

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin
\$2.50

Vol 4 No 1, March 2004

Discussion

Socialist Alliance innovations in health	2
By Lalitha Chelliah (Melbourne North East branch)	
Reply from Radical Women to the invitation to affiliate to the Socialist Alliance	3
Radical Women response: Which Way Forward for Socialist Feminists?	3
By Louise Walker (Melbourne South East branch and National Co-convenor)	
Repeal Regressive Legislation	5
By Bernie Rosen (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)	
A chance to grow	6
By David Glanz (National Co-convenor, for the International Socialist Organisation)	
A paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance	7
By David Glanz (National Co-convenor and candidate for Wills)	
National Conveners' response to 'A paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance' petition	9
Green Left Weekly: Why look a gift horse in the mouth?	9
By Dave Riley (Brisbane Central/Northern Branch and National Executive member)	
Gender Agenda: A Charter for Women's Rights	11

National Executive decisions

Protocols for the Socialist Alliance-Green Left Weekly trial relationship	13
Correction to 2003 National Conference minutes	14

Correspondence

Socialist Alliance greetings to the RESPECT conference	14
Building Socialist Alliance on campuses	14

Statements and media releases

Open letter to ALP National Conference participants	15
Grant the Nauru hunger strikers Australian citizenship	15
No justice, no peace! Indigenous Redfern is right to resist!	16
Anti-war critics slam Howard's new intelligence inquiry	16

Socialist Alliance innovations in health

By Lalitha Chelliah (Melbourne North East branch)

The Socialist Alliance bases its policy on health promotion, disease prevention and timely treatment of illnesses. It includes promoting good health. It aims to encourage a healthy community in a healthy environment and reduce health risks. Health includes the physical, mental and social well being of the community. It is a resource used by individual on a daily basis.

A healthy life depends on a healthy environment, safe working conditions and enabling people to increase control over this improvement process. It will be based on the concept of hope and community control.

The current situation, in health, where the waiting time to see a doctor in a hospital could range from 4 – 7 hours has to be abolished. The enormous waiting lists have to be eradicated.

Key health issues

- ?? Every individual to have equal access to health services and facilities according to their needs.
- ?? Multi-disciplinary primary care community health centers (CHC) to be created as the corner stone of the delivery of easily accessible services. This will apply equally to rural areas
- ?? The community will have access to general practitioners, specialist services, ancillary services and alternative medicine.
- ?? Public hospitals will be sufficiently funded so that waiting lists will be abolished
- ?? Special services for women, migrants and aboriginal communities will be made available.
- ?? The aged and children will have special emphasis due to their special circumstances
- ?? Mental health will be made a priority given its prevalence in the community
- ?? Emergency services will be upgraded to service communities efficiently
- ?? People with disabilities will have services available to enable them to function as normal members of the community
- ?? Essential pharmaceuticals will be made available on the basis of need and not as dictated by large companies. Pharmaceuticals Benefits Scheme will be retained and improved to meet the needs of the community. It will also be guaranteed from any trade agreements.
- ?? The Commonwealth Serum Laboratory will be renationalized and given specific task of producing generic drugs
- ?? Research and development will be funded and promoted on the basis of needs of the community.
- ?? The Socialist Alliance will lobby in international forums to overturn Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Agreement. It will also lobby against patency laws that pertain to restricting access to much needed pharmaceuticals and production of healthy food.
- ?? Democratic joint committees of medical professionals, other health workers and members of the community will be established to coordinate the CHCs. The community will be fully involved in the process of establishing and administering the CHCs.

Medicare

Free medical services will be made available paid by Medicare in CHCs. The allocation of CHCs and funding will be based on the needs of each community

- ?? Salaried doctors, paid by Medicare, will be available in the CHCs in proportion to the needs of each community
- ?? Salaried specialist services will also be made available in CHCs
- ?? Qualified alternative health practitioners will be encouraged to join the CHC team
- ?? Communities will have access to physiotherapists, speech therapists, dental services, occupational therapists, ante and post natal services, counsellors and dieticians at the CHCs
- ?? All public hospitals will be funded and staffed to be able to cope with the needs in their communities. Public hospitals will be built in areas where there is a need for them.
- ?? Establishment of Women's Health Centres providing access to contraception and abortion facilities, cancer screening facilities.
- ?? Special services will be organized according to the needs in each community.

General health

- ?? Prevention of ill health will be primary in our policies.
- ?? The promotion of healthy living styles will be promoted by special campaigns
- ?? Schools will be funded to promote healthy eating and providing healthy food for children
- ?? Strategies for reduction of stress levels and accidents at work places will be formulated.

Mental health

The prevalence of mental health issues is well known in the community. There is also a stigma attached to these conditions. Strategies will be formulated to address these issues

- ?? Counselling and psychiatric services to be made available free of charge in CHCs
- ?? Facilities to be established to assist the reversing of the prevalence of this problem.

Funding

The prevention of ill health will reduce the cost of treatment in the long run. The inclusion of the community in the decision-making processes will also assist in this process. The fact that the community and individuals take responsibility for their health will boost the type of healthy community we envisage.

The Medicare levy will be increased by an average of 1% to help fund the policies we put forward. A progressive tax will be implemented to create equity. The enormous funding allocated to defense will be redirected to meet health needs in the community. The Socialist Alliance will phase out private health insurance so that all Australians would have the same level of health insurance and the same access to health care. This will save the community several millions of health dollars. Until our policies are fully established general practitioners will be adequately remunerated for bulk billing.

The current Medicare Scheme will be extended to include other essential services like dental, optometry, speech, dietetics and auditory services.

Reply from Radical Women to the invitation to affiliate to the Socialist Alliance

11 December 2003

Dear Socialist Alliance National Executive

Thank you for the invitation to affiliate to Socialist Alliance and recognition of our decades of work for revolutionary change. As you know, from the time SA formed in January 2001, Radical Women has been a strong supporter of the Alliance. We've seen SA as a necessary united front of socialists which offers working people an electoral alternative and platform for socialist solutions. We have particularly supported, and have been deeply involved in, SA's electoral work, its building of socialist caucuses in unions and its organised defence of democratic rights.

At RW's meeting on December 6, members discussed the invitation and decided not to affiliate. The reason is that our purpose is substantially different and affiliation would detract us from it. I'll explain.

First, Radical Women is committed to building a mass women's movement, capable of providing the leadership needed for socialist revolution. Our program, based on the theories of Marx, Engels and Trotsky, places women at the centre of the working class struggle for liberation. Socialist Alliance, in contrast, is not a feminist organisation and does not claim to be. This can be seen in the complete lack of priority given by the majority of delegates to the May National Conference to the efforts of our sister organisation, the Freedom Socialist Party, to put the needs of women – as those most oppressed by the capitalist system - into SA's platform. The Socialist Alliance web page does not give any profile to feminist demands, the battle for women's liberation is almost absent from the pages of Socialist Campaigner and Alliance broadsheets, and women continue to be under-represented in SA's leadership bodies.

Furthermore, we decided that we do not want to affiliate to an alliance where the largest affiliate, the Democratic Socialist Party, opposes autonomous organising in the socialist movement. RW formed in the 1960s because of (male) movement leaders' designation of women thinkers and activists to organisational tasks - as handmaidens (the typists, tea ladies and foot soldiers) of the liberation movements that women fought for and made. RW emerged from the need for autonomous organising in order to build the leadership of the most committed and militant movers and shakers for social change.

We are also concerned by SA's majority position that the Alliance become a multi-tendency socialist party. While, after hot debate, SA's National Conference in May did not formally call on affiliates to dissolve, we do understand that a multi-tendency party ultimately requires affiliates to dissolve. As an autonomous women's organisation, RW opposes this.

Radical Women will continue to support SA as a socialist united front. But we commit our own resources to building a mass socialist feminist movement, which is necessary for the global change we all are fighting for.

In socialist feminist solidarity

Debbie Brennan

Radical Women

Radical Women response: Which Way Forward for Socialist Feminists?

By Louise Walker (Melbourne South East branch and National Co-convenor)

As both a feminist and a socialist, I am very disappointed that Radical Women (RW) has declined an invitation to affiliate to the Socialist Alliance [Radical Women's letter is printed below]. RW has a lot to contribute and to gain from affiliating to SA. While the decision to affiliate is one for RW itself, the reasons given for rejecting affiliation, when scrutinised politically, are not actual barriers to unity within the SA project.

In its response, RW outlines an organisational separatism that has been a central feature of politically active socialists and feminists in Australia for a very long time. This division has largely been justified through an over-emphasis of apparent political difference between various small groups on the socialist left.

There is no doubt that real political differences exist, and a healthy respect for those differences is an essential component of successful unity. However, a great deal of political commonality can equally be demonstrated between each and every socialist group that I know to be operating in Australia. In fact, most groups clinging to separateness would be challenged to find even 10% programmatic difference with either each other or the Alliance, and RW is no exception. Exaggerated or contrived differences are a recipe for the continued marginalisation and irrelevance of socialism from the broad Australian working class, and are the very antithesis of the revolutionary transformation most are trying to pursue.

The first reason RW offers for its decision to decline affiliation is that Socialist Alliance “is not a feminist organisation and does not claim to be”.

The requirement that Socialist Alliance be, first and foremost, a fully formed feminist organisation before Radical Women would affiliate begs the question of RW’s purpose as an organisation. Requiring every other organisation (and presumably individual) to satisfy, and independently achieve in advance, the very criteria RW sets out as it’s goal to help create socialism would negate the very rationale for RW’s existence.

This also begs the question (and it is one I would like to pursue with RW in the framework of an Alliance discussion): who decides what is a “feminist” organisation and on what criteria? For most feminists I know, an organisation which aims to advance women’s rights and liberation, and which has both a policy/platform and a practice/activity that does that, could reasonably be called a feminist organisation. By those criteria, Socialist Alliance would certainly qualify.

Another reason RW gives for declining affiliation is that the largest SA affiliate, the Democratic Socialist Party (DSP, now the Democratic Socialist Perspective) is opposed to “autonomous organising in the socialist movement”.

That may be a sound reason for not affiliating to the DSP, but the invitation came from the Alliance. The SA leadership is well aware of the basis upon which Radical Women exists and does its work. It would not invite affiliation if it meant that Radical Women’s very existence was threatened by the act of affiliation.

Political differences exist between each of the Socialist Alliance affiliates on a number of questions. These are just as important to the distinctive existence of our affiliates as autonomous organising is to Radical Women. Nevertheless, these differences do not preclude the common-ground unity connections created within the Alliance by affiliates.

My understanding of the DSP’s position on autonomous organising is that it is not in-principle opposed to it in the broader socialist movement. Rather, the DSP’s documents argue that autonomous organising within revolutionary Marxist parties is counterproductive - for women and the party as a whole. But the DSP has consistently made it clear that it does not consider SA such a Marxist party and that it is committed to the building of SA as a broad, multi-tendency socialist party.

But whatever the DSP’s position on autonomous organising, there is no basis for believing that the DSP position would be automatically adopted by Socialist Alliance. Socialist Alliance is not opposed to the creation of platforms and caucuses within it – indeed the Constitution enshrines such activity. I can easily imagine the creation of a socialist-feminist caucus within SA that was dedicated to putting forward the case for a socialist-feminist analysis of the world, and the principles for organising upon that basis.

Socialist Alliance’s structure is intended to be as broad as possible, to allow for the maximum participation of affiliate groups and individuals. The Alliance as a whole, and this includes the DSP, are for extending measures that facilitate the participation of any group that agreed with SA’s core aims and principles, not for restricting such measures. If RW genuinely feels that there is a serious obstacle here to greater unity, the politically responsible thing to do would be to discuss it with the leadership of the Alliance.

By implication, RW are effectively equating the DSP with SA, a myth akin to the idea that the DSP is “trying to take over SA,” or that SA is “a front group for the DSP.” Just as it is both sad and tiresome that RW wishes to perpetuate this nonsense to justify their self-imposed separatist existence, so it is to disregard the non-DSP majority membership, activity and leadership of the Alliance. It contributes nothing constructive to the building of a socialist movement in Australia, or to RW’s own expansion.

The RW letter asserts that, with the adoption of a multi-tendency socialist party framework for SA, the affiliates of Socialist Alliance will ultimately be required to “dissolve.” This is presented as a further threat to the continued existence of Radical Women should it affiliate. But is becoming a tendency within the Alliance the same thing as dissolving? Why should it be? This is the opposite of the stated intention of the national conference document of the non-aligned caucus who initiated this transformation, and it was made quite clear at conference and since.

As I understand the concept of dissolution, the politics of the affiliate would have to be disbanded and vanish, and presumably the broad politics of the Alliance would replace them. But this is certainly not what is expected of becoming an internal tendency or platform within SA, as is presently being demonstrated by the DSP as they go through this transformation. Certainly, becoming an internal tendency involves, for the affiliate, a rethinking of its relationship to the rest of the organisation, and the broader movements within which it does its political work. Without doubt it requires placing greater emphasis outside SA upon promoting SA, and looking to recruit to the tendency or platform from within SA. So yes, the affiliate must go through some organisational change to become a purely internal platform or tendency. I would not want to underestimate the real change in orientation that is involved for the group.

However, it is important not to overestimate the change either. Such a reorientation does not amount to obliteration. What should matter most to those adhering to a particular political tendency is increasing the influence of those ideas. I think that the long-term prospects for recruitment to the currents within Socialist Alliance are much greater than from outside it. But for these greater prospects to be realised, the socialist left must really get behind the Alliance. Those who

embrace greater unity in and through the Socialist Alliance demonstrate to the rest of us how seriously they take the rebuilding of the socialist movement in Australia, and so the esteem with which they are held within the Alliance will grow. In turn, the other ideas that are important to those tendencies will be taken more seriously.

However, the really crucial point to grasp in this concern about 'dissolution' is that the Alliance is not requiring affiliates to undertake the 'greater integration' that becoming a purely internal tendency involves. It is only being encouraged. Affiliates can join and participate in SA, and draw upon the benefits that a wider milieu and greater resources offers for promoting their specific agendas, without in any way compromising their distinctive political or organisational integrity or, for that matter, their public profile.

Radical Women claims that it "is committed to building a mass women's movement, capable of providing the leadership needed for socialist revolution". It seems logical that such a commitment would lead RW to grasp with both hands the greatest opportunity it has to present its ideas to the largest audience available to it in many years by affiliating to SA. For example, SA is currently in the process of developing a women's charter. If RW were prepared to recognise, at least, that Socialist Alliance is very serious about putting women's rights and liberation back on the national political agenda, RW could (and should) have made a significant contribution to the charter as part of SA. In the process, it would have strengthened its own organisation and influence, strengthened the left unity embodied in Socialist Alliance, and strengthened both the socialist and women's liberation movements.

With the political and organisational independence of affiliates respected and safeguarded, there really is no rationale for any left organisation to remain separate from the Alliance. But there are many reasons for them to unite. We must overcome our political enclave culture by sharing and building upon one another's efforts, experience and connections. There presently exists in Australia a crisis not only for social-democracy but also for socialism, and we all stand at a cross-roads. We have an historic opportunity to rebuild the organisation necessary to introduce and advance socialist and feminist ideas to ordinary people on a mass scale. We must not squander it.

I hope RW will reconsider. In the interests of constantly broader left unity, Socialist Alliance's doors are permanently open to new affiliates and members, and I look forward to the opportunity to commence the serious unity discussions that any such reconsideration by RW might bring.

A contribution in preparation for the federal election

By Bernie Rosen (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

Repeal Regressive Legislation

I would like to recommend that a pamphlet be prepared outlining and denouncing the regressive legislation that then Howard government has introduced. This has been beneficial to big business but detrimental to the working class and all sections of the community trying to support themselves on small incomes. The GST has made it much worse.

The second part of the pamphlet should advocate the repeal of this legislation and its replacement with policies that conform to the interests of the working class, and all battlers.

The pamphlet should contain irrefutable evidence to show the close connection between the Business Council of Australia, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Liberal Party. Their anti-union legislation affirms this fact beyond any reasonable doubt.

The persistent efforts of the Coalition Government to privatise the remainder of Telstra clearly indicate that their conception of the national interest is the further enrichment of the very wealthy.

Deception to Win an Election

Our readers should be reminded of the Tampa deception and the way in which this was used by the Coalition Government during the last federal election, and with the connivance of the right-wing Labor Party leadership. ALP booth workers told me that they were opposed to the policy of their party leaders on this issue.

Motivation of the ambitious Politician

It is remarkable how politicians from humble origins can be so solicitous in administering the country for the benefit of the very wealthy. Material comforts, high salaries, a chauffeur driven car, overseas travel and ego gratification derived from holding high public office are the inducements for engendering this servility and obeisance to the ruling class.

We need socialist and left-wing politicians in parliament who scorn those emoluments, and whose motivation is to serve the interests of the working people like Fred Patterson who was the Communist Party member for Bowen (Queensland) from 1944-1950. He remains a role model for future socialist parliamentarians.

This proposed publication should be widely circulated months before the next federal election. It will be a useful contribution to strengthening the campaign to defeat the conservative Coalition Government and at the same time present the public with alternative policies from the Socialist Alliance.

A chance to grow

By David Glanz (National Co-convenor, for the International Socialist Organisation)

We are now into the longest election campaign in recent Australian political history. In Queensland, our comrades had scarcely two weeks to campaign in the state election - federally, we are likely to enjoy eight or nine months of sustained political debate.

Latham has given people confidence that Howard can be beaten. Where Beazley and Crean tailed Howard, Latham has challenged him. It has shifted and lifted the political atmosphere.

At the same time, Latham is under scrutiny. The media, and the electorate more broadly, want to know what he stands for. The answers are not simple to categorise.

Latham attacks Howard from the right on some questions (such as "the male crisis") but from the left on others (politicians' super). He faced down Labor for Refugees at the ALP conference, but toned down his pro-market rhetoric in return. His populism and opportunism make him difficult to pin down.

Where he takes a stand which challenges Howard - such as defence of the Pharmaceutical Benefit Scheme in the light of the US Free Trade Agreement - the Socialist Alliance should welcome it, and argue to take the point further, raising for example our policy of nationalising the pharmaceutical companies.

Howard's defeat would be enormously welcome - there is no immediate prospect of progress on war, refugees, Medicare or workers' rights under a re-elected Liberal government.

But we also need to patiently explain to those enthused by Labor's bounceback that a Latham government would be fundamentally loyal to the neo-liberal and imperialist agenda.

Latham's recent visit to Pine Gap and his pledge of allegiance to the US alliance make the point. His commitment to fiscal responsibility and cutting tax even for the rich reinforce it. His opposition to safe injecting rooms and his disgusting attack on the indigenous community in Redfern seal the case.

The good news is that the Socialist Alliance is not isolated on this point. Workers' experience of the Keating government is recent enough that a significant minority will not simply suspend disbelief and follow Latham blindly.

Life under Labor state and territory governments makes that minority more determined - think of Carr's record on public transport in NSW, or the Bracks government's attacks on teachers in Victoria.

The radical minority's stance is reinforced by widespread cynicism about the Iraq war and weapons of mass destruction, and the global development of the anti-capitalist movement and its issues, with a record 120,000 at the World Social Forum in January.

That minority took shape in Queensland, with the Greens advancing to nearly 7 per cent and two of our three candidates picking up nearly 3 per cent. The latest national opinion poll in the Fairfax papers has Labor with a decisive lead, but the Greens on 9 per cent.

So the situation we face can be summarised in this way:

?? Latham taking the fight to Howard has raised hopes that the Liberals can be beaten. This is a healthy development and one we should welcome. We are for Howard being driven out.

?? Latham is not offering a progressive alternative, and an important minority recognise this to be the case.

?? This is a significant window of opportunity for the Socialist Alliance. There is a space now to build a much stronger socialist alternative to Labor (a space that will become much bigger under a Latham government).

We have a lot to offer potential members. We are the only socialist party that is central to mobilising against war and the occupation of Iraq around the country; that is building networks of resistance in at least some unions; and that will be standing in about 30 lower house seats in the federal election.

That is why every branch and every member should get in behind the Socialist Alliance recruitment campaign that was launched on March 1.

We are recruiting all the time - three people signed up to my branch, Wills, in just the past couple of weeks, two students joined SA at the Socialist Worker Club table at ANU in Canberra in O-week, and so on.

But a conscious, organised recruitment drive in the current political situation can turn the ones and twos into dozens or twenties.

There are a number of key mobilisations coming up where big, lively, high-profile Socialist Alliance contingents and teams of recruiters going through the crowds can provide us with a real lift.

International Women's Day, the March 20 mobilisation against the occupation of Iraq, and the student national day of action on March 31 are vital dates for every branch. By combining brief caucuses beforehand, new recruitment material (out soon) and a touch of audacity, we can find potentially hundreds of new members and supporters across the country.

In the light of this opportunity, the national committee of the International Socialist Organisation met recently and decided to make two contributions towards the recruitment drive:

* ISO members will be organising and taking part in SA recruitment teams at all major events in the coming period.

* The ISO will not be producing Socialist Worker placards at such events in the interests of raising the biggest possible SA profile.

We would urge other members and affiliates to join together in making the recruitment drive a major success.

A paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance

By David Glanz (National Co-convenor and candidate for Wills)

The following motion was carried by 20 votes to five at a Wills branch meeting on March 3. Of the five non-aligned members present when the vote was taken, four voted for the resolution. It was the largest business meeting yet for Wills branch and the second largest branch meeting in the country to discuss the question of the Alliance paper (see the reports in *Alliance Voices*, Vol. 3 No. 13).

“We live in an epoch of economic, social and environmental crisis, and imperialist war. Traditionally, many working people have looked to the Labor Party for their defence. Today, the ALP’s growing inability to meet the aspirations of its supporters makes the building of a strong socialist alternative necessary and urgent.

The coming federal election, combined with our regular campaigning work, will be an important step towards demonstrating that the Socialist Alliance is such a credible alternative. Showing that the Left is able to put aside petty differences and unite, while accepting the diversity of opinion and debate that exists, is the essence of our broad multi-tendency socialist party.

The Socialist Alliance will need to use a variety of publications to get its message across, including leaflets, broadsheets and *Seeing Red*. We welcome the support of affiliates’ publications, including *Green Left Weekly* and *Socialist Worker*.

However, we believe that none of the affiliates’ publications is currently able to play the role of Socialist Alliance paper. Each comes with its own distinctive political profile and style. The Socialist Alliance needs a paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance.

Green Left Weekly has offered more space to the Socialist Alliance. But ownership and day-to-day control will remain with the DSP. The DSP has made it clear that it will not entertain a change of name as things stand.

If *GLW* were to provide the basis for a future Socialist Alliance paper, it would need to go through a process of collectively agreed change.

That is why the Socialist Alliance, as a first step, should elect an editorial board at the May conference which would:

1. Write, commission and edit SA material to be available for publication in the newspapers or magazines of *all* affiliates.

2. Focus on linking our activist work with our federal election campaign.

3. Meet at least fortnightly to do this.

We also believe that the SA National Executive should implement the 2003 conference resolution stating that the NE “produce a draft plan for [a regular] publication covering format, frequency, editorial board, name, funding and any other relevant issues”, to assist this process.”

As the mover of the resolution, I would like to comment on some of the questions that it raises.

- 1) First, whether this is an attempt to frustrate the trial collaboration between Socialist Alliance and *Green Left Weekly*. The International Socialist Organisation, which drafted the Wills resolution, respects the democratic decisions of the Alliance. We have a highly experienced, long-term member (Anne Picot) working on the Socialist Alliance editorial board. We have contributed articles to *GLW* (five alone in one recent issue). We disagreed with the trial but, after losing the vote, have taken part – it is only by taking the trial seriously that we will establish whether the editorial board system is viable or not.

But all this is beside the point – the Wills resolution is not a contribution to last year’s debate on access to *GLW*, it is a contribution to *this* year’s debate at our national conference. The trial is only one element in the mix that members have to consider. But there are many other questions that we have not even begun to address.

- 2) Such questions include: what sort of paper does the Alliance need? Who is our target audience? How does publishing a paper fit with our activity in the unions, movements and elections? Should the paper be a party paper (like the *Scottish Socialist Voice* <www.scottishsocialistvoice.net> for example) or a broad paper? Should it be a campaigning paper or a reflective paper? How should it be funded? What should be its frequency and size? Who will own it? Who should be on the paid staff? Who will determine its “line”? And not least, given that our common project is to rebuild the influence of socialism – not Green politics – in this country, what should it be called? (As the Non-Aligned Caucus quite rightly put to last year’s national conference: “[The Alliance] has to be a distinctly Socialist party.”)

My personal view is that the paper should be an explicitly socialist, campaigning and party paper which promotes the Socialist Alliance and our collective positions on key domestic and international questions and struggles, while providing modest space for debate. It needs a new, socialist name – say, *Socialist Voice*. It needs to carve a distinct identity from those publications (like *Socialist Worker* and *GLW*) which are already in solidarity with the Socialist Alliance so that it is clearly a common project for our common cause.

You may disagree – but that’s the point. We haven’t *begun* the debate yet. The Wills resolution is calling for such an open discussion, with all options on the table.

Unfortunately, this is not the position of the national executive. At the December meeting, the majority rejected a proposal that read in part: “As a part of the editorial transitional period of *Green Left* that the National Conveners initiate a discussion within the Alliance from now until the next national conference around what, if any, changes in name, content, style and appearance the members would like to see in an Alliance-run *GLW*.”

Far from *GLW* being offered to the Socialist Alliance on the basis of control transferring to the Alliance, this sounds much more like “take it or leave it”. Socialist Alliance members deserve better.

- 3) How can we proceed? First, the national conference should elect an editorial board which continues to write and solicit material. This material should, of course, be offered to *GLW*, as well as to all other supportive publications.

Second, the Wills resolution should be the start of a debate in the run-up to the national conference – a debate which may need to continue further alongside more experimentation. Such a debate does not preclude using the resources of *GLW* which have been offered to the Alliance. Wills branch does not reject the offer of *GLW* resources, rather its decision says: “If *GLW* were to provide the basis for a future Socialist Alliance paper, it would need to go through a process of collectively agreed change.”

Third, the 2003 national conference carried a resolution on publications which read in part: “That the Socialist Alliance should move to produce its own regular publication ... That the incoming National Executive, in the light of discussion at this conference and any further suggestions received from Alliance members and affiliates, produce a draft plan for the publication covering format, frequency, editorial board, name, funding and any other relevant issues.”

One product of that resolution is *Seeing Red*. But the resolution was not simply about a particular magazine – it outlined a methodology for producing publications in general. *Seeing Red* will be a success not just because of its content and layout, but because it is the product of a fruitful, sober collective discussion which started by answering political questions (what are we trying to achieve, and how best to do it?) before dealing with matters of organisation and finance.

This is the methodology which should go into laying the basis of a united Socialist Alliance newspaper.

I would urge all branches to consider the Wills resolution. The ISO and others who support it are happy to make speakers available to ensure a balanced and informed debate. We would also encourage members to endorse the Wills resolution as individuals. Below is a list of those who have done so to date. If you would like to find out more, or if you would like to add your name to the list, email dglanz@optusnet.com.au or ring me on 0418 316 310.

Those who have supported the Wills resolution in the form of an open letter so far include:

Name	Branch	Position
David Glanz	Wills	National co-convenor, member of the <i>Seeing Red</i> editorial board, candidate for Wills
Riki Lane	Wills	National executive member, national co-convenor 2001-2003
Alison Thorne	Wills	National executive member
Greg Adler	Marrickville	National executive member
Brian Webb	Sydney East	National executive member, national election working group co-convenor
Juliet Edeson	Brisbane SW	Qld co-convenor
Kieran Latty	Sydney Central	NSW co-convenor
Alan Woodcraft	Fremantle	WA co-convenor
Michael Reidie	Melbourne NE	Vic co-convenor 2003
Phil Andrews	Melbourne SE	Vic co-convenor
Judy McVey	Wills	Branch convenor
Bill Tully	Canberra	Branch executive member
Ben Halliday	Canberra	Branch executive member
Sarah Thorne	Wills	Vic state executive member 2003
Peter Murray	Wills	Vic state executive member
Luke Deer	Marrickville	National anti-war working group co-convenor
Tom Orsag	Wills	Vic state executive member
Paul Roberts	Melbourne SE	Branch convenor, Vic state executive member
Bridget Ellery	Geelong	State election candidate for Corio
Adrian Skerritt	Brisbane SW	State election candidate for Inala
Tom Freeman	Wills	Branch executive member
Brett Cardinal	Brisbane SW	
Melissa White	Brisbane Central	
Wade McDonald	Perth	
Bob Carnegie	Brisbane Central	
James Mulgrew	Brisbane Central	
Mike Grewcock	Marrickville	
Heather Eldridge	Brisbane South	
Allan Littler	Brisbane South	
Rachel Sambrano	Brisbane SW	
Jarvis Ryan	Sydney Central	
Stephen Martin	Brisbane SW	
Fidan Kucuktepe	Wills	
Peter Hannaford	Wills	
Tony Dewberry	Wills	
Peter Carter	Wills	
Tessa Theocharous	Wills	
Patrick McLiesh	Melbourne NE	
Hamish McPherson	Wills	
James Supple	Wills	
Marcus Banks	Wills	

National Conveners' response to 'A paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance' petition

In response to the petition above, the Socialist Alliance National Conveners' meeting of February 23, passed by a majority of 4 to 1 the following motion:

"In response to the petition titled 'A paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance' currently being circulated within SA, the National Conveners reaffirm that the SA National Executive decided on December 12, 2003, 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 a Socialist Alliance editorial board committee to work in conjunction with the existing Green Left Weekly board and report to National Conveners/National Executive as required.

2. That the role of the Socialist Alliance editorial board include securing access for SA members and affiliates, soliciting material and overseeing the public presentation of SA within Green Left Weekly.

3. That this transitional arrangement with Green Left Weekly be assessed at the next Socialist Alliance national conference with a view to negotiating the integration of Green Left Weekly and Socialist Alliance editorial committees and the transformation of Green Left Weekly into the national weekly newspaper of Socialist Alliance'."

For - Lisa Macdonald, Michael Morphett, Louise Walker, John van der Velden. Against - David Glanz.

Green Left Weekly: Why look a gift horse in the mouth?

By Dave Riley (Brisbane Central/Northern Branch and National Executive member)

There's been a lot of discussion in the Alliance on the question of *Green Left Weekly*. I hope that all branches have considered the question at some stage over the last four months. However there is a conscious attempt I believe to obscure the issues in dispute by bringing in extraneous points as an excuse to give weight to a particular argument.

I want to deal with some core facts that may have been obscured in these current exchanges.

FACT #1: The Socialist Alliance has already decided at its last conference by an overwhelming majority of some 75 percent to move towards becoming a multi tendency socialist party(MTSP).

As you may recall the essence of that conference debate was centred around the question of the integration of the Democratic Socialist Party *and its assets* into the Alliance. The presumption in that debate and that decision was that the Alliance would avail itself of the DSP's resources as a means to more quickly move toward a MTSP. Contrary to the references made in some of this GLW debate, utilization of the already existing assets – including a newspaper (*The Scottish Socialist Voice*) --of an affiliate was precisely the way that the Scottish Socialist Party proceeded. Indeed nothing in the practice of the Socialist Alliance has ever suggested that we don't make as much use of affiliate resources as we can. The whole impetus of the SA to MTSP process rests on exploiting that core legacy. Even the process of discussing the newspaper question in the first instance began around the option of utilizing journals *already published* by affiliates – and both the ISO and the DSP were formally approached regarding the integration of both *Socialist Worker* and *Green Left Weekly* into the Alliance.

FACT #2: Green Left Weekly exists. A separate Alliance newspaper does not.

This is an important feature of our political existence. *Green Left Weekly* has been a major asset not just for the DSP but the whole socialist left in this country and around the world for over 13 years. We are talking about a journal that is distributed nationally and is read by some 2000-3000 people every week in hard copy format. In contrast, its closest competitor – *Socialist Worker*, the paper of the International Socialist Organisation-- would, I'd guess, sell around 300-350 papers per issue (while formally a fortnightly it now comes out less frequently). Similarly the GLW website is the top political website in Australia – outperforming the ALP and the Greens. *Green Left* even rates highly by international standards*. Currently the new GLW website is recording on average over 8600 separate visits per day (a rise even above 2003 figures). It has a brand name recognised, and known widely - standardly drawing unconditional endorsements from respected activists both from Australia and overseas--with John Pilger being the best known and keenest supporter of GLW. Similarly every edition of *Green Left Weekly* from its inception has carried regular contributions from people who are not and never have been members of the Democratic Socialist Party. This is in marked contrast to any other journal on the Australian left. Indeed its original 1990 charter was constructed as a broad regroupment project. – in the same vein as the Alliance itself.

FACT #3: "A paper of the Alliance, For the Alliance" is a recipe for no paper at all.

The recent petition circulated by the ISO starts from the assumption that really we shouldn't be interested in what already exists –what we need is our own do-it-yourself formula. Even the *Socialist Worker* cannot compete on the same

scale as *Green Left Weekly* so how is the Alliance expected to establish a 'market share' for its hypothetical journal when *Green Left Weekly* already promotes the Alliance vigorously in its pages? Let's leave aside the question who is supposed to sell this DIY journal -- given that most of the literature distributed by the Alliance around the country relies so much on effort and networking primarily by DSP members, the role of other affiliates is at best marginal in this regard. Let's not concern ourselves with distribution -- let's make it easy for the moment and only consider production and publishing.

Anyone can publish a newspaper nowadays -- computerization has changed production protocols such that it is almost straightforward -- but comrades are right to warn us about costs. It isn't cheap to produce and distribute a newspaper of any frequency. On those grounds alone -- as well as aspects of libel -- the Alliance should be wary of committing itself to any publishing project at any time. However, what is obscured in this debate is the fact that this *Green Left Weekly* proposal has no price tag. It's free. *Green Left* will remain a journal published, funded and distributed independently of any formal effort on the part of the Alliance.

I'd call that a gift. Indeed, the whole proposal coming from the DSP in regard to *Green Left Weekly* is exceedingly generous. There is no other word for it.

FACT#4: Publishing material in the journals of all affiliates is no trade off.

Before we start supervising Alliance interventions in the journals of all affiliates, SA members need to recognise that this proposal is designed to *replace* the arrangement we are establishing with GLW. It is either/or. It attempts to treat all journals equally in pursuit of some sort of spurious even handed solution. But if you read these publications you won't find much in them that promotes the Socialist Alliance in the way *Green Left Weekly* is doing and has done. For example, check out the back issues of *Socialist Worker* < <http://www.iso.org.au/socialistworker/> > and compare those with *Green Left Weekly* over the same period < <http://www.greenleft.org.au/index.htm> >.

We aren't talking about the same political process at all. Indeed, while we are being asked to "write, commission and edit" SA material for all affiliate journals these same journals aren't been opened to the ranks of the Alliance in the same way as *Green Left* is being offered. They will remain line journals committed to advocating the various positions of their respective affiliate publishers.

In practical terms unless the Alliance decides to write separate articles for each journal the net result could be that the same article will be published in every one of them. What will decide the issue over time will be ergonomics and writers will simply write copy for the journal that has the largest readership -- *Green Left Weekly* -- and will bother less with the others.

FACT#5: The Socialist Alliance must determine the editorial line of Green Left Weekly.

This is a key point. Why 'sponsor' a newspaper if we don't agree with what goes into it? We need to be assured that the collective (and the diverse) views of the Alliance will be reflected in the pages of *Green Left Weekly*. While we can sign any number of protocols or contracts the proof of the pudding is going to have to be in the reading. Between now and our conference in May we have an opportunity to do just that *before we decide on any permanent arrangement*. That is, what is known as, a "no obligation free trial offer."

Comrades who oppose this partnership are variously saying or inferring or suggesting that this arrangement cannot work, that the DSP cannot be trusted and that its political views will prevail as the primary tilt in *Green Left Weekly*, despite Alliance inputs. This attempt at wedge bogey man politics reprises the arguments that were aired at our last conference around the issue of moving towards a MTSP.

There is only one way to know if they are right or wrong -- and that is through practical experience itself. This is a basic tenet of political activity: *Do. Then see*. Given the arrangement as projected in the SA/GLW protocols that's all that is being asked of us as members of the Alliance: to decide if this offer is genuine or not; to decide whether this offer is practical or not. -- and to do that collectively through a decision of national conference -- our highest decision making body.

* According to Alexa, the *GLW* site is currently ranked 72,949 of all web sites in the world, and 78,829 according to Trafficranking. The next ranked Australian political site is Labor Net, ranked 83,812 by Alexa and 276,983 by Trafficranking, then the Australian Conservation Foundation (133,010 by Alexa), the ALP (245,782), and the Greens (338,208). See article: <http://www.greenleft.org.au/back/2003/563/563p11.htm>

Gender Agenda: A Charter for Women's Rights

The following policy statement adopted by the Socialist Alliance National Executive in February has been published in brochure form, in Green Left Weekly and on the Socialist Alliance web site. It is a first step in developing a national policy on women's rights and is presented for discussion by the Alliance membership in the lead up to the May 2004 national conference.

Imagine

Imagine a world where any woman could walk down any street, day or night, and feel no fear of harassment or assault, and where society denounced domestic violence as so abhorrent that every home was safe.

Imagine a world where girls did not merely dream of being an astronaut, a mechanic, a prime minister or a scaffolder, but said with complete confidence: “That is what I’m going to be when I grow up”.

Imagine a world where parents on their way to work or classes, or just to have some time to themselves, dropped their child off at a child-care centre in their street or workplace happy in the knowledge that their child loves going there, learns new things, and is well-fed and cared for.

Imagine a world where elderly and disabled women live independently and at home for as long as they wish because they have a guaranteed, decent income and there are plenty of community support workers to help with housework, health-care and transport.

Imagine a world where there really is equal pay, and it is *decent* pay so that no woman is forced by poverty into prostitution, or seeing her children go without food or new clothes, or not having the child she wants, or living with someone only because he can pay for her accommodation.

Imagine a world where every woman has a real choice about whether or not to have children, unconstrained by economic or social factors, and where safe, reliable contraception is widely accessible and abortion is freely available.

Imagine a world where women, in all their individuality, love the bodies they were born with, and where women express their sexuality proudly and joyfully, without fear or favour.

Imagine a world where people, not private profits, matter – where *all* people’s basic needs are automatically addressed, and their hopes and dreams for a fulfilling life are valued.

The reality today

In 21st century Australia, women have supposedly achieved equal rights. Yet women still do most of the household chores and the care of children and sick, disabled or elderly relatives. The double burden that this imposes on women who also need to or want to do waged work is barely acknowledged by society.

Whether they are migrant women working 12 hours a day for \$4 an hour in the suburban sweatshops of Sydney or Melbourne, or tertiary educated teachers, nurses or public servants who spends 60% of their wage on child-care fees, or unemployed single mothers on the 200,000-long public housing waiting list, or students trying to survive on Austudy/Abstudy payments, which are now 37% below the poverty line, life for most women in Australia is getting harder every day.

?? Despite the introduction three decades ago of equal pay, affirmative action, equal employment opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation, women’s average weekly earnings are now only 66% of men’s - *less* than they were relative to men’s 10 years ago, and declining.

?? The workforce participation rate of women in Australia is now lower than any comparable industrialised country, and the proportion of women with full-time and/or permanent (as opposed to casual) employment is falling. 70% of all part-time jobs are held by women, but 22% of women working part-time would like more hours. Meanwhile, 30% of male workers are working more than 50 hours a week and more than half of them would like fewer hours.

?? 500,000 women who want to be in the workforce are not, 32% of them because of lack of child care. State and federal government funding for women’s services is less now than it was a decade ago, despite a steady increase in the number of women and children living below the poverty line.

?? Under new tax policies, working-class women with dependent children are being penalised for going out to work - the lower a family’s income, the higher the effective tax rates faced by women who work, and this disparity actually increases with the number of children.

?? A female welfare recipient with dependent children has her welfare payments cut if she partners with a man – *whether or not* she wants to be economically dependent on him, and *whether or not* he can or does support her and her children. Meanwhile, bitter post-divorce disputes over child support are endemic as working-class men struggle to support two families on declining real wages and sole mothers continue to swell the ranks of those living below the poverty line.

?? Most women in prison are there because of crimes of poverty. The system fails to meet the needs of these women and their children then punishes them by putting them in an even more vulnerable situation.

?? In 1996, 23% of women in marriage or de facto relationships suffered domestic violence. There are no more recent figures because the government has cut all funding for collecting them. While women’s refuges have to turn away as many women as they accommodate each night, in 2002 \$10.1 million of funding allocated for domestic violence programs was diverted to pay for the National Security Public Information Campaign’s “anti-terrorism” advertisements and fridge magnets.

?? The rate of sexual assaults reported to the police has increased by around 9% per year over the last few years. The most reliable recent estimates are that around 250 women are raped each day in Australia.

?? In most states abortion is still illegal and is becoming much more difficult for poor, rural and/or young women to obtain. Meanwhile, lesbian couples still cannot adopt children or access IVF programs in most states.

?? As sexist images of women flourish in the mass media, eating disorders and the deaths that result from them are increasing among young women.

A different future

So is our imagined world of justice and equality for women merely an impossible dream?

We don’t think so.

Consider how different Australia would be if the \$43.3 million *per day* that was allocated for military expenditure in the 2003-4 federal budget was redirected to social services. Or if the billions of dollars in private profits that are made each year by Australia's biggest corporations was spent on public and community education. Or if workers and communities had the legislative power to decide how the industries and services they run operated. Or if politicians were truly accountable and could be immediately recalled if they broke their promises or didn't listen to the people between elections.

That would be a very different world for all ordinary people, and especially for women.

Making progress towards an Australia in which there is full economic, social and political equality for women requires, in the first instance, collective opposition to *each and every* government attack on women's rights - as workers, mothers, students, patients and welfare recipients. At the same time, women's ability to exercise these rights regardless of their race, ethnicity, citizenship, religion or disability must be defended and extended.

We demand action

As essential steps towards complete gender equality, the Socialist Alliance demands immediate government action on the following:

For equality and justice in the workplace

- ?? Real equal pay for work of equal or comparable value.
- ?? Automatic wage indexation that corresponds to *real* cost of living increases.
- ?? Increase the minimum wage to a level that recognises that many workers, women and men, are solely responsible for supporting family members.
- ?? Enterprise bargaining and individual contracts disadvantage women workers, who are more often in less organised sectors, so we call for all wage increases and improvements in working conditions to be automatically generalised across each industry.
- ?? Extend full-time and permanent employee entitlements (sick leave, annual leave, etc) to all part-time and casual workers on a pro-rata basis.
- ?? Legislate for and enforce programs in both the private and public sector to encourage and assist more women to be trained and employed in non-traditional jobs.
- ?? 12 months' parenting leave fully paid by employer contributions to a publicly managed scheme; the right to return to the same job; and generous paid leave to allow parents to take time off work to care for sick children and attend school activities.
- ?? Enforce anti-discrimination and affirmative action legislation to assist Indigenous women, non-English speaking background women and disabled women be economically independent.

For independence and equality in family life

- ?? A living wage - which enables a decent quality of life, not just survival - for all welfare recipients and their dependents, and automatic indexation of all welfare benefits to cover real cost of living increases.
- ?? A massive expansion of funding for community/employee-controlled, good quality, free child-care services in communities and, funded by employers, in large workplaces; these services to include after-hours, vacation and occasional care.
- ?? No discrimination in out-of-work-support and parenting payments, regardless of marital status; increase the sole parent benefit for parents of dependent teenage children.
- ?? Abolish all taxation measures that penalise families in which women are engaged in waged work.
- ?? Reverse the privatisation of all utilities and other essential services, which has disproportionately adversely affected women and children.
- ?? Expand affordable, good quality, secure public housing so child-raising can take place in a stable environment.

For women's control of their own bodies

- ?? Remove abortion from all state Crimes Acts and Health Acts and make abortion available safely, free of charge and on demand through the public health-care system.
- ?? Make safe, reliable contraceptives freely available to both women and men; end the prohibition on the import of RU486; make the "morning after" pill available free of charge.
- ?? Enforce the law outlawing sterilisation without a woman's consent.
- ?? No discrimination based on age, sexual preference or marital status for access to reproductive technologies. Women in prison to be able to use contraception, and have access to pregnancy or abortion care if needed.
- ?? Restore Medicare bulk-billing and massively increase funding to public hospitals and community health services.
- ?? Provide free menstrual/sanitary protection for all women as a public health service.
- ?? Improve availability of women-centred pregnancy care, including state funding and insurance for community based midwifery and birth centres.

For an end to sexual violence and exploitation

- ?? Strengthen and strictly enforce laws against sexual harassment.

- ?? Restore and increase funding for women's services to ensure ready access to health centres, rape crisis centres, women's refuges and counselling services for all women and their dependants who need them.
- ?? Launch a community education campaign in the media, schools and all other public institutions to promote positive, non-stereotyped, anti-sexist images of women in all areas of social activity.
- ?? Repeal all laws against prostitution in order to end the criminalisation and victimisation of sex workers, and publicly fund comprehensive health-care, legal and personal support services, and alternative employment opportunities, for sex workers.
- ?? Prosecute Australians who profit from the international sex trade and prostitution, and give full protection and rights to victims of the sex trade in Australia.

Protocols for the Socialist Alliance-Green Left Weekly trial relationship

The following protocols for the Green Left Weekly trial were adopted unanimously by the Socialist Alliance Editorial Board on January 14, then endorsed by the Socialist Alliance National Executive (majority) on February 6, 2004.

1. Green Left Weekly will be run as an independent progressive newspaper that reflects the multi-tendency politics of the socialist movement in this country while engaging in a constructive way with the various strands of progressive politics in the green movement. It will be financially independent i.e. its supporters will continue to raise the funds to run it and it will make no call on the Socialist Alliance for any financial subsidy. However, it will stand by its public declaration of support for the Socialist Alliance project and the line of the editorial column will be kept within the framework of agreed Socialist Alliance policy.
2. The Green Left Weekly editor shall work in close collaboration with the Socialist Alliance editorial board in encouraging Socialist Alliance members and affiliates to contribute articles to the paper. However, it would be expected that the Socialist Alliance editorial board would play a major and pro-active role in this regard.
3. If there is a political disagreement with the Green Left Weekly editor about an article contributed by a Socialist Alliance member or affiliate that matter will be brought to the attention of the Socialist Alliance board or its nominee/s. If the matter cannot be resolved at this level, the matter should be referred to the Socialist Alliance National Conveners. The Green Left Weekly editor will not refuse to publish any article that a majority of the SA National Conveners or a majority of the SA National Executive request to be published. This procedure does not apply to the reasonable exercise of editorial decision-making over issues such as word length, deadlines, legal concerns, basic accuracy, sourcing, etc.
4. The Green Left Weekly editorial and production team will treat constructively any suggestions for changes to the presentation, layout and structure of the paper but will not be obliged carry them out.
5. Green Left Weekly agrees to make available, without charge, space for a dedicated, regular, Socialist Alliance column to directly express the views of the Alliance itself. The length and deadline can be negotiated should the Alliance wish to take this up.
6. Green Left Weekly will continue to publish Socialist Alliance broadsheets as inserts/supplements free of charge. Any run-ons will have to be paid for by the Socialist Alliance.
7. All Socialist Alliance advertisements shall be free. Green Left Weekly will offer a 25% discount on advertising rates to all Socialist Alliance members and affiliates.
8. Around four pages a week shall be made available in Green Left Weekly for discussion of broad political and social issues by Socialist Alliance members/affiliates and accessible to Green Left Weekly readers. However, the Green Left Weekly editor will decide whether articles submitted by Socialist Alliance members belong more properly in Alliance Voices because they are not of broad enough interest to the general readership of Green Left Weekly. If there is a controversy about this that cannot be resolved between the SA editorial board and the Green Left Weekly editor, it will be referred to the National Conveners. The Green Left Weekly editor will abide by a final decision of a majority of the SA National Conveners or a majority of the SA National Executive on such a dispute.
9. None of the above protocols should be used to disrupt the weekly production cycle of Green Left Weekly. Where disputes take time to resolve the editor and staff will have to carry out their work to the best of their ability within what is already agreed between the Socialist Alliance editorial board and the Green Left Weekly editor.
10. Articles contributed by Socialist Alliance members will not automatically have the author identified as a member of Socialist Alliance or of an affiliate group. But where a Socialist Alliance contributor requests their political affiliation to be indicated in the article then such identification shall include the writer's Socialist Alliance membership."

Correction to 2003 National Conference minutes

The Socialist Alliance National executive meeting on March 5, 2004, unanimously passed the following motion:

"That the National Executive correct the minutes of the 2003 National Conference to reflect that there were no objections to the draft policy on "Publicly Owned Transport", and therefore that it was adopted as SA policy."

This correction accords with the recollections and personal notes of both Peter Murray (who moved the policy) and Dick Nichols (who did the conference minutes).

Socialist Alliance greetings to the RESPECT conference

The following greetings were sent by the Socialist Alliance National Conveners to the RESPECT Coalition inaugural conference held in London in January.

Dear comrades and friends,

The Socialist Alliance in Australia congratulates everyone who has come together to make the founding meeting of the RESPECT coalition succeed.

Like you, we face a government enthusiastically committed to supporting George W. Bush's wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Like you, we face a government committed to a neo-liberal war on its own people – workers, students and asylum-seekers.

And like you, we have learnt that the Left can best measure up to its urgent task of providing a credible and strong alternative if we work together, creating a strong and united force.

We wish you well in your deliberations.

Human need, not warmongers' greed – Workers of the world, unite!

Building Socialist Alliance on campuses

The following letter was sent to all Socialist Alliance branches, state committees and affiliates on February 15, 2004.

Dear comrades,

The SA National Conveners' on 9-2-04 discussed building Socialist Alliance's profile and membership on university and TAFE campuses during orientation weeks around the country.

We recognised that campuses are an important arena of recruitment and political activity for socialists, including SA, and decided to write to all SA branches and affiliates to begin to develop a basic framework for raising the profile of SA and deepening left unity on campuses - a framework that we can flesh out throughout the year and in future years.

Specifically, the National Conveners resolved that:

1. All affiliates to Socialist Alliance that will have a presence on any campus during orientation week be asked to highlight the fact that they are an affiliate of SA.

2. These affiliates be encouraged to actively distribute through their stalls, forums, etc. a Socialist Alliance information and recruiting "kit", to be made up by the branch/district committee, which contains:

a) The new SA recruiting leaflet;

b) The national "Education for people not profits" leaflet;

c) The latest issue of *Red Pen*, the newsletter produced by SA members of the NTEU (a new issue will be distributed to branches soon);

d) A copy of the SA Platform;

e) A copy of the current issue of *Socialist Campaigner*; and

f) Any local/city leaflets about upcoming SA activities.

3. SA branches that are located near a university or TAFE campus and/or that have members who study or work on a campus be encouraged to discuss and if possible organise a recruiting stall/presence on the relevant campus during orientation week. These stalls could be organised in addition to, or instead of affiliates' stalls if there are sufficient branch members able to help staff it.

In coming months, the National Conveners and SA's NTEU caucus will continue to discuss the Alliance's work in the education campaign, as well as other campaigns (such as how we take SA's federal election campaign onto campuses), including joint work with affiliates' campus clubs.

Socialist Alliance statements media releases

Open letter to ALP National Conference participants

Socialist Alliance distributed the following open letter to participants at the ALP National Conference in Sydney in February, 2004.

Make Labor an opposition worth voting into government

The Howard government is creating a two-tier Australia – one for the rich, another for the poor. It is trying to smash the unions, destroy Medicare, make universities too expensive for workers, and seal a “free trade” agreement with the US which will line big business’ pockets while impoverishing ordinary people. It created the asylum seeker “crisis”, took us into the Iraq war and is flexing its military muscles throughout the region in the hope that fears about “national security” will overwhelm the resentment that working people feel at the attacks on our living conditions.

Working people desperately want the Liberals out at the next election - but the ALP leaders are offering a paltry alternative. To be an opposition that’s actually worth voting into office, this ALP conference needs, at the very least, to commit the party to:

End Australia’s economic and military alliance with the US

?? Immediately withdraw all Australian military personnel from Iraq, and pressure the US to do the same

?? Stop the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement

?? Close all US bases in Australia

Free the refugees

Let the refugees in

Close all detention centres

Give full rights and support services to all TPV holders

Stop the racist “war on terror”

?? No Ministry of Homeland Security

?? Repeal all “anti-terror” legislation and protect all people’s civil rights

?? Repeal the Border Protection Act

Strengthen public health and education

?? Defend and extend Medicare and the PBS, and end private health insurance subsidies

?? Massively increase funding for public hospitals and health care services

?? Provide free, quality public education at all levels, and end government funding to private schools

Reverse the attacks on workers and trade unions

?? Repeal the Workplace Relations Act and legalise industry and category-wide bargaining and contracts

?? Repeal sections 45D and E of the Trades Practices Act, which outlaw solidarity actions across industries

?? Put real penalties into industrial health and safety legislation.

This short list of basic measures would make a huge improvement to ordinary people’s quality of life. If the ALP was to adopt these policies, it would not only re-gain much of the credibility it has lost over the last decade as a real opposition, it would decisively win the next election.

Socialist Alliance calls on all delegates to the 2004 national conference who believe that putting working people’s needs before private profit is a principle worth fighting for to take a much-needed stand at this conference and provide a voice for all those - both inside and outside the party - who want an end to war, refugee prisons, privatisation and poverty, and who want a government that will represent the millions of ordinary people, not the corporate millionaires.”

Grant the Nauru hunger strikers Australian citizenship

The following media release was issued by the Socialist Alliance on January 6, 2004:

There is an obvious, simple and humane solution to the tragedy unfolding on Nauru - grant Australian citizenship to the 248 refugees who have been detained there for more than two and a half years.

The alternative - to allow innocent victims of repression to starve to death - is intolerable in a modern civilised society. It is tantamount to murder.

The hunger strike by more than 40 Afghan asylum seekers imprisoned on Nauru is a desperate plea for justice. After three weeks on strike, the asylum seekers are suffering severe kidney pain and festering sores, and many are so weak they cannot move. For some, death is imminent.

This is not something people choose to do to themselves if they have any other options. Being forced to return to war-torn Afghanistan is not an option.

If the Howard government had any regard for human rights it would immediately agree to the AMA's request to send doctors to Nauru to provide medical treatment to the hunger strikers.

If the Howard government had nothing to hide it would ensure that the media had unimpeded access to the detention centre and all detainees on Nauru.

If the Howard government listened to the Australian people, it would grant immediate refugee status to the Nauru detainees, release them from detention and welcome them to Australia.

This crisis makes it clearer than ever that a more lasting solution is needed. Socialist Alliance calls for the immediate granting of Australian citizenship to all remaining asylum seekers on Nauru, and to all those still detained in the mainland refugee camps.

We demand that the Australian government acknowledge that a life without insecurity, persecution or fear is a basic human right for all, and that it immediately:

?? Dismantle the so-called Pacific solution

?? Stop the deportations of asylum seekers

?? End mandatory detention and close all detention centres

?? Grant permanent protection, full rights and settlement assistance to all refugees.

We call on the ALP opposition to abandon its tacit acceptance of the Coalition government's abuse of refugees and asylum seekers, and do everything in its power to ensure a humane and just resolution for those on Nauru, and in all Australia's detention centres."

No justice, no peace! Indigenous Redfern is right to resist!

The following media release was issued by the Socialist Alliance on February 17, 2004:

The death of Thomas (TJ) Hickey is a direct result of institutionalised oppression and state racism, the Socialist Alliance declared today.

"When young people in Redfern are treated like animals by the police, when their area is put under armed occupation, when they are taunted by police with offensive language, is it any wonder that the dam breaks and people fight back," said Socialist Alliance state co-convenor Paul Benedek.

"TJ's death was not an isolated incident. His family says that TJ himself was beaten up by police only weeks ago. All young indigenous people in Redfern know that this tragedy could have been them. The police have behaved like conquerors in Redfern for decades."

Socialist Alliance state co-convenor Kieran Latty added: "NSW opposition leader John Brogden has called for the Block to be bulldozed. But you cannot bulldoze state racism or years of oppression. Replacing the Block with yuppie townhouses will not rid us of the festering sore of racism.

"A fraction of the \$50 billion the Howard government is planning to squander on military hardware would solve the practical problems facing all poor Australians – indigenous and non-indigenous."

"But central to a real answer has to be indigenous self-determination. Centuries of racism can only be overcome when its victims reclaim real power over their lives," added Susan Price, Socialist Alliance candidate in the City of Sydney council elections.

"The Socialist Alliance defends the right of the youth of Redfern to resist, and to win community control of the area. Without justice, there can be no peace," Price said.

Anti-war critics slam Howard's new intelligence inquiry

The following media release was issued by the Socialist Alliance on March 7, 2004:

Socialist Alliance anti-war spokesperson Pip Hinman said today that the PM's new intelligence inquiry would be a whitewash.

"Mounting pressure on the government to explain why it joined the Coalition of the Willing's preemptive attack on Iraq - particularly since no weapons of mass destruction have been found in Iraq - has forced this new inquiry", said Hinman. "But, with a former head of the ONA - Philip Flood - as chairperson, and the prescriptive terms of reference, this inquiry looks set to be nothing but an expensive whitewash."

The inquiry's terms of reference mean it will only focus on the Office of National Assessment's processes, and not on the main issue - an investigation into the government's actions based on the available intelligence in the lead-up to the Iraq war. Further, the inquiry will only report to the National Security Committee of Cabinet - the crooks who lied to take Australia to war.

Hinman also criticised the appointment of Philip Flood, a former ONA chief and a former ambassador to Indonesia between 1989-1993. According to John Pilger, Flood helped conceal a series of killings by the Indonesian military after the 1991 Santa Cruz massacre in Dili, East Timor.

The Socialist Alliance's Luke Deer said that, despite its flaws, the full inquiry revealed how the government had lied to the Australian people.

"While the PM claims this report vindicates the government's decision to join the pre-emptive attack on Iraq, the opposite is the case, as what's already on the public record indicates", said Deer.

The report, based on information provided to the government by the ONA and the Defence Intelligence Organisation, concluded that the government's main arguments for war - that Iraq possessed WMDs in large quantities and therefore represented a "grave and unacceptable threat" to the region and the world - was wrong.

Socialist Alliance supports the Greens' call for a Royal Commission into the invasion of Iraq, and calls on the ALP too as well.

"The inquiry has to really be independent; it has to have the power to subpoena everyone - from the PM down. It also needs to have broad enough terms of reference to get to the truth about how the government used the intelligence. Anything else will be a waste of public money," said Hinman.

"We don't have to wait for another Howard cover-up. Socialist Alliance is encouraging everyone who opposed the war to make this year's federal election a referendum on Howard and his war on Iraq by voting his government out", concluded Deer.

Socialist Alliance members are active in anti-war coalitions organising protests on March 20 - the anniversary of the invasion of Iraq.

