind actually improving the lives of working people.

**Q. So you think Labor is finished as a party for working people?**

Well it still has a working class constituency and there are still some members who are sort of 'rustled on' supporters who harbour a historical longing for a return to the reform socialist principles it once stood for but yes, I think that ship has well and truly sailed. Even at best, the leading left voices in the ALP are mere echoes tinkering at the edges (like for a more humane refugee policy through Carmen Lawrence) while the overall rightward policy direction continues largely unchallenged if not supported. It's driven a lot of people away from the Labor party over the years and created a huge political space for the socialist left. However the sober reality is that the revolutionary socialist left hasn't picked up in this period, but in fact has declined.

**Q. So it's a crisis period for the socialist left as well?**

Yes, absolutely. Working people have been looking for an alternative, and the most obvious reflection of that is the dramatic growth of the Greens in the last few years. The growth in support for the Greens is not because the environment is increasingly the single issue that overshadows all others for working people but because the Greens have expanded their range of progressive policy issues. This is resonating with more working people, despite the limited reform parameters the Greens offer. We, the socialist left, should have expanded in this the period and we need to come to terms with our failure to do so.

One reality of this conjuncture is that the demise of the Soviet Union in the early 90's closed a chapter in the legacy of Stalinism as an existing historical political force in the workers movement. But for many in the working class it also closed the book on historical prospects for socialism. For the revolutionary socialist left the fight against Stalinism took a heavy toll. It creating a sectarian culture of marginalisation, organisational splits, the 'in-house' elevation and endless refinement of theory, program and language as an end in itself, and a focus on validating organisational difference and competition for THE vanguard party position in the working class. We are down to the historical remnants and fragments of a long and difficult struggle and the sooner we (especially comrades in the affiliates) come to terms with this and regroup into a healthier, more positive and collectively stronger socialist organisation the better.

**Q. Are you saying that the revolutionary socialist affiliates should simply dissolve into the broader socialist reform perspective of the Alliance?**

No, not at all and this was made quite clear at conference and since.

Our foundation affiliates range from 3 to 300 in terms of membership. And 8 different groups (and a few still outside the Alliance) all saying: we are the vanguard, we have the answers, and we have about 95% agreement, but the extra 5 or 8% difference is decisive in terms of transforming capitalism so you should join our group rather than the others is just not a message that's being accepted. In bourgeois elections people vote at the ballot box every few years but in the socialist movement people fundamentally vote with their feet and I think the results are in and for all to see. 90% of the working class doesn't really know we exist and the balance doesn't understand the differences between us. Even a large percentage of Socialist Alliance members are barely aware of the differences between affiliates and most have never met some affiliates because they are too small to be spread across our 30 branches. We need to collectivise our resources, our commitment to the ideals we share, and our purpose to reach our common goal. And we need to find a fresh path and inclusive culture to get this under way successfully.

**Q. How can that be done without requiring the affiliates to dissolve for the common socialist good?**

The conjuncture we're in requires a message of a joint socialist vision. To rebuild the socialist movement in this country we have to set aside the impulse that the solution for the working class in this country is for socialist tendencies to recruit to themselves as the primary reason for being together in SA. We have to understand that it's a longer process, necessitating a broader milieu in a broad socialist party where the accent's on a common message of socialist unity to re-establish socialism on the agenda first and foremost. As a multi-tendency party we will be celebrating our 'unity in diversity' with full democratic voice and tendency rights to organise around a political perspective within the party and its publications. However, failure to collectivise our political message and resources will greatly weaken our capacity to take advantage of the current political opportunities to rebuild our movement.

Without grabbing this generational opportunity, this historic moment to restore the socialist movement and preserve the very valuable legacy of the revolutionary socialist tradition, well we won't have this opportunity again in another generation.

**Q. What do you mean by "generational opportunity"?**

Part of the demographic that I'm talking about, in terms of people who have responded initially to this message of socialist unity and building a broad socialist party where everyone's welcome, are aging comrades. They are people with a lot of experience and dedication and the moment really is now. We don't have that many years to rebuild our legacy with the people in this demographic. This is the reality of membership within the affiliates as well as among non-aligned. We have a lot to share in terms of political experience in party building, education of newer members to the socialist movement, and historical memory (good and bad). Harnessed correctly, it's a decisive platform to restore the fortunes of the socialist movement now and into the future. A temporary tactical or strategic united front manoeuvre where we go in and build our little cadre groups from 10 to 20 or even from 300 to 400 is not going to make a decisive difference in this country. But a broad based socialist movement of two or three or four or five thousand, where we start getting back into the numbers that the old Communist Party had, that's where we start making a difference, for our class and for our political heritage.

**Q. Do you think that's realistic in the foreseeable future?**

Yes I do. When I came into this country in 1980 the CP still had thousands of members, but it was a party in decline. Battered by Stalinism, splits, literally a party in political and ideological decline. But the Alliance is in this period of growth and working people are looking for an alternative. Two or three thousand people in a period of upswing can make a lot more of a difference than five or ten thousand people in a period of political and ideological decline, who are in despair and can't see a way forward.

**Q. So who exactly are the non-aligned in this demographic that are part of this broad socialist convergence you mentioned?**

We have people who at one time or another have been members of the existing affiliates, other factions of the Trotskyist movement here and overseas, ex members of the Communist Party, ex-members of the former Socialist Party of Australia, ex-Maoists, ex-ALP and Greens. They've have come back into being activists and leaders in the socialist movement through the Alliance process. We also have long-standing union militants who have become leaders in the working class movement through their activities and we have activists from outside these traditions who have radicalised through the various movement campaigns the Alliance has been active in. So it's a deep and very profound convergence, well beyond the existing affiliates.

**Q. That's pretty diverse. How is it that you have managed to work together in such apparent agreement and in such a short time?**

The single thing that unites the non-aligned movement in SA (less a movement than a spontaneous loose network of members really) is the political view of the necessity of breaking out of the sectarian marginalisation and the factional competitiveness of the past to build a more positive alternative. Many of us at one time or another have been members of one group or another and walked away for various reasons. But we haven't walked away from socialism. As I said earlier, part of the ongoing debate is that some foundation groups still cling to a perspective that the Alliance is and should fundamentally remain a united front for building the affiliate groups. People who are not members of these groups are in a sense the waters that they are swimming in to restore their sagging political fortunes, including in relation to each other.

**Q. That still sounds more old left than the new fresh approach you said the Alliance offers.**

Well some affiliates are much further down the track to understanding and accepting this new period and the opportunities it offers than others. We are still working through it in a comradesly fashion. The main thing is that by working together we have broken down a lot of the old barriers and factional concerns and that will continue.

**Q. So how will the Alliance as a single multi-tendency party reconcile an affiliate perspective that remains within this minimalist, faction first, united front approach?**

Well, continued discussion and democratic decision-making will hopefully go a long way to keeping everyone moving forward together. In the end, what we establish as an Alliance in practice will be critical. Hopefully all existing and potential affiliates will see that being in the Alliance is better for their long-term prospects than being outside. We want the unique perspective and contribution each affiliate brings to the Alliance. We want them to share this with the much broader audience the Alliance offers and all affiliates will still be able to recruit to their respective tendencies. In the end though, the leadership roles across the Alliance will naturally gravitate to those who place building the Alliance first. The credibility and political weight of the tendencies amongst the Alliance membership will flow from how they participate in this priority task. Already the leadership role of the non-aligned members will before long, and in some ways already does, supersede many of the roles of particular affiliates, not just on paper but in reality. We constitute half the National Executive and the majority of National convenors. It really is part of an organic, emerging collective SA leadership in which building the Alliance is the priority, first and foremost. This emerging collective leadership will not just be non-aligned members but include all those in the affiliates who share that priority.

**Q. Given that the Alliance is now much more than the sum of its foundation affiliates, where do you think SA's continued growth is likely to come from?**

We are still in a period as an Alliance of consolidating or reconsolidating the established socialist left. It's already happening through the non-aligned members who biographically represent a whole range of historical political currents. We have also joined another affiliate in the socialist youth group, Resistance, a very important development given our demographic profile and we are hoping for a few more affiliations in the near future.

There are an awful lot of people out there who are waiting to see if this socialist unity is real and that we're getting it right before recommitting their hopes and resources and time to the socialist movement that they never really left in their minds and in their hearts.

If we get it right we're going to bring a lot of very politically experienced people back into the socialist movement through the Alliance. We have about 1000 members across 30 branches now. We are at a point where we're achieving a critical mass that will set us up for presenting a real alternative and start to get us into the broader audience reach that the Greens have.

**Q. Do you think this will be reflected in the Socialist Alliance vote in the upcoming federal election?**

Possibly. Hopefully. It is important that we run in elections and try to maximise our vote but I think, as Scottish Socialist Party MP Colin Fox said when he was here, it's better to have 100 members than a thousand votes (or some such comment). Our electoral success will depend on the success we achieve with building the Alliance, presenting the common socialist voice, winning new members prepared to commit their time and resources, and by virtue of their active support for the Alliance we tap into their networks. That is really when you start building an electoral base that ultimately reflects actual support. The anti-war work we're leading, the anti-racist fights, rebuilding militant trade unionism, these will translate into electoral success for us, if not now then over time. But electoral success is only one measure. People will vote for us because they see the work we do on the ground, and that is where our credibility comes from.

We've gained a few hundred members since conference and get two, three, four new members each week just through our web-site alone. Of course we still have a lot of work to do to build up the necessary party infrastructure for a permanent broad-based socialist alternative that working people can embrace. But the progress we've made in a very short time has laid a solid foundation for taking qualitative steps forward in the opportunities that are ahead of us.

To read more discussion and debate on the way forward for SA see: [www.socialist-alliance.org](http://www.socialist-alliance.org)

## **The paper debate**

*By Melanie Lazarow (Wills branch)*

The paper of the Socialist Alliance needs to be produced and prepared in line with the political tasks of the Alliance. In my view they are:

\* Connecting with the dissatisfaction of the electorate in finding a reformist and/or active voice for free education, health care, refugees, and anti-war sentiments.

\* Building a broad organisation where a wide section of the left feel comfortable to express views on the above issues and local issues.

\* Coming together in campaigns to shift the political mood to the left.

The production of the paper of the Alliance should start from the politically necessary tasks, and then consider resources both available and potentially available.

The resource on offer from the DSP is *Green Left*, which is associated closely with the DSP and with the politics of the DSP.

This is a short cut which would have detrimental effects to Socialist Alliance. It misleads potential members to believe that the Alliance is mostly a DSP project, which it is not. This misconception would be reinforced to the detriment of the Alliance.

Ownership of the paper must be felt by all affiliates and independents. Disaffection is unneeded and unwarranted and should not have been instigated. While I would not want *Socialist Worker* to be the paper of the Alliance, neither would I want to make others take it on as their paper when it intervenes in struggle in a particular way.

It is necessary that the paper of Socialist Alliance be a new "brand" which will be associated with Socialist Alliance alone.

It will, no doubt, reflect the work we do in Socialist Alliance, like the NTEU members' fight against the Nelson reforms, and the necessary intervention into elections. I look forward to working productively to this end.

## **What paper for the Alliance**

*By Kieran Latty (Sydney Central branch)*

Other contributors have raised problems with the idea of *Green Left* becoming the new Alliance paper without serious changes- such as its history of supporting contentious positions and its association with the DSP.

These points are valid, and in my mind make the case quite convincingly. But there is another important reason why we need to think twice about taking on *Green Left* in its current form. And that is that *Green Left* has evolved to relate

to a particular audience as a tool to build the DSP and Resistance. A new alliance paper has a different potential audience, is building a different sort of organisation and will be sold and distributed by a different sort of organisation.

Even having a paper of the Alliance is a real question, and is why the ISO has been cautious about proposals for a new paper.

Revolutionary groups need papers because their ideas are complex and you need several pages to put forward a world-view. You cannot explain the nature of the state or the need for revolution in a photocopied A4 leaflet.

They can support them because their members have a high degree of activity and financial contributions.

However, many broad left wing groups like the greens don't bother producing papers for the public because their ideas are simpler and can be conveyed in election leaflets or in parliamentary speeches. They also don't have the level of activity or political commitment required to be able to get their members out selling and distributing a paper, and even if they could, it would be seen as a distraction from electioneering.

The Alliance is something in between - we are not a party of committed revolutionaries, who are all prepared to sell papers on street corners every week and pay for its upkeep, nor are we as passive and electoralist as the Greens, although we do need to run serious election campaigns. So we need to think through whether we have a paper and if so, what sort of paper?

It has already been demonstrated that the Alliance, and other broad left groups like the Greens can grow without a paper. We already have regular broadsheets, posters and leaflets with which we can build our profile and recruit members.

None of this means that a paper is not a good idea, but it is only a step forward if the new audience, connections and membership it gives us outweighs the effort needed to finance its production, distribute it and sell it.

To maximise the benefits of a new paper, we need to think carefully about who is our audience and how do we relate to it. We also need to consider how a broad organisation like the Alliance would use a new paper.

As a starting point, we cannot simply say that the audience for an Alliance paper is simply a mixture of the audience of the existing affiliates papers.

The nature and style of the papers of the affiliates have changed over the years to relate to new audiences for revolutionary ideas.

For example, the launch of the *Green Left* was part of a conscious attempt to relate to the rise of the environmental movement at a time when the ideas of class struggle and workers action was in decline.

*Green Left* was a reflection of an adaptation to new circumstances- an elevation in importance of the environmental movement and a downgrading of an emphasis on the workers' movement.

The ISO's paper has evolved too. Starting as the *Battler*, it was initially a highly agitation workers' paper, full of letters and reports, which related to the tail end of the workers' movement of the 1970's.

With the fall of that movement, and the isolation of socialists, the paper changed to the monthly *The Socialist* with a much more in depth, theoretical emphasis.

Again, as we saw politics speed up in the 1990s we launched *Socialist Worker* as a fortnightly. Since its launch *Socialist Worker* too has changed, to try and relate to the rise of the anti-capitalist movement and the anti-war movement.

However, for much of the last twenty years at least all revolutionary groups have been operating in a period in which our organisations and papers have been largely isolated from the working-class movement. This has been because the continued hold of Labourism on the working class combined with low levels of industrial struggle have meant our ideas (revolutionary ones) have been marginal to the workers' movement - hence the revolutionary organisations and their publications concentration on students, movement activists and, in the case of *Green Left Weekly*, partly on a liberal, educated audience in the inner cities which tends to vote Green.

However, the current political period, dominated by the break up of Labor's working-class base opens up a working-class audience for the broad pro-worker politics of the Socialist Alliance - an audience which the affiliates of the alliance have not been able to relate to in a systematic way for many years.

This is illustrated by the small yet significant numbers of working-class militants who identify with or who have joined the alliance, but who would not have joined one of the affiliate groups. It is also illustrated by the comparatively good vote we get in solid ALP areas (see my other contribution in this issue of *Alliance Voices* on our electoral audience).

In short, a new paper of the Alliance has a much broader audience than the *Green Left* or *Socialist Worker* in the same way that the alliance has a much wider audience than the DSP or ISO.

Relating to this new audience would mean a change in content and style from the current *Green Left*.

For example, *Green Left* is tailored to its educated inner city audience- it runs very long articles, has pretty pastel front covers and is called "Green Left".

To get a broader, more working-class readership, we might want to look at an even broader name that *Green Left* - even something like *The Voice*, or if we wanted to put a real emphasis on workers we could look at something like *Workers Voice*, *Workers News* or *Workers Weekly* (provided it was a weekly). There may, however be some merit in standing behind the word socialism with a name like *The Socialist*.

Irregardless of the name, the articles would need to be generally much shorter, but also try and explain our politics to people, not just assume they support refugees, think war is bad and Labor is crap but argue these points in a language and style people can relate to.

Needless to say, articles would need to be in line with the Socialist Alliance policy, except for debate, which would still need to be presented in a readable and accessible way - for example, “David Glanz and Doug Lorimer discuss what to do about the Labor party?” not “the united front and the labour aristocracy”. Such debate should also be only a minority of the paper too.

Lastly, but not least, we will need to discuss how we use and finance such a paper. At present the financial viability and high sales of *Green Left* is made possible by the high demand on DSP members.

If such a demand was placed on the Alliance membership as a whole it would distort the practice and nature of the party - most independents and potential members do not have the time or confidence to sell the paper in the way the DSP does, and even if they did have more time our first priority needs to be campaigning and building the movements.

The current network of campaigning stalls, combined with a larger subscription base built on the Alliance membership, and an easy to sell paper could provide the sales needed to sustain a successful Alliance paper without such a demand on the membership - provided the DSP continues to co-ordinate the distribution and fundraising for the paper. No one affiliate can be expected to do that, so it is fair to expect more burden on the alliance as a whole. We should also expect that Alliance branches would be expected to have paper coordinators - again placing a burden on the organisation.

This burden may well prove to be a worthwhile trade off if the new alliance paper takes off, but we should still seek to minimise it.

In this light, we should be open to reducing the size or frequency of the paper if we think that taking on a weekly 24-page paper is too much of a strain. Simply reducing it to a 20-page weekly with a two-colour front would save tens of thousands of dollars a year in production costs. That means less fundraising effort or even turning a profit that could be used to build our election campaigns and the organisation in general. With shorter articles we could still cover all the important issues and ensure everyone can actually finish reading the paper over the week.

## **Towards a Socialist Alliance national newspaper**

*By Simon Millar (Wills branch and National Executive member)*

As a strong supporter of the National Conveners' majority motion, which establishes a transitional Socialist Alliance (SA) editorial team to oversee the public presentation of SA within *Green Left Weekly (GLW)*, I wish to address the issues raised by comrades opposed to this process.

Janet Burstall starts her article “For the Alliance's own paper” in *Alliance Voices* with some terrible metaphors. To try and paint the editorial team of *GLW* inviting SA to publish in its paper and become a part of the editorial team as the equivalent of Indigenous activists working for a white-controlled organisation is both intellectually bankrupt and reveals a deep sectarianism. To view and attempt to persuade others to view an affiliate as the equivalent of white masters is the sort of politics we must leave far behind if we are to build lasting socialist unity.

As an independent I have political differences with both the DSP and Workers Liberty, but I still regard them both as genuine socialist organisations and comrades I am happy to work alongside. Working together is a significant part of the strength and potential of Socialist Alliance and is a key reason why independents are joining SA. So a word of advice to comrade Burstall is stick to the important political questions at hand without resorting to sectarian metaphors if you want to increase the chance of your arguments being taken seriously.

Comrade Burstall's recipe for providing SA with a national newspaper is to start from scratch. This is essentially the same general line coming from Dave Glanz, though his piece is far more constructive and useful in that it raises many of the practical and political questions that need to be addressed. According to Janet, it's either start our own paper or SA loses its independence by making *GLW* (under the editorial control of one affiliate) its national newspaper. This is a manufactured argument. The real argument is this; either we try to start our own national newspaper from scratch, which we all know is way beyond our current means, or we work transitionally with the *GLW* in a fully open and accountable fashion to transform the *GLW* into a paper run and controlled by SA. The attempt to turn *GLW* into a SA paper may fail, nothing is set in stone, but to pose it as either an independent SA paper or a SA paper which is in reality run and controlled by the DSP is fear mongering and dishonest. If comrade Burstall's portrayal of the debate were true then the proposal would never have won independent support.

I don't think comrade Burstall is deliberately being dishonest. Rather I think her skewed vision stems from her politics. She states repeatedly that she thinks that SA's most important quality is its independence from affiliates. Janet wants us to believe that it is because of this precious independence that non-aligned people have joined SA.

It is a simple fact that the vast majority of independents joined SA because they welcomed the fact that two major Socialist Organisations plus a range of small to tiny socialist organisations were prepared to work together for the first time. It was this move towards socialist unity both organisationally and in practice that has won over most if not nearly all independents.

It has been important to establish at this point in time rules which stop any affiliate, despite its numbers, being able to dominate the Alliance. While the current structure of SA does preserve SA's independence, it is not SA's most precious quality but a reflection of our current weakness. I don't want to labor this point but it seems many comrades need to be reminded of the decision of last conference and what it actually means.

At the conference the majority of independents clearly expressed that SA's most precious quality/greatest achievement was the level of unity that has been achieved throughout the whole organisation and that they wanted to

see this unity develop into a multi-tendency socialist party (MTSP). The unity process is not about starting from scratch but building on the collective gains of the past. It is about putting together/combining the affiliates and independents into one party while allowing full tendency rights for the various affiliates.

One of the key components of dialectics is what Hegel called "sublation" - the creation of something new by preserving what is useful while discarding what is not. Building upon what we have should be plain to comrades like Janet Burstall who claim to be Marxist and subscribe to a dialectical view of change. It's about tossing SA's supposedly precious independence out the window and gaining the truly precious political commodity of unity. Real political and practical unity around a basic socialist program, which reflects the fact that in regards to the key issues facing the Australian socialist movement, from Medicare to refugees, we already have nearly complete agreement.

At present we have independence in abundance, the affiliates are still independent of each other within SA and SA is still unfortunately largely independent of the working class.

No other affiliate as yet has offered their hard-earned resources in the manner that the DSP is proposing with *GLW*. It is a move that demonstrates to myself and many others the DSP's generosity and genuine commitment to seeing SA fulfill its potential and flourish.

Dave Glanz's criticisms raise a range of important practical and political questions. Firstly he argues that SA would not be able to support *GLW*. This is untrue as the DSP are moving to become fully integrated within SA as a political tendency and would continue, if accepted by the SA membership, to put considerable resources into producing and financially sustaining *GLW*.

Dave argues that this would simply mean that *GLW* would in effect remain the paper of the DSP making it impossible for affiliates and independents who are at odds with the DSP's politics to support the paper. What the DSP is in reality offering is for a political process to be entered into whereby *GLW* becomes in every sense SA's paper. The editorial and political control of the *GLW* would be transferred to SA. Even the name of the paper is up for grabs and it may be necessary to adopt a new name in order to make it clear that the paper has become SA's paper.

Considering the years of effort and political investment the DSP has put into *GLW* it is a wonderful act of faith and commitment towards SA on the DSP's behalf. The *GLW* is in my opinion the most professional, well presented and well written paper not only on the Australian Left but also across the globe. For SA to be in a position to inherit such a prestigious publication is nothing to be fearful of but rather celebrated.

I would take Dave Glanz's criticisms more seriously if the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) saw SA as more than just a united front and was taking steps to channel their members and political activity primarily into and through SA. The ISO's united front approach is unfortunately a recipe for SA to remain a weak fledgling organisation leaving it unable to take on the political tasks confronting the socialist movement. I feel sorry for the ISO rank and file who must feel at a loss as to where they are actually going and judging from the information I have received many do not have an understanding of the unique and vital gains that SA has made in its short period of existence.

The real question for the ISO is one of political will and perspective. It would be of enormous value to both the ISO membership and SA if the ISO finally realised that the future of socialism in Australia lies within SA. SA has recruited a small but extremely significant layer of trade union leaders to its ranks and this is the first time since the old Communist Party of Australia that a socialist organisation has done this. With Resistance joining SA's ranks, SA now has the capability of recruiting large layers of youth who have been mobilizing in their thousands for years now.

Colin Fox from the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP) on his recent tour, described it as criminal that SA in Britain continues to have virtually no profile while at the big anti-war demo's while the various SA affiliates competed with each other as per usual. This failure by the ISO and most of the small affiliates to see that it is now time to drop the sectarian practices of the past, resolve our political differences within one organisation and work together in practice, is the reason why Australia's SA is still like Britain's and why we trail so far behind Scotland's socialist movement.

Scotland's political and economic crisis is much deeper than Australia's and this played a major role in the formation of the SSP. But we must not discount the vital importance that the leadership of Scottish Militant Labour played. If the Socialist Workers Party (British equivalent of the ISO) had been the major party in Scotland there would be no SSP. The advantage we have here and now is that we can look at the incredible success of the SSP and we can speed up Australia's march towards socialism by applying these lessons to Australian conditions. This is the beauty and strength of internationalism.

The SSP has shown us what good political leadership can achieve. On the other hand SA in Britain is a glaring example of the disastrous policy of half measures. It is well and truly time to fully face up to the fact that the socialist movement will not be able to tackle the crisis of Social Democracy until it overcomes its own crisis. In this period, to think that a couple of hundred people are in sole possession of the politics and organisation to bring about socialism in this country and as a consequence must be kept separate and apart from the socialist movement is a terrible mistake. These are the real arguments that underlie the paper question and why I embrace and welcome the DSP's offer in the full understanding that it is the only way that SA in the foreseeable future can obtain its own paper and a fantastic paper at that.

I wish the ISO were prepared to make a similar move with its paper. Non-Aligned comrades I'm sure would have loved to see *Socialist Worker* and *GLW* merge into one paper. This would have been ideal. This is not the case so Non-Aligned comrades such as myself are forced to face the reality that the march towards unity is uneven. We cannot make practical decisions based on the lowest common denominator and minority views. We must make decisions based on the conscious desires of the overwhelming majority of the socialist movement who at the last conference made it abundantly clear that they want a Multi-Tendency Socialist Party and all that this entails.

The last thing I or anyone else wants is splits or people leaving, I am very confident this will not happen due to the level of maturity and trust that has developed inside SA and the respect for our democratic decisions. There is also justifiably a collective pride in SA achievements. So while decisions like this latest one over *GLW* is causing some conflict, it is healthy and unavoidable in a large organisation. SA members should not be scared off from making decisions which will take SA forward. A truism of politics, and one that is learnt by bitter experience, is that if you don't move forward, you at first stagnate then die.

Dave Glanz argues that if SA takes on *GLW* it will heavily distort the work of the Alliance. Firstly, Dave is right about one thing: SA is not a democratic centralist organisation so no one can be forced to sell SA's paper. On the other hand I know first hand how important *GLW* is already in the trade union movement in Melbourne. To have *GLW* evolve into the paper of SA will only enhance our ability to bring SA politics into the trade union movement. I can see a whole range of trade unionists who already know and read *GLW* contributing and distributing SA's paper, using it as a vital political resource.

Having a national SA paper that can profile all of SA's candidates for the next election as well as having articles on key SA election issues and policy will not distort but in fact strengthen us enormously. The true distortion of SA's activity continues to stare us right in the face. As mentioned before we have the continuing spectacle of SA affiliates who publicly build and promote themselves in competition with SA while SA itself still struggles to build even a rudimentary national organisation.

It is not year zero for the socialist movement. To talk of starting from scratch in order to create some new supposedly truly independent SA paper is nonsense. This argument may unfortunately confuse those who are new to politics. No one is asking the ISO to throw away decades of socialist struggle or to abandon its political perspectives, the same applies to the majority of the SA membership, which includes a majority of independents who also in the main have many years of political experience and in the case of Non Aligned Caucus (NAC) decades of socialist struggle. Once again this goes to the core of the philosophy, which is motivating many NAC people to strongly support the process of *GLW* transforming itself into SA's paper. We know we don't have to start from scratch but rather build upon what we have collectively achieved.

What Dave Glanz, Janet Burstall and now Greg Adler are proposing is purely utopian. We are being led to believe that we are capable of establishing a monthly SA paper with an organisation, which has roughly \$2000 in its national bank account and no full-time staff. It is a proposal that in reality means that SA will not have a national paper for many years. It would also be a paper that would have to be sold in competition to *GLW*, *Socialist Worker* and the various other existing socialist newspapers. It is in light of the DSP's offer totally unnecessary.

SA desperately needs affiliates to integrate and begin to throw all their time and energy into building SA. The DSP has voted to do this but until the paper question is resolved they are in a bind. The central activity of the DSP is the production and distribution of *GLW*, so for these comrades to be able to fully integrate then the *GLW* has to be integrated as well.

What will this mean for SA? It will mean hundreds of fellow comrades out on the street not only selling SA's paper but also using this paper to draw new people into and around SA. Every SA member will be able to write for the paper and the democratically elected bodies of SA will have full control over the paper and its content. I'm sure this will lead to many SA members selling the paper alongside DSP tendency members, who will obviously at this point in time be the backbone of the paper distribution and finances.

All the questions Dave raises about the political content, length and style of the paper need to be thrashed out inside SA. We need to discuss for instance what should go in the paper and what articles are better suited to *Seeing Red*.

But unless we embrace the DSP's offer then these discussions will be so much waffle. By setting up an editorial team which begins by facilitating SA material into *GLW*, as well as *GLW* agreeing not to write any editorials which contradict SA's political positions, we have begun a process that will lead (hopefully) to a SA national paper and help facilitate the integration of SA's largest and hardest working affiliate.

SA is going to have to address Dave's questions as a matter of course, the key difference being that at the end of this process SA can hope to gain a truly fantastic national paper with a readership already in the thousands. It comes as no surprise to me that this direction has been overwhelmingly support by SA branches all around the country.

Finally I wish to address the point that by *GLW* over time becoming SA's paper it will confirm that SA is nothing but a DSP front organisation. This is where I find Dave Glanz most politically schizophrenic. On the one hand he constantly stresses the point that SA needs to reach out to the thousands of disaffected ALP members and on the other hand he thinks that these people will not join SA because they will think it's a DSP front.

In Scotland, where they actually have reached out to thousands of former Labour Party voters and have recruited hundreds of them, I can guarantee that it didn't even register that *Socialist Voice* used to be called the *Scottish Militant* and was produced by Scottish Militant Labour before they passed this asset on to the SSP. In reality those who might be concerned by this process are a tiny layer of existing socialists who for one reason or another are hostile to the DSP's politics.

As socialists, this illusion should be quickly dispelled when you point out what has actually transpired politically. I can't imagine a party doing any more to demonstrate that it doesn't want to control or dominate an organization as have the DSP. The DSP is a tiny minority on SA's key leadership bodies despite the fact that its comrades do most of SA's work. If anything, one of the pressing problems of SA is that its leadership bodies are not effective working bodies, but that's another issue. These socialists who are supposedly politically educated and who cannot bring themselves to even

be in the same organisation as the DSP, despite all the democratic mechanisms that are in place within SA, are the sort of sectarian socialists that need to change or be left behind.

The reality is that the vast majority of even the most militant sections of the working class and petty bourgeois have had little to no contact with SA, let alone the affiliates. Until the socialist movement unifies itself it will remain weak, divided and irrelevant. I would like to see SA become a MTSP at this coming conference, or at least for SA to set down a strict timetable for the decision to be made.

In the meantime if SA can move towards having a national paper that improves on what *GLW* has already achieved this will be a great step forward. The nonsense that is being spouted by affiliates who want SA to remain a united front flows from a fear of their leaders losing control when the ideas they espouse have to face scrutiny from the broader socialist movement. If they were confident in their ideas then they should have no fear of being a tendency within SA. The majority of SA members are independents like myself who are not wedded to any affiliate's politics and who will vote for or against motions on the basis of what we think is correct at the time. Decisions, which are wrong, will be shown to be so in practice.

For example, the fact that socialists can stand apart from one another because of Cuba, despite the fact that everyone at least agrees that Cuba needs to be defended from US imperialism, is the stuff that police agents dream about. If Cuba is a hopeless Stalinist dictatorship then after Fidel dies it will quickly implode, surely? At the end of the day practice will show who had the better insight into what was going on in Cuba. Should this divide socialists here in Australia when we actually agree on the most basic questions in regards to Cuba's defence?

These are the sorts of divisions that have made Trotskyists appear as hopeless sectarians to the most politically conscious working-class militants. At the root of many divisions I believe is pure emotionalism and egotism. Thousands mobilized against capitalism around S11, unprecedented, but did hundreds join the socialist movement? No. This is the hub of the crisis from which SA was born and which we are still yet to resolve.

A MTSP is just the next major step to overcoming this crisis of leadership within Australian socialism. I urge comrades who oppose the transformation of *GLW* into SA's paper to overcome their fears and participate in a positive and constructive manner in the political process that has already begun.

## **Workers League on an SA newspaper**

*[The following motion and supporting statement was put to the Socialist Alliance National Executive by Workers League. It was discussed, and defeated, at the December 12, 2003, NE meeting.]*

### **Motion**

"Socialist Alliance will produce a monthly tabloid of about 20 pages, starting in 2004, in order to assist all the struggles in defence of workers' and democratic rights. Its primary focus in the coming period should be against the Howard government. It will be aimed at Labor Party and Green party members and non-party activists and will try to find common points of action wherever it can.

It should be a tabloid paper rather than a journal because it aspires to become a more regular publication after it has build a base of support.

It should be a paper that does not lecture but which reflects a wide variety of views and should encourage a debate in the left and in the workers' and mass movement. This will take the form both of articles and a letters column which would be prominently featured.

Its international coverage will come from a variety of sources and its news reports and photographs should be of a high standard.

It will promote Alliance activities, but not in a triumphalist way, and it will also promote non-Alliance activities.

It should cover cultural and artistic issues in a lively way with reviews, photos and interviews.

Alliance positions will be stated in editorials and lead stories but the paper should also carry regular interviews with workers and activists who do not necessarily agree with the Alliance. The aim will be to give a picture of the way the mass movement is actually developing rather than how we would like it to develop.

The paper will appear immediately on the Alliance web-site.

The Editorial Board should be gender-balanced and consist of comrades from all states and territories and reflect a range of political views. It will function mainly through email.

The paper should be funded through sales and donations and should initially be a monthly until its base is established. It should be produced mainly by volunteer journalists and graphic designers and possibly one part-time admin worker.

Affiliates will continue to publish their own papers or journals."

### **Statement in support of the motion from Workers League:**

This brief proposal is based on an estimation of the current situation in Socialist Alliance and how best to take it forward. It reflects the gains that we have made over the past three years and a recognition that we are still at an early stage in the development of a socialist party that can win support in the workers' and mass movement.

There are no organisational short cuts to building this support. The central questions facing the Alliance are political and not organisational.

The proposal acknowledges the tremendous work that comrades have put into their publications, particularly the DSP and the ISO.

It would be useful if other comrades in the Alliance could put forward their views on the sort of paper they would like to see.

The viability of this proposal depends of the ability of the Alliance to function with strong differences of opinion within its ranks over both national and international questions. The Alliance has managed to do this up to this point and there is no reason to doubt that it continue to do so. The open discussion of differences can in fact be a point of attraction for many activists who are looking for a left alternative today.

## **Discussion and resolutions on the newspaper question**

### **1. Acceptance of DSP offer for SA to take editorial role on *Green Left Weekly***

*[The following motion was carried by the SA National Executive on December 12, 2003.]*

"NC notes that branch feedback confirms overwhelming support for the 14/11/03 NE provisional decision to '... accept the DSP offer for Socialist Alliance to undertake an editorial role on *Green Left Weekly*. This role to encompass:

1. The formation of an SA editorial board committee to work in conjunction with the existing *GLW* board and report to National Conveners/National Executive as required.

2. That the role of the SA editorial board include securing access for SA members and affiliates, soliciting material and over sighting the public presentation of SA within *GLW*.

3. That this transitional arrangement with *GLW* be assessed at the next SA national conference [in May 2004] with a view to negotiating the integration of *GLW* and SA editorial committees and the transformation of *GLW* into the national weekly newspaper of SA.'

and recommends that NE ratify its decision to proceed."

### **2. Formation of an SA Editorial Board**

*[The following motion was carried by the SA National Executive on December 12, 2003.]*

"National Conveners recommend that:

In accordance with the SA National Executive decision of 12/12/03 to initiate a 4-month trial period for SA to undertake an editorial role on *Green Left Weekly*, the following 9-person Editorial Board will be established:

Board Convener: National Convener (nominee: John van der Velden)

DSP Representative (nominee: Peter Boyle)

SA Affiliate Rep (nominee: ISO – confirmed as Anne Picot)

*GLW* editorial committee Rep (nominee: Alison Dellit)

Humphrey McQueen

David Scrimgeour

Dave Riley

Andrew Watson

Austin Whitten (Editorial Liaison)

The trial period will commence with the first *GLW* issue in January, 2004 and conclude with a full review at the SA national conference in May, 2004.

The board will work in conjunction with the existing *GLW* editorial committee. Its role will include the following:

1. Securing access for SA members and affiliates and soliciting relevant material.

2. Preparing material that informs and promotes SA to *GLW* readers on behalf of SA.

3. Oversighting the public presentation of SA within *GLW*, and adjudicating any issues regarding publication of SA material that may arise with the *GLW* editorial committee, including further consultation with NC and NE as required.

4. Establishing draft protocols for working with the *GLW* editorial committee on behalf of SA, including recommendations for NC and NE consideration and ratification as required.

The board will meet on a monthly basis, or more frequently as required. It will report to the National Conveners and the National Executive as required."

### **Statement in support of the motion submitted by John van der Velden (not voted on)**

A 9-person board is the maximum workable number that balances diversity of input with the requirements of weekly decision-making and output deadlines.

Four positions have been earmarked as Representative positions and thus able to be proxied as required. Given the political importance and sensitivity of the SA paper question, it is desirable that the Board be convened by a national convener throughout the trial period. In practice, it is understood that this be a national convener who is not also a member of an affiliate.

The DSP should have a representative, as *GLW* remains a DSP paper throughout the trial period and there are issues and concerns that the DSP may want to put forward and/or negotiate. The *GLW*

editorial committee is allocated a position because it is a working relationship. Their voice and vote is required in order to ensure a smooth trial and in which the practical implications of any SA board decisions for *GLW* and its audience must always be a priority consideration.

The SA affiliate position is allocated to ensure that there is always a voice available from those in the Alliance who have existing publications, and thus a community of experience and concern to contribute to the trial period. The ISO is regarded as best placed to contribute this input given their political weight in the Alliance as the 2nd largest affiliate and the only other producer of a major newspaper. As with all SA sub-committees, the Editorial Board is responsible to the NC and NE and this is regarded as constituting adequate representative democratic input and oversight.

The remaining five persons are nominated in their own right. They reflect a balance of editorial experience, political authority within the Alliance, and capacity to assist with discharging the tasks assigned to the Board.

These are not proxied positions. Temporary or permanent vacancies will be filled by National Conveners, as required, between NE meetings.

Austin Whitten has agreed to be the editorial liaison for the Board between meetings. This would include being the first point of contact for the *GLW* Editorial Committee and coordinator of weekly implementation of SA Board decisions and input to *GLW*. Copy for *GLW* from SA members and Affiliates should go directly to the *GLW* editor, not Austin.

The Board will meet monthly, starting with the first week after this December NE (about Dec.17) and then again the week before the first issue of *GLW* in the new year (about Jan.14). Thereafter the Board will meet the week after the monthly NE meetings. Additional discussion between meetings will be by email as required, unless the Board convener decides an extraordinary meeting of the Board is required.

The Board will provide an initial report to NC and NE for the Feb. NE meeting, including any recommendations regarding working protocols for the trial period.

### **3. Feedback from branches on National Executive resolution for SA to undertake an editorial role on Green Left Weekly**

#### **ADELAIDE BRANCH**

Angela asked me to send an e-mail about the results of the branch discussion regarding the DSP offer to allow *GLW* to become an SA publication. It was not put to the vote but there was consensus that this was a positive move, without any dissenting opinions.

David Scrimgeour

#### **AUBURN BRANCH**

Hi Comrades

Auburn branch had a discussion re the NE's newspaper resolution (this was not the first time we had discussed the general ideas raised in the resolution).

A presentation was given that outlined the NE resolution and counter motions that have been published in the Alliance Voices. After discussion clarifying points such as who supported the motion and how debates within the Alliance may be presented in a such a paper, the branch voted unanimously to endorse the NE's motion and pledged to have further discussion assessing the progress of the project (if passed) in the trial period in the lead up to the May national conference.

Comradely, Angela Luvera (Convener)

#### **BANKSTOWN BRANCH**

Dear Comrades,

Tuesday night's meeting (2/11/03) of the Canterbury-Bankstown Socialist Alliance branch we discussed the SA NE's provisional acceptance of the DSP offer for Socialist Alliance to take on an editorial role on Green Left Weekly.

There were 14 comrades present, 9 from the DSP and 5 non-aligned.

I gave the report, which briefly outlined the decision taken at the national conference to move towards a single, multi-tendency socialist party and the SA NE approach to both the DSP and the ISO regarding further integration of their papers into SA and the response of both tendencies. The report also briefly outlined the political, theoretical, organisational and historical reasons of publishing a national socialist newspaper (whether it be Green Left or any other socialist paper), as well as the motion adopted provisionally by the SA NE and asked for feed back from comrades about what they thought.

All members either spoke or voted in favour of the motion, including all 5 non-aligned members who spoke and voted in favour of the provisional motion.

An indicative vote was taken and was passed unanimously in favour of supporting the provisional motion and its ratification at the December 12 SA NE.

comradely, Kim Bullimore

### **BRISBANE WEST BRANCH**

Dear comrades,

The Brisbane West branch has had two discussions re. the NE decision to provisionally accept the DSP's offer re. Green Left Weekly.

The first discussion was at our branch meeting on November 6, attended by 8 members of SA and one contact (note that this discussion took place before the NE vote). Of the SA members present, five were DSP members and three were unaffiliated members (Rodolfo Alleman, Anita Muhlhaus and Ted Reithmuller). Everyone expressed general agreement with the idea that Green Left Weekly become the paper of the Socialist Alliance.

There was some discussion around how an Alliance paper might reflect the diversity of opinion within the Alliance on a range of issues. The main concern of the unaffiliated members and the SA contact (who has subscribed to Green Left for the past six months) was that there was some risk that Green Left Weekly could be lost to the left as a whole if something went wrong with the hand-over. It was pointed out in discussion that any such hand over would be a gradual process and not an abrupt change and would be able to be reviewed at the May national conference.

The second discussion took place at the following branch meeting on November 27. Unfortunately we had a number of apologies from members unable to attend this meeting for one reason or another. There were four DSP members, one member of Resistance, one member of the South-West branch of SA who we'd asked to attend as a guest speaker on the situation in the QLD AMWU, and two contacts. We had a brief discussion because most of the members present had already discussed the issue at the previous meeting. One member said he supported the proposal in principle, but was concerned that the DSP, as the largest affiliate, needed to take into consideration the concerns of affiliates who did not agree with the proposal, or the greater unity achieved through the Socialist Alliance coming together might be threatened. We did not take an indicative vote because the outcome of such a vote would have been a foregone conclusion - all the members of the West branch present were also members of the DSP and Resistance who support the NE proposal.

Maria Voukelatos, Brisbane West Co-Convenor

### **CANBERRA BRANCH**

Hi,

Just to advise you that at the ACT branch meeting on Nov 27th, we voted to endorse the NE motion to begin an editorial role in Green Left Weekly, 10 in favour and 2 against.

We also unanimously endorsed the NE proposals regarding finances, and voted to begin paying our \$1 per member per week to the national account as of January 1st, 2004. To date we have around half a dozen non-aligned members who have already committed to making a regular financial contribution.

Comradely, Kerry Williams

### **DARWIN BRANCH**

The Darwin Socialist Alliance branch meeting last Thursday discussed the newspaper proposal. We voted unanimously to endorse comrade Louise W's motion for the following reasons:

- \* We need a newspaper in order to conduct better outreach work, propaganda, persuasion; to more effectively convey an alternative vision for the world.

- \* We need a newspaper and we've been offered one

We considered that as there was open and democratic discussion regarding the transfer of Green Left to SA it should not damage the unity we have built in Socialist Alliance. We also consider that Socialist Alliance taking over responsibility for Green Left has the potential to broaden the appeal and strengthen Socialist Alliance.

We had two concerns:

- \* that Green Left shouldn't become the forum for damaging public debates between the affiliates

- \* that the financial basis of Green Left not be undermined by the transfer

We agreed that the SA convenors should decide what debates are useful to have publicly and what debates are more usefully had through the pages of Alliance Voices. We also agreed that while the DSP was taking a certain risk by increasingly "floating" the Green Left project to the Alliance the potential was also there to greatly strengthen both Socialist Alliance, the reach of Green Left, and consequently further strengthen the Australian left overall. One non-aligned comrade summed up his opinion of SA taking increasing responsibility for Green Left by saying "it's the best thing that's happened in the Australian Left since SA formed".

Ruth Ratcliffe

### **GEELONG BRANCH**

Last Thursday Geelong had its ordinary branch meeting. We had 16 in attendance and 6 genuine apologies.

I gave the report on the paper discussion and the NE resolution. In my report I included Workers League's comments, Workers Liberty's proposals from Janet, and the ISO proposal from David. There was a good hour of discussion that followed which included a few questions and clarifications. In the end everyone agreed to take a vote on supporting the NE position.

The vote was carried 15 for, 1 against and 1 abstaining. However, the person voting against later said they misunderstood because they thought that GLW would disappear completely and would have voted for the position had the person known that GLW would stay but its political control would change from DSP to SA.

All but 5 at the meeting were independents - 4 DSP and 1 Radical Women. All members were financial at the time of voting. 5 apologies were from DSP members. The comrade from Radical Women abstained. Leaving all 11 independents present supporting the NE resolution.

Comradely yours, Tim Gooden

### **HOBART BRANCH**

On the 30th October the Hobart branch of the Socialist Alliance voted unanimously to endorse the majority proposal of the NC re: Green Left Weekly and SA.

Of the 9 SA members present, 3 were DSP members, 2 were Resistance members and 4 non-aligned.

Discussion covered wanting to ensure that the political content of the newspaper was not watered down, and reassurance that the DSP would continue to support the newspaper. It was noted that the SA continues to be an embryonic organisation and dependent on the support of the major affiliates at this time. This discussion also included discussion about the proposals regarding change of office space from DSP to SA and finance-raising of branches.

Linda Seaborn

### **ILLAWARRA BRANCH**

Info for the upcoming NE.

At the branch meeting on 25/11/03 we passed the following motion: "That the Illawarra Socialist Alliance agrees with the provisional NE acceptance of the DSP offer and accompanying NE proposal in relation to Green Left Weekly."

This issue had been flagged via mail-out and by contacting members to ask them their views on this subject, particularly as we wanted to know what all members thought, especially if they were unable to make it to the meeting where the vote was taken. Responses of members unable to make the meeting were communicated to those in attendance and a lengthy discussion ensued after a report was given on the NE's motion and the counter-motion in relation to this topic.

Members voted unanimously to accept the proposal. Overall, all responses from members have been supportive of this process in relation to the newspaper question. The opinion of members overall was that the newspaper, under SA control and editorship, could be a great building device for the Alliance and that a paper which reflected content from the various members and affiliates of the Alliance, plus had official pieces from the Alliance on its views of the day would be very useful. One member contacted via phone suggested that he thought a name change for the paper, at some point, might be needed.

Yours in solidarity, Chris Pickering, Convenor

### **MELBOURNE CENTRAL BRANCH**

Dear NE members

The Melbourne Central branch held a discussion and vote on the motion adopted by the NE on GLW, last night. Present at the meeting were 6 DSP members, 1 non-aligned member, 1 Workers Liberty member. The counter motion moved by David G and the Workers League motion were also distributed to comrades.

The results were as follows: 7 in favour, 0 against, 1 abstention

Cheers, Jody Betzien

### **MELBOURNE NORTH EAST BRANCH**

Comrades,

Just a brief note to say that the Melbourne N/E branch discussed the newspaper proposal at its meeting tonight. The motions presented by Louise W and David G to the November 14 NE were canvassed, along with Greg Adler's proposal to be moved at the December 12 NE.

North East SA members present were unanimous in their support of the Green Left motion as adopted by the November 15 NE.

Comradely regards, Arun Pradhan

### **MELBOURNE SOUTH EAST BRANCH**

Motion adopted 7 for, 2 against, 1 abstention:

"South East Socialist Alliance branch welcomes the current discussion on the need for an Alliance national regular newspaper and believes that this will be a necessary step in the growth and maturity of the Alliance.

However, it does not believe that this publication should be a revamped Green Left Weekly and so does not support the motion accepted by the NE.

Our branch believes discussions should begin as soon as possible on the development of an Alliance newspaper which is independent of, and not identified with, any of the affiliates. These discussions should commence around questions such as who the audience is for such a paper, what the political objectives are, how it can be financed, who will sell it, how many journalists are required and the composition of an editorial board. This should go hand in hand with policy development within the Alliance.

We believe adopting Green Left as the Alliance paper means accepting its association with one of the major affiliates and as such their political history. We believe that this would be a distortion of the Alliance project. An

independent Alliance paper should be supported by all members and be politically attractive to people coming to the Alliance as a non-sectarian organisation. It is desirable that the paper reflect agreed Alliance policy and decisions and it would be therefore undesirable to have debates between affiliates within the pages of the paper when these can be held elsewhere.”

### **MELBOURNE WEST BRANCH**

The discussion on the provisional NE resolution on the newspaper was held at our branch meeting on Wednesday 10.12.03. 22 people attended - DSP: 14, Resistance: 1, non-affiliated members: 4, non-affiliated SA supporters: 3.

Karl Miller reported on the NE motion, and the counter-motions and arguments opposing the motion.

On conclusion of discussion an indicative vote was taken to ratify NE motion. Everyone voted in favour of the motion.

Linda Waldron

### **NEWCASTLE**

Dear Comrades,

I'm writing to inform you of the discussion that Newcastle branch had on the paper proposal voted upon by the National Executive at its November 14th meeting.

At our last branch meeting (Wed Nov 26th), the branch discussed the successful motion passed at the NE meeting and unanimously endorsed it. The sentiment amongst comrades is that this is a very positive step forward in strengthening the Socialist Alliance.

Comradely, Jon Lamb, on behalf of the Newcastle Convenors Committee

### **NORTHERN RIVERS**

To the SA NE.

The Northern Rivers branch has discussed the DSP offer for the Socialist Alliance to undertake an editorial role on Green Left Weekly at its October meeting (all members had been sent the DSP and ISO responses by email or post prior to the meeting). The passing of the NE majority motion in relation to this was discussed at the November meeting. It was explained that the motion was subject to ratification in December after time had been allowed for feedback from the membership.

The branch executive understood this to mean that the branch was to be advised that the NE was open for feedback, and members were advised accordingly. We did not vote on the proposal - simply because we were unaware that this was what had been wanted.

While I have no voting figures to report on I can confidently advise the NE that the response to the proposal was broadly enthusiastic at both meetings (each attended by 11 members - with a total of 14 different members over the two meetings) with only one member voicing any reservations - he felt there might be some difficulties in the implementation process.

In solidarity, Tom Flanagan, Northern Rivers branch convenor

### **PARRAMATTA BRANCH**

Dear NE comrades,

This is to inform you that the Dec 2 branch meeting of Parramatta SA voted unanimously in favour of the DSP's proposals regarding the Socialist Alliance moving toward having Green Left Weekly as the Alliance's paper, starting with the setting up of an SA GLW editorial committee to work in conjunction with the current GLW editorial board.

Comradely, Owen Richards

### **PERTH DISTRICT**

To the National Convenors,

Below is a copy of the motions regarding the "newspaper question" presented and voted on at a Perth District-Wide meeting on Monday December 1. For your information 34 people attended the meeting (2 of whom were observers).

Comradely, Nikki Ulasowski

MOTION A: Newspaper Question. Moved by Edith Leonard

"This District Meeting endorses the National Executive's decision on 14 November 2003 to provisionally accept the DSP offer for Socialist Alliance to undertake an editorial role on Green Left Weekly." Motion carried 22-8.

MOTION B: Publications. Moved by Wade McDonald and Allan Woodcraft

“The Green Left Weekly proposal does not commence with an analysis of who is the SA's audience nor the political orientation needed to connect with that audience. It is an organisational response to a political problem.

The current advocates of the Green Left Weekly proposal are failing to identify the main audience for the SA.

Ongoing practical collaboration and an open-ended discussion amongst affiliates is more likely to create the grounds for deeper political agreement amongst affiliates rather than a forced push for regroupment.

A weekly newspaper at this time will seriously distort the orientation of the SA's upcoming political (work) and is a distraction from the main issues facing the SA: orientating on its audience and campaigning for serious intervention in the upcoming federal election. It is simply not possible to reconcile the weekly routine of newspaper circulation with prioritising the SA's electoral intervention.” Motion lapsed.

### **SYDNEY CENTRAL BRANCH**

11 comrades were at the meeting [that discussed the NE resolution on the newspaper]: 9 voted in favour, 1 voted against, 1 abstained.

Comradely, Susan Price, Convenor

### **SYDNEY NORTHSIDE**

Just a reportback on the Northside Branch discussion regarding the GLW proposal.

A very positive discussion with a majority in favour of the proposal (6-1).

A number of independents talked up the high national profile GLW has, the professional nature of the publication and its broad range of readers... "much wider than merely those who identify as socialists", as one comrade put it.

The only concern raised was that GLW has been closely associated with the DSP in the past.

All agreed to continue discussions up until the National conference. Also two unaffiliated comrades have decided to pledge \$5 per week and one comrade \$1 per week.

Comradely, John Gauci

## **International Women's Day 2004**

*[The following resolution was passed by the SA National Executive on December 12, 2003.]*

"That Socialist Alliance participate in International Women's Day, March 2004, by:

(i) Encouraging SA branches to initiate (if necessary) and participate in broad committees to organise an IWD march and rally in their city, and to promote rally themes and demands which link opposition to the war to the domestic neo-liberal attacks on women.

(ii) Producing a "charter for women's rights" which presents the Alliance's positions on women's rights, to be launched in February for use in our federal election and IWD campaigning.

That the National Conveners be responsible for drafting the charter, in consultation with any SA member who is interested, for ratification at the first NE meeting in 2004."

### **Statement in support of the motion submitted by Lisa Macdonald (not voted on)**

We head into 2004 with both the federal Coalition and all state Labor governments pushing the same economic rationalist policies of privatisation and cuts to social services, public education, health and transport, and welfare and migrant services, and income support.

The consequences of this assault on the public sector for working-class women in particular have been disastrous (especially women's access to child care and aged care, legal aid, sole parent support, and workplace rights, to name a few).

There is a simmering, and rising, anger about these attacks, reflected in some protest actions (eg: the 2000-strong rally in Melbourne recently against cuts to social services). International Women's Day provides an opportunity to organise and mobilise that anger by bringing together activists from the range of single-issue campaigns that bear on women's quality of life.

We are also seeing a growing preparedness amongst organised workers, including thousands of women workers, to resist the government's attacks on workers' and union rights, and their union leaderships' capitulation to those attacks. IWD is an important opportunity to relate to the anger in workplaces about casualisation, AWAs, real wage cuts and work overload, and to link up more with and deepen the militant networks that are beginning to emerge through struggle in some unions (eg: NTEU, teachers, AMWU, public sector unions, etc).

Finally, the fact that the Iraq war will probably still be raging next March means that IWD becomes a "natural" focus for mobilising against the occupation (the European Social Forum Assembly for the Rights of Women is discussing organising a march across Europe for IWD 2004 around the theme of opposing the war.)

Relating the global issues to domestic ones is one of the strengths of Socialist Alliance, and something that fits in with our election campaign as well. The IWD march themes and demands are one way of making those links.

But SA has a lot more to say and offer in the way of explanations and solutions. The production of an SA "charter for women's rights", which could be launched just before IWD, would not only give Alliance members participating in IWD committees and actions a political tool to open discussions with others and draw people towards SA, it would also assist our broader election campaigning.

In sum, our participation in organising and building IWD marches and the production of a women's rights charter will help strengthen the existing campaigns and activist networks and build Socialist Alliance, enabling us to work with a broader range of activists, present our policies and solutions for women, and potentially join many new members.

## **March 20: Global day of action against occupation of Iraq**

*[The following resolution was adopted unanimously by the SA National Executive on December 12, 2003.]*

"That Socialist Alliance support the call for an international day of action on March 20, 2004, the first anniversary of the US bombing and invasion of Iraq, and that:

(i) All SA branches be urged to actively encourage, build and participate in March 20 actions in their area.

(ii) In keeping with the demands coming from the US, and SA's own political assessment of the war, that SA members argue in the anti-war coalitions and local groups for a focus on 'Troops out!'

## **Socialist Alliance condemns violence, and smear campaign**

*[The following media release was issued by the Socialist Alliance National Conveners on November 26, 2003.]*

The November 18 assault on Australian Manufacturing Workers Union national secretary Doug Cameron has generated a torrent of speculation in the media about who committed the assault and why.

Despite the complete absence of evidence indicating who might be behind the attack, the implication in all of the coverage to date has been that left opposition groups within the union, and in the union movement more generally, were responsible.

Socialist Alliance spokesperson Sue Bolton said: "The Socialist Alliance unequivocally condemns the use of violence by anyone in the trade union movement to settle differences. We oppose such action because it cannot solve political disputes and serves only to take unions further out of the hands of rank and file members."

Ms Bolton added: "However, the Socialist Alliance condemns equally the attempts to use the assault on Doug Cameron to smear militants in the AMWU and other unions.

"We call on the media to immediately halt its red-baiting campaign against particular AMWU members, such as the Workers First group in Victoria, whose only "crime" has been to use legitimate union channels to campaign for a more democratic AMWU in which the rank and file members have a greater say in the direction of the union.

"The consistent pattern of media coverage indicates that there is a political agenda being played out. The media empires of Rupert Murdoch, Kerry Packer, the Kerry Stokes and Fairfax families, and the ABC all blamed opposition groups within the AMWU for the assault.

"This is consistent with the campaign that has been run by the employers and the government for several years which has attempted to reduce support for militant unionists in Victoria by trying to smear their reputations with unproven accusations of violence."

## **Draft Socialist Alliance manifesto for the 2004 federal election**

The following draft "Manifesto" for Socialist Alliance's 2004 federal election campaign (starts page 27) is being circulated to Alliance members for feedback.

Please send your comments, criticisms and suggestions by January 9, 2004, to the National Election Campaign Working Group conveners, Brian Webb and Dick Nichols, at [ne@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:ne@socialist-alliance.org), or phone the national office on (02) 9690 1230.

**SOCIALIST ALLIANCE MANIFESTO**

**2004**

***Sick to death of their lies?***

CARTOON WITH HOWARD AND RUDDOCK ISSUING THEIR BEST GEMS

***Another  
Australia is  
possible...<sup>1</sup>***

**WWW.SOCIALIST-ALLIANCE.ORG**

**SOCIALIST ALLIANCE MANIFESTO 2004**

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<sup>1</sup> See back page

## **Another politics is possible...**

*The Socialist Alliance approach to politics and election campaigns is different to those of other parties, for two reasons.*

*First, we don't just pop our heads up at election time. The Alliance acts all the year round to build all movements for progressive change—from the unions to the anti-war movement. The alternative for which we are fighting will grow through strengthening people's participation in all movements for justice. Election campaigns are just one part of this process.*

*Second, we don't just fight for reforms for their own sake—the policies we advocate point to a new type of society. The Socialist Alliance goal is an Australia where the majority of people (workers and unemployed, family farmers and the self-employed) would really gain the power to make the decisions presently made by the Kerry Packers and the John Howards. Such people's self-government is the essence of what we mean by socialism.*

*This would constitute real majority rule, as opposed to the "choice" every three or four years between parties who agree that corporate profit and power are simply untouchable. It is also the only way in which the four Green principles of social justice, democracy, peace and environmental sustainability—which Socialist Alliance also shares—will become reality.*

*If you agree with what we say, then get active in the Socialist Alliance and its campaigns.*

*If you disagree but want to discuss things further or if you simply want to know more, get in touch with your closest Socialist Alliance branch (see back page for details).*

## ***Our eight-point plan for social justice, democracy, peace and a healthy environment***

Sometime in 2004 there will be a national election in Australia—and the Socialist Alliance will be standing in all states and territories.

We have a twofold message for this election.

1. The Howard government—that bunch of liars, scoundrels and war criminals—can be defeated.
2. All that is unjust, undemocratic and environmentally destructive in Australian society can be eradicated.

Being a partner-in-crime in the US's illegal and bloody war in Iraq? Rocketing house prices? The slow death of our river systems? Bashing unions that dare to look after their members? Shockingly expensive child and aged care? Thuggish treatment of refugees? There's not the faintest reason for us to put up with **any** of these evils.

Why? Because they are the product of deliberate "pro-market" policy choices by federal governments, Coalition and Labor. They will be eliminated when policies that put people's need before private profit replace them.

What sort of policies? The sort explained by some of our candidates for the next federal election in this eight-point plan, policies that can transform the Australian political agenda.

1. Candidate A says:

***‘To counter terrorism—stop behaving like terrorists. Get the troops out of Iraq’***

PHOTO

In 2003 a clear majority of people in Australia opposed this country supporting the US in its war for oil in Iraq.

The Howard government treated our opinion with contempt. It said it was a matter of urgency to remove the Saddam Hussein regime because of its “weapons of mass destruction” and connections with terrorism.

Now everyone can see Howard lied. On the basis of those lies Howard made Australia a criminal accomplice in a cruel and bloody war in which tens of thousands of innocent people have perished. Socialist Alliance says the only way out of the Iraq disaster is to bring the troops home now.

There is no middle road. The ALP is daydreaming if it thinks it can devise a positive role for Australian forces in Iraq. That’s because the vast majority of Iraqis—including those who were victims of Saddam—rightly see all foreign troops as part of an imperial occupation force.

With this approach Australia is also helping fertilise, not eradicate, terrorism. Imagine if you were living in the hell that is Iraq today. Wouldn’t this latest crime of the US and its mates—the world’s biggest terrorists—convince you that terrorism was a legitimate way to fight for your right to freedom?

The tragedy of Iraq tells us that the major parties’ foreign policy approach has to be overturned. Here is Australia on the wrong side again, dutifully helping Washington trample on the rights of peoples.

Australia’s “defence policy” is also based on a whopping lie—that the country faces potential aggressors and must have the most lethal tanks, jet fighters and submarines available to keep them at bay.

But there’s a small problem. No-one, not even the federal government, can tell us who these aggressors might be.

You don’t need to waste billions on M1 tanks, F-x fighter jets and Collins class submarines to defend Australia against imaginary threats. You only need them if you think Australian forces may have to get involved in helping friendly corrupt governments repress people’s uprisings in places like West Papua, Aceh or the southern Philippines.

Or if you want to guarantee Australian business a share of the bonanza by helping out the US in its next war for natural resources.

Such “defence expenditure” is simply like a mafia gang splashing out on the latest in machine guns so it can win the next shoot-out.

**There is an alternative.** Australian foreign and defence policy must *change sides*. It must champion the poor and struggling peoples of the world against the dominant corporate elites and their governments and global institutions, like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

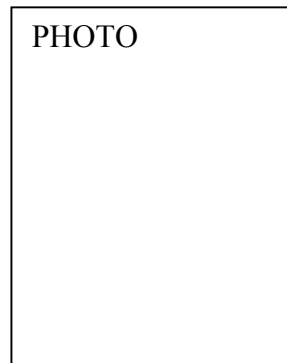
That requires one thing above all—**putting an end to Australia’s military and economic alliance with the US.**

***We also say:***

- *Withdraw Australia from the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank;*
- *Fight for the cancellation of the crippling \$3 trillion Third World debt;*
- *Lift Australia’s aid to developing countries from its present miserable 0.3 per cent of GDP to 1 per cent.*

## 2. Candidate B says:

### ***'Poverty is a sickness we can cure—with jobs for all, and a decent welfare system'***



In Australia, one of the richest countries in the world, it's a disgrace that up to 23 per cent of people are below the poverty line, that after twelve years of four per cent growth, the real unemployment rate (including all those who want to work) is at least 12 per cent, and that in the 1990s the wealthiest 20 per cent scored an extra \$111 a week—more than *eight times* the increase of \$13 received by the poorest 20 per cent (which was probably not enough to cover GST price increases).

It's a disgrace, while the Chief Executive Officers of the top 20 corporations managed to scrape by on \$8 million a year each, that Australia ranks 22<sup>nd</sup> out of the 29 countries in the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development for its spending on social welfare.

It's a disgrace that over the past 10 years the debt of households has increased from 56 to 125 per cent of their income and that housing debt as a percentage of household assets has increased by 60 per cent because of rising house prices.

**There is an alternative.** Socialist Alliance says that by combining job creation, a decent minimum wage and a just welfare system, poverty can be eliminated in Australia.

First, the vast reserve of wasted energy and creativity in people who are presently out of a job can be harnessed in two ways:

- Through shortening the working week (without loss of pay) to spread around available work, and;
- By building a modern, democratically managed public sector dedicated to solving the country's key economic and environmental problems—like its inadequate rail network, dying rural and regional economies, inadequate community services and scores of environmental crises.

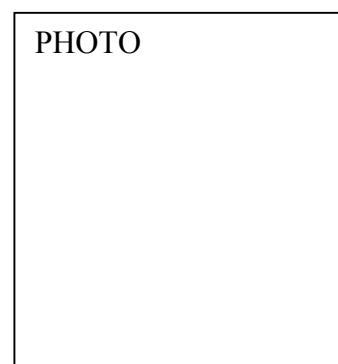
Second, it's not enough just to create jobs if these are casual, part-time and poorly paid. There's also a need to legislate a minimum wage at 60 per cent of the average wage [\$ figure]. This would lift the 1.6 million "working poor" in this country above the poverty line.

Third, the welfare system has to be rebuilt so that it provides a living income to all those who are unable to work.

If Sweden, Norway and Denmark can afford social security payments that are above the poverty line there's absolutely no reason why Australia can't too.

#### ***We also say:***

- *Fight the housing rip-off with a program of quality public housing. Establish a publicly owned housing finance corporation to provide low interest loans;*
- *Create a network of quality, low-cost childcare centres that can lift the burden of caring for children from the shoulders of those—overwhelmingly women—who want to work;*
- *Abolish work for the dole;*
- *Reject the privatisation of welfare;*
- *[Key demand re aged care]*



### 3. Candidate C says:

## **'For security at work—defend and extend worker and union rights'**

Over the past 20 years our life at work has become more stressful, unsafe and unrewarding. Some of us are taking home more money, but often the price is 12-hour shifts and less time for family and leisure. Others are working two shitty little jobs and worrying where the next job contract will come from.

The facts tell the story. In 1971, 89 per cent of us were in full-time jobs, now it's 69 per cent; 60 per cent of Australians feel that workers are a lot less secure than 10 years ago; 30 per cent of male workers are working more than 50 hours a week and more than half of these wish they could work less; and 1.2 million Australian workers feel they have to do unpaid overtime.

All this has gone along with the weakening of our unions, a collapse that started back in the 1980s with Labor's Accord with the ACTU. In a lot of workplaces industry-wide standards have disappeared, often because most union leaderships have been spineless in confronting the Howard government's anti-union laws.

Women workers are losing out most in this retreat. [Get statistics from Anne Summers' book]

At the same time those unions that are still putting up a fight for their members' conditions and rights—like the some branches of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union or the National Tertiary Education Union—are in the gunsights of a government that is determined to neutralise unionism once and for all.

**There is an alternative.** Socialist Alliance says we urgently need to rebuild militant, democratic unionism in this country. What else stands between us and low pay, speed-ups and stress at work and exploitation and victimization by the employer?

We need a legal framework that strengthens the position of workers and unionists, repealing all anti-union laws and enacting a workplace bill of rights that protects workers who organise against exploitation.

**We also say:**

- *Make industry and category-wide bargaining and contracts legal;*
- *Put real teeth into industrial health and safety legislation; and*
- *Jail employers who kill.*

### 4. Candidate D says:

## **'Rescue our essential services from corporate greed—public is best'**

PHOTO

Privatization was supposed to provide us all with cheaper and better health, education, transport, housing, communication and care for our children and old folk. The real result? A two-tier society where those who can afford it go private while the rest of us have to make do with decaying public systems.

Meanwhile the corporate service providers are rolling in their taxpayer-funded profits: private health insurance firms get subsidized to the tune of \$3.7 billion a year; the Child Care Benefit

(CCB) doles out around \$1.5 billion a year, much of it to new corporate child-care providers; spending on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme reached \$4.18 billion in 2001-02; subsidies to private schools [data]

Of course, none of these whopping gifts to big business—paid for by us—have guaranteed decent services and equal access.

The Australian health system, which is failing to provide basic services in outer suburbs and rural Australia, will not be rescued by Howard's MedicarePlus.

We face a crisis in aged care—with the prospect of hundreds of thousands of older Australians ending their days handing over their life savings to corporate sharks like Doug Moran for the privilege of a bed.

Despite child-care payments under the CCB, 280,000 people—overwhelmingly women—are locked out of work. They need to look after children because child care is too expensive or simply unavailable.

Housing left to the banks, private developers and real estate sharks has meant “through the roof” house prices, lengthening waiting lists for public housing and up to 50 per cent of our income going on house mortgages or rent.

Private road transport, whose real cost in terms of government subsidies, pollution, noise, congestion and road damage, adds up to \$1800 for every Australian each year, is moving people and freight at *40 times* the cost of running our urban rail services—“using a chainsaw to cut butter”, as environmentalists say.

**There is an alternative.** To *dump once and for all* the lie that “public” must mean high-cost, inefficient and second-rate services.

This is a lie repeated millions of times over by big business and their governments—and swallowed by the ALP which under while in government began the whole process of handing public assets over to the corporations.

Yes, the old-style public sector was often slow-to-act and insensitive to consumer needs. But that was because outfits like government railways were always run as ministerial dictatorships, with no role for their consumers except to cop what they were given and no role for their workers except to obey orders.

Those shortcomings will be overcome if public services not only use the latest technology but are truly accountable and democratically managed—run by boards comprising workers, users and administrators.

What *can't* be cured if private companies get their hands on supplying essential services is the provision of services only where there's a profit to be made and with quality and safety standards cut to a minimum.

***We also say:***

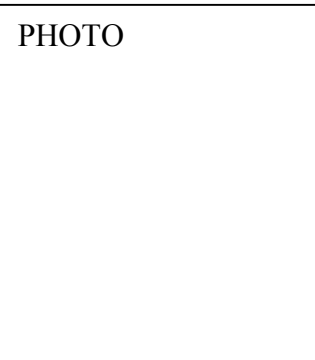
- *Provide free, quality public education without up-front fees and end government funding to private schools;*
- *Extend Medicare to cover the full cost of all health services and abolish private health subsidies;*
- *Launch a large scale program of quality public housing;*
- *Renationalise all privatized public transport and rail freight.*

**5.Candidate E says:**

‘Howard, not refugees, is the biggest threat to the security of working people’s lives’

Does the fear of refugees flooding Australia keep you awake at night? Do you agree that ASIO needs more powers to track down, detain and interrogate “illegal” and suspicious people, especially Moslems?

If your answer is “Yes”, then the Howard government has got you where it



wants you—spooked and ready to vote for those who are toughest on “border protection”, the Coalition.

But think a bit about who’s responsible for the real attacks on our security. Destruction of permanent, full-time jobs? Check out the Liberals’ Workplace Relations Act. Family farms going broke and rural communities disappearing? Try the banks and agribusiness sharks like Elders. A university system that’s turning students into nerve-worn battery hens? Have a look at the Coalition’s Nelson Report.

The plain truth is that Australia faces no threat at all from refugees and asylum-seekers. From the mid-1970s hundreds of thousands of Indo-Chinese “boat people” were accepted into the country without a problem. So why are handfuls of Iraqis and Afghans now a threat? Why can’t Australia treat fellow human beings fleeing poverty and repression with compassion in the 2000s? What’s changed?

Johnny Howard’s got elections to win, that’s what. The Coalition policy refugee policy is simply about creating scapegoats to reinforce support for the government and to undermine a confused and spineless ALP. After all, while voters think refugees and “aliens” are Australia’s main problem, they’re going to worry less about increases in interest rates, the creeping destruction of health services and million-dollar handouts to posh private schools.

Never forget that Howard, Ruddock and the rest are a mafia of liars—liars about refugee children being thrown overboard, liars about asylum-seekers not asking for asylum, liars about the horrors of life in detention centers, liars that even members of the Australian secret services can’t stomach.

**There is an alternative.** The reality is that Australia could have a humane refugee policy tomorrow. The Howard government itself has shown this with its reception of refugees from Kosovo in 1999, temporary though this was. This country must show humanity to some of the world’s most defenceless people—by increasing the refugee intake, developing a plan of resettlement, education and training for new arrivals and guaranteeing them the same rights as all Australian citizens.

*We also say:*

- *Close down the detention centres;*
- *Repeal the Border Protection Act;*
- *Repeal the temporary protection visa system; and*
- *Abolish all restriction on social security for new arrivals.*

## **6. Candidate F says:**

### ***‘Our ecosystems are dying— save them with an emergency environment recovery plan’***

Practically no advanced industrial country has destroyed its precious ecosystems so brutally in order to achieve “development” the way capitalism in Australia has. Just a few facts:

- Australian industry churns out more greenhouse gases per person than any other country, with global warming threatening disastrous coral bleaching;
- In the 40 per cent of Australia where land use is intensive, 85 per cent of rivers have been degraded and are carrying unsustainable concentrations of fertilizer run-off and sediments;
- Salination threatens hundreds of thousands of hectares in the Murray-Darling basin and other river systems;

PHOTO

- Australia’s rate of land-clearing is surpassed by only four other countries in the world, and is boosting greenhouse gas emissions and land salination as well as putting hundreds of native species at risk, and;
- The Australian model of urban development is producing an unsustainable urban sprawl and generating overwhelming tides of waste.

Under either the Coalition or Labor our environment will continue to degenerate, taking us closer to the threshold of real catastrophes. As things stand, the country already faces an enormous repair bill if its environment is to be restored.

**There is an alternative.** Restoring Australian ecosystems is a huge and urgent challenge, demanding large-scale emergency restoration plans backed by enormous resources. It’s the only way to overcome the salination of the Murray-Darling basin (estimated cost \$7.5 billion), to drive a comprehensive plan to develop sustainable energy; to ensure that the vandalism of water use in Australia’s South is not repeated in the North and to plan and carry out a thoroughgoing road-to-rail conversion of transportation.

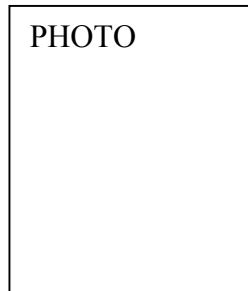
Socialist Alliance proposes a properly funded, democratically managed Commission for Sustainability to drive the urgently needed push for environmental repair.

*We also say:*

- *Impose a comprehensive recycling system for all waste materials;*
- *Oppose new coal-fired power stations;*
- *Immediately close all uranium mines, with no replacement for the Lucas Heights reactor;*
- *Ban all genetically modified organisms.*

## **7. Candidate G says:**

***‘No racism, no discrimination, no second-class citizens—full rights for all’***



Australia is supposed to be the land of the “fair go”, where we are all equal before the law and in the eyes of government. If we don’t “get on” it must be our own fault.

That’s rubbish.

Try life as an Aboriginal Australian in custody for a minor offense—still awaiting the implementation of the recommendations of the 1987 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.

Try living as an asylum-seeker on a temporary protection visa.

Try a few days as a Moslem Australian who is “known to ASIO”.

Try adopting a child if you are gay or lesbian.

Try getting the police to take violence against women seriously.

Try persuading a prospective employer to take you on if you have a physical disability.

Try getting a lawyer to take your case seriously if you’re poor.

Try getting the Murdoch and Packer media to publish a pro-union or minority point of view into.

Try stopping a government that’s in a minority but determined to go to war.

In truth Australia is a country with a big democracy shortfall. Indeed, the constitution doesn’t even tell us what democratic rights we have.

**There is an alternative.** The Socialist Alliance says Australia needs a comprehensive bill of rights that entrenches equality for all. We also need positive discrimination policies that overcome generations of discrimination against women, Aboriginal people and many migrant communities, and proper funding for services like legal aid to make equality before the law a reality.

The Socialist Alliance also stands for increasing the decision-making power of the people on critical issues such as the decision to go to war. If other countries can hold referenda on such vital questions there's no reason why Australia can't.

*We also say:*

- *Abolish ASIO and other secret service agencies;*
- *Repeal all "anti-terrorist" legislation. This potentially turns activism into "terrorism" and throw basic democratic rights (like the right to silence and the right of access to a lawyer) into the dust bin;*
- *Ensure full equality for lesbians, gay men, bisexuals and transgendered people;*
- *End discrimination against people with disabilities;*
- *Repeal the Native Title Act and implement real land rights.*

## **8. Candidate H says:**

PHOTO

### **'Who pays for all this? Those who've been ripping us off'**

All very nice, you might say, but where's the money going to come from for this massive expansion of the public sector that Socialist Alliance proposes?

The answer is simple. By taking back some of the wealth working people have created from those who have been ripping us off for years.

From the National Australia Bank, which racked up \$4 billion in profits for 2002-03.

From the \$75 billion which is owned by the wealthiest 200 Australians.

From Kerry Packer and Richard Pratt, worth \$5.5 billion and \$3.4 billion respectively.

From the Murdoch family, which has to scrape by on \$4.5 billion.

Peter Costello is talking about reducing tax rates for the rich—Socialist Alliance proposes the opposite. Especially when we remember that Australian business contributes only 16 per cent of total tax income, as compared to the average of 24 per cent for the whole OECD.

Here are some examples of how the billions needed for a decent public sector could easily be raised:

- Increase the income tax rate for those on \$100,000 a year and above by [calculation to come];
- Introduce a tax on foreign exchange transactions (Tobin Tax) of [calculation to come];
- Increase the company tax take to the OECD average. This would raise [calculation to come];;
- Cut back subsidies to big business and funding to wealthy private schools. This would make available [calculation to come]; and
- Just halving "defence" expenditure would raise [calculation to come].

### ***There is an alternative—to be fought for!***

This brochure has explained the broad outline of Socialist Alliance's alternative policy approach to achieve social justice, peace, democracy and sustainability. It has explained why it can be afforded.

Do you agree with it? If yes, then it's important that you vote for our candidates in the forthcoming federal elections.

But that's only a start—the alternative we propose won't come about through voting alone. More important is to change the political agenda out in the workplace and the community, to get active in the campaigns for social justice, peace, democracy and sustainability in which Socialist Alliance is involved.

Do you want to know more? The Socialist Alliance will be presenting detailed policy positions throughout the coming year. Look for them on our website, or pick them up at your nearest Socialist Alliance branch or stall. Do you want to discuss more? Then get in touch with your nearest Socialist Alliance branch or contact us on [ne@socialist-alliance.org](mailto:ne@socialist-alliance.org).

## ***...but it can't happen without you!***

BLURB along lines of:

Socialist Alliance is made up of ordinary people, who like millions of Australians are sick to death of fat cats rorting the system, warmongers, union-bashers and grey, barely distinguishable Liberal and Labor politicians.

The difference is that they are committed to doing something about it.

If elected our candidates would follow the rule of the Scottish socialist parliamentarians

We are an expanding force with [details on branches]

You can make a difference. So join the new politics.

Help the invisible Australia of ordinary working people become a force for change

DETAILS

***HOW YOU CAN HELP US AT ELECTION TIME.***

***DONATIONS TO OUR ELECTION CAMPAIGN FUND***

***JOINERS CLIP-OFF***

## ***What we say about the other parties***

**The Greens:** The recent growth of the Greens is very positive. It confirms that millions of Australians are fed up with pro-corporate Liberal and Labor, and are reaching out for a political alternative that expresses their desire for a just and peaceful world. The Green parliamentarians have stood up against the Iraq war, for refugee rights and for the environment.

The core difference between the Socialist Alliance and the Greens is our conviction that the four Green ideals (social justice, peace, democracy and environmental sustainability) can only become reality in a socialist society.

Of course, through our struggles we can make progress on all four fronts, but it's a daydream to think that this society—dominated by profit-obsessed corporations—can be rendered peaceful, democratic, socially just and environmentally sustainable.

The Socialist Alliance looks to collaborate with the Greens in the communities and in the social movements and gives its preferences to the Greens before the other parties.

**The ALP:** Most of the dirty work of imposing “economic rationalism” (permanent free kicks to big business) has been done by ALP governments, state and federal.

It was Hawke, Keating, Beazley and Co who unshackled the finance sector, flogged off public assets, cut company tax and crushed militant unionism. Through this period Labor's political domination of the unions largely crippled their ability to act in defence of working people.

Socialist Alliance's main aim is to build the working-class political alternative to the ALP. In particular we work to rebuild a strong democratic, union movement out of the shambles created by Labor.

At the same time Socialist Alliance recognises that many ALP members are still committed to defending the interests of working people and to the struggle for reforms. Socialist Alliance looks to work with ALP members on all issues where we agree.

At election time Socialist Alliance puts Labor before the Coalition.

**The Australian Democrats:** Despite taking more a progressive stance than Labor and the Coalition on a number of issues, the Democrats are basically in the game of sugar-coating the bitter pills of Liberal or Labor economic rationalism. Democrat “reasonableness” gave us the GST, and it may well give us the complete privatisation of Telstra.

The Socialist Alliance looks to collaborate with the Democrats on any issues where there is agreement. At election time we place the Democrats after Labour and before the Coalition.

**The Coalition:** The Coalition is at present the main agent of economic rationalism and the corporate elite. Socialist Alliance participates in and supports all campaigns and movements that oppose the Howard government.

However, our aim is not just to remove the Coalition but to shift the Australian political agenda to the left, and make it impossible for any future ALP government to repeat Hawke-Keating-Beazley economic rationalism.

At election time the Socialist Alliance always places the Liberals and National parties after the ALP and the Democrats.

**One Nation:** At election time the Socialist Alliance always places this racist organisation last.

### ***BOX ON DETAILED POLICY RELEASES—“What do you socialists say about...?”***

Authorisation

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<sup>2</sup> Data in this brochure has been drawn from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Reserve Bank *Bulletin*, the Australian Council of Social Services, the Social Policy Research Centre, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the *Business Review Weekly* and *Fragmented Futures: New Challenges in Working Life*, by Ian Watson, John Buchanan, Iain Campbell and Chris Briggs (The Federation Press, 2003).