

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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2004 National Conference agenda at a glance

Uniting to fight war and neo-liberalism

FRIDAY

7.30 Public meeting conference launch, Trades Hall

SATURDAY

9.00-9.05 Welcome

9.05-9.15 Procedural motions

9.15-9.30 New affiliates

9.30 Australian Politics Today and the Tasks of the Socialist Alliance

11.15 Morning Tea

11.30 Socialist Alliance's Trade Union Work

1.00 Lunch

2.00-3.40 Publications

(i) Newspaper

(ii) Seeing Red

(iii) Book on socialism

4.30 International Solidarity

5.30 Pack up

5.30-7.00 Union caucuses

7.00 Defend Craig Johnston - Defend militant unionism dinner

SUNDAY

8.30 Registration opens

9.00 Leadership structure and Constitution changes

10.15 Morning Tea

10.30 Building the Socialist Alliance

12noon Developing Socialist Alliance Policy

1.00 Lunch

2.00 Policy session continued

3.30 Election of leadership bodies

5.00 Close and Internationale

The Two Alliances

By Dave Riley (Brisbane Central/Northern branch)

As we approach this conference I think it is important for comrades to note the existence of two Alliances where seemingly only one exists. There is a divide that festers in the Socialist Alliance which has determined the format of our organisational debates over the last twelve months.

At its core rests the issue of the Alliance moving towards becoming a multi tendency socialist party (MTSP) - and variously comrades locate themselves relative to that question. Some do so more consciously than others and this is reflected in the various positions members may adopt at different stages in this ongoing debate.

This issue was clearly established as the dividing line at our last conference where the Alliance by an overwhelming majority of some 75% endorsed the trajectory of the MTSP. At this coming conference, this issue is again in dispute although it is not so clearly delineated. But comrades should be in no doubt that underlying the debate on the Green Left Weekly trial and the question of national restructuring lies the dynamic of how and at what pace we will advance toward becoming a multi tendency socialist party.

I have intervened previously on the GLW issue with a contribution entitled Green Left Weekly: Why look a gift horse in the mouth? (Alliance Voices, Volume 4 No 3: March 11, 2004) which presented five facts about this debate which the opponents of the GLW trail have, to put it bluntly, simply ignored. They have ignored these facts primarily because I raised very strongly the spectre of the MTSP and bracketed my contribution within that trajectory. So let me put it clearly once again: exploring the Green Left Weekly option is the best way we can move toward a MTSP. The alternative proposals on this question are engineered to frustrate that end.

On the issue of national leadership restructuring of the Alliance, the MTSP aspect may not be so self evident as the question of how and at what pace we organisationally move ahead is not clear cut. But I strongly object to any notion that any change in the way we run our national structures should be dismissed out of hand as though we live in a Panglossian state of adequacy. We cannot advance and develop the Alliance with our current structures prevailing

because they have fostered an everyday division in the Alliance between those who do the work and those who make the decisions. Comrades who are the most active in the SA's day to day work - who lead locally or head up our national campaigns - are not adequately represented in our national executive.

Instead of a true "executive" body, ours functions more like a Senate - where all the work is minuted and done off stage, and in many instances, by other people. In the Alliance you need to ask the question: who's minding the store?

Indeed under our current setup there is no obligation on the part of our NE or NC membership to actually involve themselves in the day to day work of the Alliance. Instead, the motor of the Alliance nationally rests with our steering committees which are backed up by the commitment and cadre resources primarily of the DSP.

I may be old fashion, but I believe that a leadership's role is to lead. Decision making is a process enriched through involvement in the political businesses to hand. So we have to find a way to integrate our national decision making with the day to day work we are doing. Our tasks are not something "other people" are supposed to achieve - instead it has to be collectively fostered.

The problem is that while we remain hostage to small affiliate concerns or to the supposition that the DSP must be progressively handicapped through an ongoing process of disenfranchisement - then we will forever be blind as to what is actually happening in the Alliance. We'll just assume that it does happen - and that's precisely what we do now.

Long term this dynamic will resolve itself as it is being gradually resolved at the branch and district level. The problem nationally is that the pressures are so great that we need to act now if we want to attain the sort of efficiencies we aspire to. Our steering committees are living a tangential existence relative to the National Executive/Convenors. Their work has to slow down to slot into the rythmn of the formal leadership bodies while there is no direct relationship between the two.

The other co-efficient of the Alliance's duality is that our branches are politically marginalised by this same process. The less the national leadership is involved in day to day deliberations allied to the concrete

assessment of what's happening at the coal face - the less relevant are its considerations to the branches.

Being on the NE is like living in two separate floors of the same building - with hardly a stair case between them.

I can afford to say this because as well as serving on the NE, I also serve on the election steering committee and the GLW board. I am also my branch and district co-convenor. While I may either be stupid or consecrated in this regard, at least I have had experience of the Alliance at all levels. To simply ignore the problems we face won't make them go away.

The further out you swim, the further down you sink

By Jonathan Strauss (Marrickville branch)

This is a partial response to the Socialist Democracy and Workers League (SD/WL) contributions on Socialist Alliance perspectives (*Alliance Voices*, vol. 4, nos 4 and 7). It discusses how a "new cycle of working class militancy" can be understood to exist and how Socialist Alliance should then relate to it

The first SD/WL contribution said the levels of industrial disputes and union membership show "workers are in a largely defensive position". These measures are at historical lows, but the significance of this is not as clear as the contribution suggests.

The numbers of days lost in strikes in 2003 (419,700) was half what it was 1996 (928,500), the contribution said. Yet mass radicalisation among workers is usually associated with relatively rare strike waves - in Australia, from 1916-20, perhaps at the close of WWII, and from 1969-76 (days lost peaking at 6.29 million in 1974) and 1979-81. From this point of view, a low level of industrial militancy has existed since the Accords under the Hawke and Keating governments: there has been no significant change between 1996 and today.

The contribution also says union membership grew "throughout much of the 20th century" until 1962, then declined before growing again during the 1970s and then steadily declining to its current low. Total union membership as a proportion of the workforce, or union density, shows the following high and low points, after this dropped below 10% in the 1890s (source: David Peetz, *Unions in a Contrary World*, chapter 1: first series, Australian Bureau of Statistics union censuses, discontinued 1996; second series, ABS household surveys):

1921	53%
1927	58%
1934	42%
1953	63%
1970	49%
1975	56%
1985	49% (financial members)
1990	46%(financial members)
1996	35%
1976	51%
1982	49.5%
1992	39.6%
1997	30.3%
2002	23%

Thus, union membership has risen and fallen much more than SD/WL suggest. These rises and falls are the result a number of influences of union membership. Rises appear to be associated with, among other things, periods of political radicalisation and the influence of interventions by radicals - such as the IWW and CPA, but also ALP-oriented socialists - in the unions, which occurred during and after WWI, during the 1930s depression and WWII and in the latter half of the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s. (The apparent lags between periods of radicalisation and movements in union density - membership growth in the 1920s and early 1950s, decline in the early 1930s and maintenance in the latter half of the 1970s - might be explained by the delay in entry into the unions of radicalised young unemployed workers, apprentices and students, but unfortunately the union censuses do not show the age spread of union members.)

If political radicalisation and radicals' interventions are important to union growth - for example, by helping to generate and coordinate the active members, delegates, organisers and officials who can lead a resurgence of the labour movement - the SD/WL claim that "the primary task" of SA "is to build up union membership and to re-establish some basic union consciousness" must be questioned. Their statement that "many union leaderships themselves, *facing the prospect of going out of existence*, have been forced to focus on these issues" (emphasis added) suggests why that perspective is a problem.

Can SA find strategic agreement with those "many union leaderships"? Our aim is different to theirs - class struggle unionism as opposed to the simple survival of unions, or, very often, the union apparatuses in particular. Thus, although Socialist Alliance must be aware the class collaborationist leaders have and will continue to take measures to stop membership decline, we can surely not find anything to celebrate in some of the examples given by SD/WL in their second contribution: a possible rise in the membership of the Health Services Union in NSW because of the introduction of a bargaining fee for non-members equivalent to union dues; or the NTEU defeat of the Howard government's plan to tie university funding to draconian industrial relations practices, which, having been achieved largely by parliamentary lobbying, left students high and dry, in terms of solidarity *action* by the union in the face of the Nelson cutbacks.

For SA, building up union membership and basic union consciousness must be indissolubly linked to developing more class conscious unionism. This combination is needed because socialists in the unions will win nothing for our class' struggle if they do not begin to explain their politics and win support for this.

The two SD/WL contributions seem to warn us against the latter task, continually speaking of the "need to have some revolutionaries in the unions who have won a base" and, vaguely, of a need to not "short-cut the struggle to build in the unions". Yet SA must give it special attention. Indeed, the latter is a task only more class conscious, socialist workers can carry out.

If we wished to historically compare our situation we could note, for example, that at the beginning of the 1930s the CP can hardly have had a large union base (it led only the coalminers' union), since it had only a few hundred members, and yet, through about 15 years work pursuing both industrial and political questions in the unions, it won the leadership of a substantial minority of the Australian unions (despite its Stalinism). This example is important in addressing the question posed by SD/WL about what is new in this militant currents compared with those of the 1980s and early 1990s: not only does the militant current exist in several unions, but it is already associated with a socialist political organisation, SA, which can bring to it both a broader perspective of struggle and activists across a broader range of unions. And in this we can already find the answer to the SD/WL question: "What sort of a perspective do we offer" SA members in other unions for their work?

Workers in Iraq under threat from Islamist "armed resistance"

By Janet Burstall (Sydney Central branch)

Introduction:

Amendments will be moved by Workers Liberty to the report on the anti-war campaign. These amendments will be in accordance with the views on the workers movement in Iraq, expressed below.

The amendments will aim to overcome the contradictory nature of the NE resolution, which claims to be in solidarity with the both the resistance and women and trade unions. The resolution fails to recognise the real threat that Islamism poses to the workers movement and women. Building solidarity with the workers and women's movements in Iraq is equally as important as building rallies against the occupation. This NE resolution proclaiming solidarity is disingenuous because the SA has done nothing to implement a National Executive decision to raise funds for the Unemployed Union of Iraq.

There is a growing workers movement in Iraq, and the "armed resistance" is its mortal enemy.

There are 3 union groups in Iraq - the Federation of Workers Councils and Unions in Iraq - including the Unemployed Union of Iraq; the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions and the General Federation of Unions in Iraq.

The General Federation is the reconstructed Baathist state union body, anti-working class, and a fake "yellow union".

The FWCUI is led by the Worker-Communist Party of Iraq. It does not recognise the Interim Governing Council. It has organised many demonstrations of unemployed workers, and other campaigns, and has quite a developed set of demands and policies, including a draft Labor law.

The IFTU is led by, but includes currents other than, the Communist Party of Iraq. It recognises the IGC, and in turn is recognised by the IGC.

Relations between the IFTU and the FWCUI are poor, with considerable antagonism on the part of the WCPI, on the basis of the CPI connection and the CPI's membership of the IGC.

There is an urgent need for a unifying set of demands for the interests of the workers in both union federations including around ending the occupation, and a sincere effort by the leaders of the FWCUI to make common cause with the ranks of the IFTU.

Mobilising solidarity with Iraqi workers is complicated by this split. The main discussions and attempts at resolution have been on the part of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions, at meetings in Jordan late in 2003, early 2004. The unfortunate presence of the Iraqi General Federation of Trade Unions complicated matters. The GFTU is NOT a genuine union body, but its presence is required by the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions and especially the Syrian union body, which is itself state run. The FWCUI sees the IGC recognition of the IFTU as state endorsement, making it not a real union.

However left union delegates from Britain, the Fire Brigades Union and the RMT, have toured Iraq, and visited IFTU affiliated factories and workplaces, and have been convinced that these are independent unions. Further, the large and significant Southern Oil Company union considered affiliation to both Federations and chose the IFTU.

US Labor Against the War is conducting an energetic solidarity campaign in the USA and deals with this split between the Iraqi unions by sharing its fund-raising results 50:50 between the 2 federations.

The picture is not entirely clear, but in the face of the 2 main forces in Iraq, the US Occupation and the Islamist/Baathist reactionary armed resistance, a third way is desperately needed for the people of Iraq, and by the workers in particular. Tariq Ali said in *Seeing Red*, there are no signs of hope in any movements developing in the Middle East. Reaction abounds he says, and a secular movement is needed.

The role of the Mahdi army and al-Sadr have been explained in detail by WCPI authors (*A week of war of terrorists* - <http://www.workersliberty.org/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=2084>) . In Nasariyah workers in aluminium and sanitary supplies factories recently defended their factories from being commandeered by the Islamist militia, as well as preventing the occupying forces from remaining in residential areas.

Iraqi independence after the US occupation could be the replacement of one murderous dictatorship - Baathist, by another - Islamist. Socialists around the world have a responsibility to do all they can to strengthen working class forces and supporters of secularism and freedom in Iraq. Or else they could end up jailed, tortured and murdered, as happened in Iraq after the fall of the US backed Shah, when the Islamists took power.

It is inexcusable for working class internationalists to say that these things do not matter, with reasoning such as "sorting out the political ideologies among those in the struggle (against the occupation) has to be decided by the people. This is after all what it means to support the right of nations to self-determination." (Pip Hinman, *Seeing Red*, March 2004, p. 15)

Self-determination means that the people of a country should be free to choose their own government without coercion or intervention from other governments, armies or states. It is most peculiar to read socialist saying that to identify and support working class interests in internal struggles in other countries represents a violation of rights of self-determination.

There are other arguments for ignoring the reactionary nature of the "armed resistance" and consequently neglecting to provide real solidarity to the Iraqi workers' movement.

The main argument is that the USA is so much greater an evil that all mobilisation must be directed against the USA and its allies. The USA may be a greater evil in the sense that it has such vast military power and potential to intervene almost anywhere on the planet, supporting any kind of hideous dictators that will accommodate their interests. But the Islamists in power are a greater evil in a different sense in that for workers, socialists and any oppositionists, every moment of public life is potentially dangerous if they do not submit. For women every moment of public and private life is potentially dangerous with the added power of men in the family backed by Sharia law. It is not only pointless, it is not moral to rate the evil that we will choose as greater or lesser amongst these two. To choose the "armed resistance" as the lesser evil, is to say that if the people of Iraq must suffer the risk of Islamist rule, then that is the price they pay for thwarting USA imperialism in Iraq to the benefit of anyone else threatened by the USA.

Another argument is that to condemn the Islamists is to logically have to support the Occupation. This is only the logic of "lesser evilism" and "two camps". If we recognise that the Iraqi working class and secular forces are struggling to assert themselves in Iraq, then there is a third way, that is neither the "armed resistance" nor the US occupation.

The beginnings of working class organisation in Iraq are fragile because of the dangerous opponents they face, but the WCPI is hundreds of times bigger and more influential in the Iraqi working class, than the SA is in Australia, in a roughly similar size population. The seeds of the secular movement which is needed are struggling, and they need international working class solidarity.

It does matter who ends the occupation. If the Islamists end it, they will triumph over the people of Iraq. If the workers movement can play a strong role in ending the occupation and can struggle for their demands in the creation of a new Iraqi government, then they can at least win rights and freedoms that will allow them to maintain their organisations and develop their struggles. They could be a beacon and an inspiration to the masses of the Middle East that there is a way out of the reactionary mess.

More reservations on the Revised Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group Proposal on National Leadership Bodies

By Maureen Murphy (Wills branch)

I welcome David Srimgeour's contribution to Alliance Voices (Vol 4, No 10) on the non-aligned caucus working group proposal on national leadership bodies. As a non-aligned member on the National Executive, I am also unable to support the Revised Proposal, although I recognize it is a vast improvement on the initial unwieldy and less democratic proposal outlined in Alliance Voices (Vol 4, No 2).

The non-aligned representatives on the National Executive are now very clearly split over the rate, pace and type of change proposed in building the Socialist Alliance. All the non-aligned members on the National Executive were signatories to the Non-Aligned Caucus proposal to the 2003 National Conference to transform the Socialist Alliance into a Multi-Tendency Socialist Party (MTSP). However differences of opinion on how best to do this are beginning to emerge.

My greatest concern is that unless we proceed slowly and cautiously, we are in very real danger of building a Single-Tendency Socialist Party, namely the DSP. Over the past 12 months the national office of the Socialist Alliance is now located at the national office of the DSP, many of the branch offices of the DSP have now become Socialist Alliance offices, the national weekly newspaper of the DSP is now being trialed as the weekly newspaper of the Alliance, and non-DSP members in SA branches are being encouraged to sell it. If I wanted to build the DSP, I would have joined them. Instead I wanted to build something broader, hence I joined the Socialist Alliance.

It would be a misrepresentation of these real and valid concerns, to characterise all those who share them as against building the Alliance or as anti-DSP, as has been suggested by some within the Alliance, including some non-aligned members on the NE.

Similar to David Srimgeour, I have valued the political perspectives and input from the non-DSP affiliates at National Conference and on the National Executive. The other affiliates carry with them years of valuable experience and insight, and have often acted as a counter-point to DSP perspectives. This diversity of views is to be encouraged, and is truly what a Multi-tendency Socialist Party should be about. The leadership proposal before us further entrenches DSP power within the Socialist Alliance.

Leadership proposals which marginalise or disenfranchise non-DSP affiliates will ultimately work against the Alliance. If the Alliance splits with affiliates and non-aligned members leaving the Alliance because it is seen as DSP-controlled and operated, that would be a great setback for working class politics for many years to come. It would undermine the great achievements and advances made thus far.

DSP member, Dick Nichols, in his contribution supporting the Revised Leadership Proposal says our leadership principal should be "Those who lead shall work, those who work shall lead". Whilst recognising the concern of the DSP that they are not adequately represented on the NE given the amount of work they do and their membership numbers, it is also a truism and self-fulfilling prophecy. If the local Alliance office is also the DSP office, of course DSP members will be more comfortable using that space; if the trial Socialist Alliance newspaper is also the DSP newspaper, of course DSP members will be more inclined to write for it and sell it. If the DSP sets the agenda for the Alliance, of course their members will be more inclined to implement that agenda.

My own experience working alongside DSP members in the Victorian Trade Union Steering Committee over the past two years has been fraught at times, resisting attempts to "takeover" and control the agenda. Fighting to have a workshop for unorganised workers with appropriate panelists at a trade union seminar in October last year was a major battle, after which I felt disillusioned and exhausted. The end result of this after two years is that the committee is now inactive.

The current NE structure is flawed and organising monthly NE phone hook-ups with 21-23 NE members has been difficult. However shifting to bi-monthly hookups with 29-33 people does not seem to be the solution. Let's proceed slowly and cautiously and examine the ramifications of existing proposals. Rather than being reactive, responding to yet another new initiative alongside the already enormous weekly newspaper initiative, let's take some time for some careful forward planning. Why the great rush?

National leadership structures: they are broke, they should be repaired

By Lisa Macdonald (National Co-convenor, Sydney West branch) and Dick Nichols (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

The debate about our leadership structures has broken out late in the run-up to the Third National Conference. Given that this is a controversial issue and that conference has a heap of concerns on its plate, delegates must be feeling a strong temptation to let sleeping dogs lie and continue with our present leadership formula

It is to this sentiment that comrade David Glanz appeals in his contribution "Let's get out of this muddle" (*Alliance Voices*, Vol 4 No 10). In it he indicates that "the ISO will be moving a procedural motion that the motion on leadership structure [proposed by the Non-aligned Caucus Working Group] 'lay on the table' so that we can give ourselves time to come back next year with a system we can all support."

Here we argue that it would be a serious mistake to support comrade David Glanz's proposal. It would undermine the Alliance's ability to carry out the work we have before us, as well as that projected in the resolutions that will be coming before conference. It would restrict our potential to grow.

A. The two questions delegates must answer

In grappling with the NAC Working Group proposal conference delegates will have to satisfy themselves that they have the right answers to two questions:

- Does the present leadership structure *really* need fixing?
- If yes, will the NAC Working Group proposal *really* provide an improvement?

B. Does the present leadership structure really need fixing?

In Dick's original analysis of the state of Alliance national leadership structures (*Alliance Voices* Vol 4 No 8) he gave four broad reasons why our present leadership structures aren't working. While neither comrade David Glanz nor comrade David Scrimgeour (*Alliance Voices* Vol 4, No 10) have questioned this analysis, it may well be difficult for conference delegates to know what to believe. This is precisely because the operation of the national Socialist Alliance is so remote from the life of the Alliance branches.

To help delegates make an informed judgment here's a summary of the facts about our national leadership situation, grouped under the four broad headings of the original analysis.

"There is no real representation on the NE of the political life of the Alliance at the branch, state and territory levels"

We have not had time to confirm with every state and territory, but to our knowledge *not one* state or territory conference has taken a report on or made suggestions to the National Executive in the last year; and not one branch has submitted a resolution or made a suggestion to the NE.

Result: The political life and debate of the Alliance's National Executive is *overwhelmingly irrelevant* to the branches. Insofar as the national organisation matters it's as a source of resources ("When are the stickers arriving?", "Haven't you people finished the manifesto yet?", etc, etc).

"The NE does not directly oversee the bulk of the national work of the Alliance"

The bulk of the national work of the Alliance is carried out by the various working groups and steering committees set up by the NE since the last conference. Of these five bodies (trade union committee, anti-war steering committee, national elections working group, *Seeing Red* editorial board, Socialist Alliance editorial board) only *four* NE comrades (Brian Webb, Dave Riley, Maureen Murphy and Peter Boyle) participate on the NE *and* a national working body. Add in the five National Conveners and only nine of the 23 members of the present NE are involved in actually implementing national Alliance work.

"Those who take responsibility for important areas of national Alliance work are not on the NE"

The areas of work where there is no direct channel to the NE are: anti-war, trade union and *Seeing Red*.

"The Alliance national apparatus is stretched to the limit and without time to properly plan and encourage the involvement of Alliance members in the wide range of Alliance work."

- The Alliance has yet to produce updated media statements and national leaflets on the following issues: the war on terrorism and Howard's anti-terrorism laws; Latham's immigration and refugee policy; Latham on the "end" of multiculturalism; the Laws-Jones-Howard affair; Labor's IR policy and much more;
- Our web site too often falls behind the pace of political events;
- Our policy development effort, while under way and registering good initial successes at this conference, is still a long way behind where it should be, especially given the level of interest "out there" in policies alternative to Labor and the Coalition;
- The national money-raising effort for the election campaign hasn't begun;
- We have had to postpone the introduction of our national finance system;
- The Alliance national office has managed to produce only one issue of *Socialist Campaigner* this year.

There's a whole lot more that's crying out to be done if we are to get the national Alliance up to speed. Comrades attending the conference will get a clear idea of this when they visit our "Volunteer here!" table, where a wide range of national work will be laid out, and everyone asked to think seriously about what they might contribute.

C. Doesn't the solution to these problems lie at the local level and in the national working committees?

In his contribution comrade David Scrimgeour says: "I believe the main work of the SA should be within the branches and within working committees, and that this is where our energies should be directed, rather than towards building up more centralised decision-making bodies."

The implication is that the problems outlined above can be resolved *if only* we put more effort into building the branches and the [national] working committees. But this misses the central question, namely, *can the national working committees successfully grow and carry out their work in the absence of a change in the structure and method of work of the National Executive itself?*

To make headway here the Socialist Alliance needs a National Executive that is capable *not just* of representing all the outlooks within SA *but also* of discussing and deciding on how to get Alliance members involved in carrying out the decisions we vote for.

For that discussion and decision-making to be real those comrades who are actually leading up this work have to be on the National Executive. If they are not, one of two things tends to happen: either the work doesn't get done or gets

done badly (with the consequent depressing impact on morale and commitment) or it gets done behind the back of the National Executive, i.e., undemocratically.

Here the critical problem is the shortage of comrades on the National Executive who are prepared to take responsibility for leading areas of work. Those who could contribute to this critical job are either reluctant because of other matters they see as more important, or those who presently carry the burden of work so simply haven't had the time to propose and help develop the sort of structures that would convince others to participate.

That can only begin to be solved when we have a National Executive that really takes responsibility for making the national work of the Alliance happen.

Other suggestions for getting comrades involved, such as comrade Riki Lane's proposal (see Alliance Voices, Vol 4, No 10) that all working group meetings be advertised on the web and in Socialist Campaigner, and that they have e-lists (which already exist) are useful, but they won't in and of themselves solve this central problem of a split between those who make the decisions and those who do the work.

D. Isn't the proposed structure too complicated and unwieldy?

"Complicated", "unwieldy and complex", "bureaucrat's folly", "wealth of impenetrable detail": such are terms that comrades David Glanz and Michael Morphett have used to describe the proposal from the NAC Working Group. There's a very big dose of demagogic exaggeration in all this.

The proposal changes the NE formula adopted at the last conference in only two, perfectly understandable, ways.

Affiliate representation: Instead of two representatives for large affiliates and one for small, all affiliates would have one representative for every 50 members (or part thereof) who are financial members of Socialist Alliance.

Branch and territory representatives: Instead of the states and territories being "represented" by non-aligned NE representatives they didn't elect, these representatives would be elected by the states and territories, in proportion to their share of the national membership of Socialist Alliance. The non-aligned representatives would continue to hold a guaranteed majority on the National Executive.

If conference votes to adopt the NAC Working Group proposal, how would the National Executive be elected? In the following simple enough way:

- The affiliates would nominate their allocated number of NE representatives;
- The state and territory representatives (equaling the total number of affiliate representatives plus one) would be divided between the states and territories according to their share of the national membership of Socialist Alliance;
- The state and territory representatives would be elected by their conference delegations using the Single Transferable Vote system we use to elect delegates to conference. (Note: the new computer program developed by comrade Karl Miller has enormously simplified the counting of STV results);
- Conference would vote to endorse the results.

The states and territories choices of representatives would be ratified by the first state and territory conferences after the National Conference. If any conference wished to hold the election for their NE representatives again, it could.

E. Comrade David Glanz says: "How many members will have realised that the new formula would decisively shift power towards the National Conveners, who would be meeting weekly, and away from the National Executive, which would meet every two months?"

Unfortunately, this is also exaggeration, designed to stir up fear of an all-powerful group of National Conveners usurping the power of the National Executive. Delegates should remember:

- That the NAC Working Group's formula for the election of the National Conveners *remains unchanged*; it must have two non-aligned members at least. In addition, the DSP would prefer to see a National Conveners' group made up of two non-aligned, 1 ISO, 1 DSP and 1 smaller affiliate.
- That the idea behind making National Executive meetings less frequent is *not* so that the important decisions can be shifted to the National Conveners, *but to make time for the working groups to meet as real sub-committees of the National Executive*. The idea is to *create time* so that more National Executive comrades can really participate in implementing the Alliance's work, as outlined in comrade Louise Walker's motion on behalf of the NAC Working Group (see *Alliance Voice* Vol 4, No 10). This will provide the extra collective thought and energy that will allow the working groups to build on what they have achieved over the last year.
- What is being proposed is not "decisive" but would apply only until next conference, where it will be reconsidered in the light of a further year of Alliance-building. We have changed our Alliance leadership formula at each conference to date, not, as comrade Morphett states, because we are addicted to restructuring to give the illusion of progress, but because the Alliance is a rapidly evolving political organism in which our organizational forms can quickly get out of kilter with our political needs.
- Under the proposed change the powers of the National Conveners would remain unchanged, the working groups would become the direct responsibility of the National Executive, and the National Executive would *take responsibility* for the work it and conference decides.

F. Comrade David Scrimgeour: "The restructuring seems to allow a greater voice for the DSP at the expense of the smaller affiliates"

The proposal certainly allows a greater voice for the DSP, but this still falls well short of the actual share of DSP comrades in the membership of the Alliance and the actual share of national Alliance work done by DSP comrades. Also, it does not take place "at the expense of" anyone. All affiliates retain their representation; the non-affiliated retain a majority; everyone is encouraged to participate in the national work of the Alliance. How does any current in the Alliance suffer from this?

G. Conclusion

Conference delegates should carefully consider what a vote in favour of maintaining the present leadership structure will mean:

- The gulf between local and national Alliance life will remain;
- Maintenance of the existing representation formula for affiliates ensures that the National Executive will not take direct responsibility for our national work. It will consequently be harder to involve non-aligned comrades because the division between a representative body that makes decisions and a small, overworked apparatus will in all likelihood be maintained;
- *The Alliance will continue to fall behind the real opportunities to grow.* All the evidence of the past period — in elections, the unions, the anti-war movement — indicates that when we find the time and energy to organise seriously we have a sizeable and growing impact in politics. The best testimony to that is the increasing respect our political opponents are giving us.

Finally, it's well past time to abandon the assumption that Alliance national bodies can vote on anything regardless of organisational consequence because, in the end, the DSP apparatus will make sure things get done. The greater the workload becomes, the less true this is. The present arrangements are a bottleneck.

In short, the Alliance can only fulfil its potential (1) if more Alliance members step forward to take up national work, and (2) if we give ourselves a structure to ensure that the time those comrades volunteer is as fruitful as possible.

The NAC Working Group proposal is a valuable step along that road. It will allow SA to involve more members, get more done, experiment more and, on that basis, have a thorough and considered discussion of how our leadership structure should evolve in future.

Let's shape the future of our union work, not just tread water

By Ian Jamieson (Fremantle branch)

Having acted as a proxy for Chris Cain at the April 23 SA National Executive meeting and having seen Comrade Greg Adler's first Counter-resolution and Statement in Support on the trade union resolution of the NE in Alliance Voices (Vol 4 No 9), I wish to respond.

Since that NE meeting, the various resolutions have been revised. However I wish to discuss comrade Adler's original Statement in Support, assuming he still holds to this position, as well as a few remarks submitted by Socialist Democracy and Workers League in Alliance Voices Vol 4 No 7, which reply to a previous contribution by comrade Sam Wainwright.

It seems to me that the differences we have within the Socialist Alliance over trade union policy are most clearly expressed in this Statement in Support rather than the generalised points in Greg's first (and second) counter-resolutions.

The emerging militant current within Australian unions

Comrade Adler questions the "militant current" term proposed in the documents before the SA Conference - how do we define it, who does it include, and perhaps the most important point, why should SA place top priority in defending this current when there are other tasks for unionists to take up, particularly the bread and butter issues on the job.

It would be unhelpful to define the militant current simply in terms of a few union branches that have shown courage, or a particular strike or industrial action. The examples used in Vol 4 No 7 as a comparison refer to twenty odd years ago (with the exception of the Patricks dispute) and that does at least make this current "new".

The numbers involved, who identifies with it, the fact that it is a new phenomenon are all of course important, particularly at a time of a general downturn in industrial activity. However, the important ingredient of the militant current is that it by and large stands outside the traditional influence of the official trade union hierarchy. It is not afraid to take big employers on and win gains for its membership, doesn't balk at confronting state and federal laws, does not get weak kneed at mixing it with Labor or Labor-dominated structures.

The current is, of course, small in comparison to official union membership. It is politically fluid, with leaders in the ALP (for whatever reason), leaders who would vote or flirt with the Greens, and some who are members of the Socialist Alliance. Its leaders are not necessarily union officials and it includes many who have decades of experience in class battles.

What is also of interest to the Socialist Alliance is that it has great potency in broader layers of union members who may not be members of the few union branches of the AMWU, CFMEU, MUA and other unions. It has served as a great inspiration throughout the union movement, the MUA/Patricks dispute is a clear example, when tens of thousands were mobilised, not by the MUA leaders but from amongst this militant current in a whole range of unions.

Another feature is its inclination to directly take up political issues and show industrial solidarity with the anti-war movement, East Timor and a host of other social issues, not pay mere lip service to the social movements.

It is not the sum of various rank and file groups in a range of unions. It has shown on many occasions that it puts democratic decision making into practice within union structures and on industrial issues.

Another striking feature is a demonstrated willingness to collaborate with our own tiny forces, with some looking directly to our leadership as a multi-tendency socialist party.

These are exciting prospects, not just for the Socialist Alliance but for the union movement as a whole as the trend is to strengthen and embolden rank and file union members to transform their unions into fighting units.

The militant current didn't evolve out of thin air. It wasn't created by fiat or by the exertion of will of a few experienced unionists. There are historical reasons for why this phoenix rose in the unions it did.

Because of its willingness to mobilise and lead by example, and because it has put the runs on the board, it stands in stark contrast to the majority of other unions.

For these reasons alone, it is imperative that the Socialist Alliance give top priority to its defence. The defeat of this current would set the progressive wing of the union movement backwards and, despite their relishing the defeat of militant leaders, conservative minded union officials would see the demise of their own union membership.

It is no accident that the federal government's continual refining of its reactionary industrial laws has been targeting the militant current. The government recognises its potential and potency, and the new laws aren't just employer "paybacks" but aimed at heading off growth in this militant current.

The Labor leadership of the trade union movement

The Howard government is not the only one to recognise the big picture emerging in the unions. The ACTU, not just unions directly affected by the generalised dissatisfaction in the ranks such as the AMWU, is spearheading a campaign to counter any militancy in the unions. The resolution on alleged violence and criminal activity in the unions that the ACTU is actively pushing throughout Australia is its aggressive answer to militants within the ranks. "Toe the line we give you - or face whatever consequence we, the government and the bosses can dish out." It is the opening shot against dissident voices and we can expect more. Now please don't accuse me or other SA members of "ultra-left" rhetoric. This is a plain statement of fact. Sure, not all so-called left wing or right-wing officials will go down that road but those forces are being assembled

Why? It is not just a question of preserving their jobs directly in union elections; the ACTU has to be able to deliver reliable industrial relations for a Latham government, and his state counterparts, to win employer support. They can't afford mavericks in their ranks and will take any opportunity to minimise, isolate and drive out unionists who don't tug their forelocks to industrial peace.

Does explaining this to fellow unionists "play into the hands" of these union leaderships? Hardly. It certainly would if we left this at empty rhetoric and we didn't resolutely defend the Craig Johnstons of the world. But no-one is suggesting that.

Comrade Susan Price is dead right if she made the comment at a public meeting in Sydney that the key issue in the unions is the Labor Party. Everyone agrees that Howard must go and we are absolutely in favour of this sentiment and will campaign with anyone who wants to replace the Coalition with a Latham government. But it's only a fraction of the solution that workers are looking for - they are looking beyond getting rid of the Liberals. How then do we deal with a right-wing federal Labor government, given Labor's decades of sellouts, the right-wing state Labor governments and a social program that differs little from the Coalition's?

Do we pretty the face of Labor until the day after the elections? Of course not - we can leave that to Labor Party apologists.

Our role as activists and members of the Socialist Alliance is to point to a socialist alternative. We will gain a positive hearing during the election campaign through outlining a class perspective. We are not predicting a massive vote, but a massive hearing that will give confidence to our trade union activists in future battles over social issues as well as bread and butter union matters.

Tactics within the unions

The first step to gaining a base amongst fellow workers is to be honest. Very few workers have illusions in Labor governments delivering the goods. The illusion that is widespread is a belief that if we only had a "white knight in shining armour" in the union leadership we can get at least partial gains. In a majority of unions, most believe their current leadership doesn't even come up to this mark.

Being honest with workmates, and in our general propaganda, gives us an edge - it gives us an audience for a socialist solution. It also rubs many union officials up the wrong way - they castigate us for being ultra-left, out of touch, splitters, a small minority, etc. But they are not our preferred audience. Just as they give us nothing, we owe them nothing.

Obviously we don't go out of our way to antagonise union officials. We have always sought to unite as many as possible around issues of concern to union members. At times that means closely collaborating with conservative union officials whether from the official right or official left. But the aim is not to curry favour with them but to gain a broad hearing for action. It could well be that union officials will come to agree with our strategies and tactics and there is no problem with that.

However, unity at the expense of a principled stand on issues is not what we are about. We have to be prepared to criticise where necessary, even if this means being a minority voice.

Comrade Adler believes that (presumably the DSP) show "no respect or understanding for traditional union organisation". I, for my part, plead guilty to the first assertion but object to the second.

I have no respect for organisations that are undemocratic and exclude members from decisions affecting their lives. I have no respect for union officials who finger you to your employer, or for union officials who place the interests of the Labor Party or the factions within it above the interests of members.

But that doesn't mean I, and others in the DSP and Socialist Alliance, don't understand union traditions. The fact that we have been able to amass decades of experience has helped, in whatever modest ways, build the militant current into a class-struggle left wing. A practical example is helping Chris Cain and Ian Bray over the line in the WA MUA election in June last year.

Our experience has shown that on bread and butter issues such as electing a militant team to official positions, there is no substitute for espousing socialist policies, explaining the bigger picture within the framework of a traditional union organisation.

That is how working-class leaders are created and how they can command respect from fellow workers.

Shaping our union intervention

It is true, as Greg reminds us, that we are small. A majority of our SA union activists are not in the CFMEU, AMWU or MUA. But are the tasks we are setting ourselves not a major concern for these comrades? Would they be better off concentrating on "bread and butter" issues in their union and workplace? Are the tasks we set ourselves to grandiose?

Pose these questions around the other way. How do we relate to our workmates without taking up major issues such as defending militant unionists? Surely if this current is defeated it makes it harder for us to convince fellow working-class activists to get involved in bread and butter issues on the job.

The NE Trade Union Resolution before the Conference is a guide to activity, it is not a prescription for every tactical decision on the job. Comrades have to continually assess and reassess how to intervene given their circumstances and use our collective experience.

However, the Socialist Alliance is in a good position to intervene collectively in unions, to recruit, to learn and to grow.

Having to contain our perspectives to "working closely with their union organisers and through official channels" because "the vast majority of [our] work is around bread and butter issues" doesn't help shape our union work, nor does it help shape the Socialist Alliance to be tomorrow's working-class leaders.

A final point. My apologies to Greg if this contribution appears to be telling him how to suck eggs, that is not my intention. I have spelt things out to help clarify the discussion, to make my position clear. I'm sure on many points raised we don't have any issue or disagreement.

The great Green Left Weekly debate - getting to the nub of the issue

By Alison Thorne (Wills branch)

One week out from the 3rd National Conference of Socialist Alliance we finally seem to be getting to the nub of the issue in terms of the "great Socialist Alliance newspaper debate."

As several comrades have pointed out, the motion on the table about the Green Left Weekly trial does not even address what is at the heart of the debate.

The debate has been hard to pin down because it has been subtly changing over the months. However, comrade Kerryn William's contribution was useful in that she made crystal clear that there is no proposal for any change of ownership or control of Green Left Weekly. There is no proposal on the table for Green Left Weekly to become "the paper" of Socialist Alliance operating under the democratic control of Socialist Alliance.

The proposal on the table - as it is written - is really little more than for an SA editorial board to continue producing a weekly "Common Cause" column for Green Left Weekly and soliciting articles from SA members for Green Left Weekly.

But what the proposal in effect seeks to do is to give a special status to a newspaper produced by one affiliate at the expense of publications produced by other affiliates. Already we have seen the newspaper of one affiliate getting a full page coloured advertisement on page 2 of Seeing Red. No other affiliate publications get a mention. If the trial continues, the privileging of one perspective at the expense of others will only increase.

Many comrades have talked about the valuable role Green Left Weekly plays in promoting the Alliance. I am certainly not going to disagree.

I wrote for Green Left Weekly during the trial - a news piece in the lead-up to the union's National Council about our joint work as Socialist Alliance activists building Members First within the CPSU.

However, this particular news piece was not solicited by the editorial board. It was something I proposed that I write at a Members First meeting because I wanted to help build Members First. I similarly proposed that Members First write an article after the National Council for Socialist Worker. This was written by Member's First comrade and Wills Branch delegate to conference, Terry Costello.

Green Left Weekly covers Socialist Alliance activities, profiles candidates, runs advertisements and does all of the other super duper things many comrades have written about in Alliance Voices. But - and this is what is being overlooked - so do the other affiliate publications. Let's look at a couple of examples. The current issue of Socialist Worker has:

- an editorial urging socialists to send a message to Latham by voting for SA
- it advertises the SA National conference and public meeting

- it publishes a letter by a non-aligned member of SA expressing views about the SA newspaper debate and a contribution about the debate around SA preferencing of Clover Moore
- it promotes the rank and file group Teacher's Alliance which SA members are working together to build
- it profiles the Wills SA election campaign and draws out lessons for other branches
- it takes up an SA priority campaign by building the rally to defend Craig Johnston.

The previous issue had a similar amount of SA coverage including an interview with SA's Queensland Senate candidate, Sam Watson.

The publication of which I am the managing editor, the Freedom Socialist Bulletin, has similar impressive Socialist Alliance coverage. We have had several covers profiling Socialist Alliance since it was formed over three years ago.

These are the statistics:

- 33% of covers have featured a Socialist Alliance picture - including the current issue
- 83% of covers have given prominence to a story featuring Socialist Alliance inside
- As well as the front cover, the current issue of our magazine includes the following stories which promote Socialist Alliance or cover debates within the Alliance:
- a tribute to Yaluritja by Comrade Ray Jackson who profiles Clarrie Isaacs' role as the WA Socialist Alliance senate candidate at the last Federal election;
- an article about the debate about what kind of newspaper Socialist Alliance needs;
- a contribution by Radical Women explaining why it supports SA but decided not to affiliate;
- a feature profiling the Stolen Wages campaign which SA adopted as a priority campaign;
- a three page feature about the community rally protesting police violence against Somali Youth in Footscray which quotes comrade Linda Waldron and interviews two of the young Somali organisers;
- an educational feature about the preferential voting system explaining how a vote for Socialist Alliance can keep working to kick out Howard;
- candidate profiles and interviews with comrades Lisa Macdonald, Graham Matthews, David Glanz and Linda Waldron.

Why is the value of this promotion of the Alliance by smaller affiliates completely marginalised in the debate about publications?

Quite frankly, I was very sad about the piece written in Alliance Voices Vol 4 # 9 about the Footscray campaign in support of Somali youth resisting police violence. Comrades Linda Waldron and Ray Fulcher spend almost a page talking about the various media coverage for the campaign in great detail. They talk about the coverage of the campaign in Green Left Weekly, in the local press and in the mainstream media. They talk about coverage on community radio 3CR in Melbourne and 2XX in Canberra. They criticise the role of the mainstream media in ignoring the role of SA. They proudly talk about Green Left Weekly "including extensive interviews with the young men involved."

This is all fine. But why don't they say that the Freedom Socialist Bulletin put this campaign - with a prominent SA placard - on its front cover? Why don't they credit the Freedom Socialist Bulletin with also "including extensive interviews with the young men involved" and publishing a photo of comrade Waldron speaking at the rally and quoting extensively from her excellent speech?

Comrades Linda Waldron and Ray Fulcher cannot claim not to have seen this coverage as they have a subscription to the Freedom Socialist Bulletin.

The Freedom Socialist which is the international newspaper of our tendency has similarly called for people to get behind Socialist Alliance by voting socialist. The new issue due out 28 May features an article on maternity leave and child care which lampoons Howard's "white picket fence" policies, critiques Latham's Baby Care payment and advocate a vote for SA which calls for free quality childcare and a 12 month national employer funded maternity leave scheme.

The question before conference is do we want to privilege one affiliate's publication at the expense of the others?

Despite all the talk of "generous offers" there is no proposal to "give" Green Left Weekly to Socialist Alliance to run as SA democratically decides. Instead, SA members are being "encouraged" to sell Green Left Weekly because it is "the" paper of Socialist Alliance. By implication, of course, other affiliate's newspapers are not.

At the conference, I will be backing the resolution by comrade Ann Picot calling for a paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance. I will also be supporting the resolution by comrade Riki Lane who recognises that all of the affiliate publications work to build Socialist Alliance.

I also support much of comrade Carlene Wilson's analysis. What makes activists write, edit, design, fundraise and - most importantly - sell a newspaper is that they politically agree with its contents and want to popularise the ideas within it. Green Left Weekly does not now - and is very unlikely even if it does become the "official" paper of Socialist Alliance - to consistently argue a Trotskyist feminist view of the world. But nor should it have to if this is not the politics of the comrades who put the blood, sweat and dollars into producing and distributing it. But given this, I'll stick to selling the Freedom Socialist, Freedom Socialist Bulletin and our united front effort, Seeing Red.

Members of the Freedom Socialist Party will continue to write for any affiliate publication - including Green Left Weekly - when this helps strengthen a campaign we are working to build such as the SA election campaign, Members First, Stolen Wages or International Women's Day.

We will also continue to produce and sell the magazine which puts forth our socialist feminist views and promotes all of our priorities - one of which is building a broad, effective and democratic Socialist Alliance.

Green Left Weekly - what is on offer

By Alison Dellit (Sydney West branch)

During the last few months, there has been a great deal of discussion about how the Socialist Alliance could play a bigger role in Green Left Weekly.

As the GLW editor, and a member of the Democratic Socialist Perspective as well as the Socialist Alliance, I want to clarify what is on offer, and why I think that the Socialist Alliance taking on a central role in editing, producing and distributing Green Left Weekly will help to take the left forward.

Green Left Weekly was established in 1991 as an independent and broad progressive newspaper, although since its inception members of the DSP have played the central editorial role on the paper, and have been the core of distributing the paper. Thanks in large part to its broad character, it has maintained a broader readership and support base in a period when much of the left, and the progressive movements, has been on the defensive. It also attracts the broader support base that can keep the paper largely self-financing.

GLW already takes the politics of the Alliance to a much bigger audience than any other Alliance-building publication, with SA members playing the dominant role in writing, editing and distributing, it could be a vital asset to the Alliance. However, last year the DSP offered to begin a process of transferring this leading role in GLW to the Socialist Alliance.

The Socialist Alliance NE adopted this proposal on a trial basis and established an editorial board to implement this trial. The beginnings of the process were enshrined in the protocols, which include: keeping GLW editorials within the framework of agreed Socialist Alliance policy; agreeing to publish any articles the Socialist Alliance national executive or conveners want published; and a dispute resolution procedure that enables the Socialist Alliance national conveners to have the final say on whether any articles submitted by Socialist Alliance members get published.

On the basis of the experience in this trial period, the Socialist Alliance editorial board is not proposing to take on the leading role in Green Left Weekly overnight. We are certainly not proposing that this take place at this conference - because the Alliance is not ready for that. Nevertheless, such a transition of leadership is the aim. That's why the Socialist Alliance editorial board process is so important, to work out how such a transition could take place and build up skills and understanding to assist it in happening.

If/when the Alliance does, eventually, take this on, it will obviously be able to make whatever changes to Green Left Weekly it decides to: the name, the layout, the masthead, the very nature of it as a broad paper. Like most DSP members (and I suspect, most of our supporters and subscribers), I think the name and the nature of GLW is an asset well worth preserving. We'll keep trying to convince others of that, but we have not set this as a precondition for continuing the process of the SA replacing the DSP's central role in the paper.

The SA editorial board has just begun to scratch the surface of what we could do with a greater role in Australia's biggest and most widely-read left newspaper. To turn away from the process of developing a relationship with this newspaper now, would be to reject one of the best tools for socialism in this country.

At the moment, the editorial board has primarily been concerned with the material in Green Left Weekly that promotes the Socialist Alliance. One of the ways forward mentioned in the editorial board's motion is for the board to start to think more about the overall content and editorial positions of GLW. We are willing to negotiate protocols that give the Socialist Alliance editorial board a stronger role in Green Left Weekly.

This is one of the reasons that it would be great to get more of Socialist Alliance's affiliates working on the editorial board, particularly those which produce publications, and have experience in presenting socialist ideas and often different and effective ways of doing so. The Socialist Alliance has a great deal to bring to Green Left Weekly. To be the most effective, requires everyone's input and expertise.

The editorial board will not be enough to progress this process, and that's why we want to suggest some other ways that SA can get more involved in the decision making on the paper. SA branches should be discussing the content of GLW regularly, what would help make our work easier, what has worked and what hasn't. Branches should organise copy to be written accordingly, and other feedback to be forwarded to the GLW and/or the SA editorial collectives.

We welcome any Socialist Alliance volunteers to help out on Green Left Weekly, particularly in Sydney where our production offices are based. The paper largely survives on the labour of volunteers, and we can always use help in layout, writing, proofing and editing. Those able to put in significant time are drawn into our staff meetings and the informal discussions where much of the content of the paper is decided. This is the best way, in many senses, for the alliance to start to have a strong influence over GLW.

If we want to take it on, one of the most widely read socialist newspapers in the world is up for grabs - why would we retreat?

The leadership restructure proposals

By Michael Morphet (National Co-convenor and Sydney Northside branch)

Comrades,

Let me start by saying that in my last contribution (vol.4, No. 6) out of exasperation I used some intemperate language and for this I apologise. It is a little difficult to respond to the Minority NAC proposals and the DSP support of them when we seem to be being presented with varying reasons as to why change is necessary.

At first the objection to the current system seemed to be based on the NE being a rubber stamp, unwieldy in size and generally dysfunctional. When I and others (vol. 4, No. 4) explained some of the reasons for the rubber stamping and

offered a formula for slimming down the size of the NE, these objections to the current NE ceased to be the focus and the second proposal from the minority group (No. 6.) actually proposes expanding the NE from 23 to 33.

The latest justification for the proposed changes is that it is necessary to "complete the transition to an MTSP". There is no explanation or amplification as to how and why the changes are supposed to achieve this goal.

There is however one consistent theme in the minority group's first and second proposals and in the DSP's support of the second proposal. That is the principal that those doing the work in the Alliance shall lead the Alliance. To understand where this ethos is coming from we need to step back from the current debate a little. The DSP is a Cadre/Vanguard party whereas the Alliance is a Broad, Mass party. Two distinctly different types of organisations.

This distinction is central to the current debate. The DSP has as an operating principal "Those who lead shall work, those who work shall lead", as comrade Dick Nichols puts it (No. 8). This is fine for the DSP. There are obvious operational advantages in doing things this way for them. Members of the DSP accept this on joining the DSP as being part of a tightly focussed, disciplined, energetic, centralised organisation, but there is no such acceptance from those joining the Alliance. There have been advantages for the Alliance too in having an affiliate as effective as the DSP, but this does not mean that what suits the cadre/vanguard type party will suit the Alliance.

In conversation with the DSP leadership, they have indicated that they try to have a different way of thinking for and about the Alliance than they do for the DSP, and that this is sometimes difficult. I suggest that in this debate a clearer distinction should be drawn. In vol. 4 no. 4 I asserted that those doing the work shall lead is essentially undemocratic in principle. I counterposed this with those doing the most effective job should be able to gather the most votes at conference. There does not seem to have been any attempt to refute this. That the principle of those doing the most work shall lead would be more undemocratic in practice than in theory should be noted. After all who can match the energy, focus and pace of some in the Alliance, who might be full timers? Does that in and of itself entitle them to be the leaders to the exclusion of all others, affirmative action aside? (quotas etc.)

Then there is the question of what Alliance work actually is. This is currently defined fairly narrowly as being traditional left activity with the emphasis on what builds the Alliance in the short term. This excludes many in the Alliance who are doing essentially socialist work that will have benefits for the Alliance in the longer term. This is a bit like the argument that used to be had in the universities; Which is the most beneficial, pure research or applied research? The answer must surely be that both have their place and should be recognised as such. This aspect of the question touches on the subject of how we value and preserve our diversity and avoid any trend towards becoming a monolith. Can a situation be remotely described as equitable where those doing a certain type of work have a leadership position by virtue of that work which in turn allows them to define what sort of work is acceptable for consideration for leadership?

It is cause for disquiet when the relationship between the NE and the working groups and committees is blurry and ill defined. Is it, as Dick suggests (AV Vol. 4 No. 6, page 16, points 2 & 3) to 'oversee the overseers' or is it 'participation in' as suggested on p 18 point 2 (same vol.)? If it is the former it is one layer of government too many and if the latter, given the blistering pace and work ethic as outlined above, the outcome would appear obvious. Here I would like to restate that the working groups and committees are functioning very well without bureaucratic interference in their activities nor administrative duties needlessly imposed on them. To state the obvious; their function is to oversee and participate in the functions for which they are named, not to be an automatic part of leadership. As previously pointed out they already have a great influence in setting the agenda for the Alliance within the framework of Alliance policy. (Vol. 4 No. 4)

On the question of PR versus Slate method of election, the PR system is more democratic and safer. More democratic because a situation could arise where somebody has the confidence of the membership but does not find favour with the large affiliates for one reason or another. Because that person can't get on one of the affiliate's slate they can't be elected. Safer because it removes from the larger affiliates the temptation to run a slate or team based not on true independence and diversity but malleability or manageability. We are all human and the desire to make life easy is natural. It is generally accepted that the PR system is more nearly representative of the constituents' will than any other system. It is not sufficient argument to say that a PR election is more difficult to run. That is a small price for the advantages it has.

That the current proposals are far too complicated is evidenced by the fact that there are almost as many versions of what they actually mean as there are people who have read them, at least among those that say they understand them. The Alliance is a very unusual organisation; all those affiliates from such diverse currents, some international, and the non-aligned from a wide range of backgrounds. Given all that, it will probably always be case that whatever leadership structure we have will have anomalies and distortions. To impose on such a complex organisation a leadership structure which is itself enormously complicated is a recipe for chaos. I do not resile from the concrete objections or the constructive suggestions I made in volumes 4 & 6. I don't think they have been addressed.

I agree totally with comrade David Glanz where he finds it peculiar to withdraw leadership proposal 1 on the grounds that the membership has not had time to digest it and, at the same time, advance leadership proposal 2 with even less time for consideration by the membership. I also agree with him when he says that we should stick with what we have for the time being to avoid doing ourselves some real harm. If these proposals get up the victory will be pyrrhic. The resentment and angst caused will only fuel traditional criticisms. I appeal directly to the DSP to not proceed with their support for this proposal. The DSP has in the past had the wisdom and foresight put the long term interests of the Alliance above all else and I hope they can see their way clear to doing so now.

A letter to editorial comrades

By Sam Pillay (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

Dear Editorial Comrades,

Putting together a paper is an arduous task. There is no question about it, especially in a politically charged environment. Conference will affirm whether we endorse the continuation of the trial period for another six months or declare a name change, or a realignment of a different kind.

It remains a fact though that the Alliance without a weekly propaganda organ and organiser is a non-starter. Contrary to the arguments of some comrades, *Seeing Red* cannot be that organ for it is essentially a theoretical forum in general. It cannot cover once every three months matters that need to be studied daily and summarised weekly: That is our avenue to supporters and cadres.

So, no matter what changes take place at conference, the fact that the Alliance needs a weekly commentator, agitator and propagandist will not.

Green Left Weekly Issue No 581 is a leap in the context of the current debate. The editorial, in a welcome sweep, shows how the paper can without a glitch transform itself into the voice of the Alliance. Particularly noteworthy is the manner in which it demonstrates the Alliance's critical support for the Greens and yet delineates the difference in political outlook between the two parties.

No matter which way conference points us, however, the key issue is taking our technical excellence to a higher level still. Our point of departure should be our strength, not our weakness.

The treatment

Comrade Sarah Stephen spent a few moments with the author at our branch meeting on Tuesday, and we discussed some issues in general. It is not the author's intention to imply, however, that Comrade Stephen in any way endorsed his views but those were a useful few moments.

The author emphasised the strength of Issue No 581. He suggested that the back page splash on Craig Johnston could have, with a slightly different treatment, been the splash on the front page. The different treatment, designed to not alarm traditional *GLW* supporters, could have been a straightforward headline such as *Trade unionist in the dock*, with perhaps a banner strap at the foot with a play on our publicity handbill and poster *He's always been there for us ... We'll always be there for him*. The value for Socialist Alliance at the County Court rally would have been enormous: Our trade union supporters and cadres would have led our week's news coverage.

The "terror" election campaign story could have been displayed much more effectively so that it "jumped out" of Page 3. On any other occasion this story could have been the splash. Our new emphasis ought to be *news* that directly affects the working class and its supporters.

This May Day in Sydney, for example, provided an inescapable example of the need to be prepared for the unexpected. The Labor bureaucracy turned a sizeable rally into a downtown side street. It decapitated a spirit that could have inspired city shoppers. It was a heaven-sent opportunity proving what we have said of the Labor leadership all along. Splashing that story would have presented logistical difficulties but we could have surmounted them if we had had field correspondents ringing in the story and editorial staff converting it into copy and "stripping" it in to replace another. It would have been difficult, but not impossible, and it would have been an electrifying experience for the staff, not to mention supporters and cadres.

Greater use could be made of breakouts and sidebars to run with the excellent features we carry, in order to make it easier for the reader to "get into". It is, alas, true that most readers' attention tolerance is narrow indeed; hence the need to make it as easy as possible for them to access stories in "bites" – an unfortunate cliché but an accurate description. Our task is to give the reader cause to read the articles.

Splash and punch

We must master all the bourgeois techniques – the techniques are ours, after all, even if they own them – to get our message across. Let us study the bourgeois papers relentlessly to glean better methods, and we'll not only train ourselves but also train new comrades.

Let us learn when to "splash" our artwork and when to let it take a backseat, to let the words do the talking. Let us occasionally splash our slogans across the front page but always to back up a story that spills onto to, say, Page 2 and perhaps Page 4. Let us learn to keep the right hand pages to break new stories with punch. In this respect, *Socialist Worker* with its effective modular layout is a good example. Above all, let us use the front page to break the story of the week. What story we splash is a matter of honing our skills of treatment.

It is indispensable to introduce a system of "rounds"; politics, international, finance and economics, community affairs, health and so forth as a great way to start training new comrades as socialist journalists.

As for training new comrades as journalists, they will write when they have something to say. How we go about ensuring they have something to say is matter of how we learn to politically motivate them, which in turn will politically motivate our attitude to our work.

This could be a great beginning to us working as Socialist Alliance workers with a socialist message – *our message* – and there would be little requirement for tedious, tenacious and tendentious argument about whether the Alliance viewpoint is being conveyed.

A name change

We created the Alliance to fight for a socialist alternative. Our stated aim is to build the Alliance into a cohesive multi-tendency socialist party. There are bound to be much more taxing political differences down the road but the difficulty will surely be ameliorated if we are guided by socialist principles.

Finally, please allow this author this observation: A name change is not an impossible proposition. Given *GLW's* track record and the escalation of the worldwide political crisis, its long-term readers will welcome a socialist name change if it is introduced with discretion and style, and we can confidently look to winning new adherents to socialism.

These are but a few thoughts on how we may forge ahead, and this letter is by no means the finished word on the art of newspaper production. To use a variation of Marshall McLuhan's famous aphorism: The message is the medium.

The masses do await *chutzpah* in leadership both theoretical and practical. We have it. Let us go to it.

All the reformist parties, meanwhile, can only display what Marx once termed, in another context, their *testimonium pauperatis*.

Green Left Weekly – a Socialist Alliance paper?

By Tom Flanagan (Northern Rivers branch)

I am writing this in response to Riki Lane's contribution in Alliance Voices Volume 4 Number 10 titled *Motions on publications and national working groups*.

In that contribution Riki states that, "In many branches – Lismore [sic], Melbourne and Geelong to my direct knowledge – members are being told that GLW is THE paper of the Alliance and that all members should sell it."

I am curious as to how Riki has *direct* knowledge of Northern Rivers branch as I have never seen him at a Northern Rivers SA meeting or stall or even been aware of him visiting the area.

DSP members in Northern Rivers have always been careful to be clear about the relationship between GLW and SA in the trial period – which has been discussed in detail at three branch meetings. No one has ever said that GLW is THE paper of the Alliance or told anyone to sell it. Northern Rivers SA members, as elsewhere, have access to Alliance Voices and are generally well informed about the debates around the country. The petition 'A paper of the Alliance, for the Alliance', was circulated on the SA branch elist immediately it arrived (without comment). No one from Northern Rivers has signed it to date.

Since SA's trial relationship with Green Left began, 10 Socialist Alliance members in the Northern Rivers have chosen to sell Green Left, including the 4 members of the Democratic Socialist Perspective in the branch of 35. Another person who is not yet a member of SA (we are encouraging him to join) has also chosen to sell the paper. These people were not *told* to sell the paper, or even told that they *should* sell it.

Four of the non-DSP members have sold Green Left when helping out with Socialist Alliance stalls. Another takes a small bundle of GLWs each week to sell from the café he runs. He was joined directly to SA as a regular Green Left buyer, as were many of our members, (which shows that Green Left has been a good recruiter for SA even before the trial period commenced). I, as branch convenor (and a DSP member) did not even suggest to him that he should sell GLW from his café, that was his idea – I did suggest to him that he should join SA.

Two non-affiliated Northern Rivers SA members (actually also members of the Communist Party) often buy extra copies of GLW or take spare back issues to give to their friends and contacts with the aim of encouraging them to join SA.

We also have a non-affiliated (former) member of the SA-GLW Editorial Board who sells copies of GLW to workmates and union contacts. And when you think about it, what is the point of SA members putting effort into the editorial board unless SA members encourage people to read what is produced?

Green Left has already ceased to be purely a DSP project – SA has a direct stake in it. In that way GLW *is* different to the publications of the other affiliates. And I think that in part explains why many SA members choose to sell the paper. The transitional arrangement voted for by the SA National Executive on December 12, 2003 is bearing fruit. The fact that non-affiliated members are choosing to sell GLW is a positive indication that the work of the SA Editorial Board has been a success and that the goal of the trial period is achievable. That is (quoting the December 12 NE motion): 'the transformation of Green Left Weekly into the national newspaper of the SA.'

Non-affiliated SA members can speak for themselves as to why they choose to distribute Green Left Weekly. My observations are that they are very confident about using it as a means of approaching people and keen to encourage others to read it. I can only infer that they see its usefulness as an outreach tool and as a means of drawing people closer to SA.

The more people involved in reaching out and drawing people closer to SA, and the more effective the tools they use, the stronger SA will become and the better we will be able to achieve our socialist goals.

Workers need fighting unions: A reply to Socialist Democracy and Workers League

By Sam Wainwright (Fremantle branch)

In this piece I will respond to a number of the points made by SD/WL in their reply to me in Alliance Voices (Vol. 4, No. 7):

Class collaborationism, fact or fiction?

The SD/WL comrades object to my description of mainstream Australian trade union officialdom as class collaborationist. I see this as a straightforward statement of fact. Wasn't the whole Prices and Incomes Accord based on the notion that wage restraint would be good for Australia's "national interest" and the benefits would trickle down to the worker? The argument that we've got to help our enterprise make a profit and be reasonable and moderate our demands so the boss can afford to employ us is the orthodox position coming from the ACTU and most unions.

At an MUA delegates training course I attended in 2000 we were presented with four hypothetical workplaces and asked us to select the best one: 1) Strong Boss-Weak Union 2) Strong Boss-Strong Union 3) Weak Boss-Strong Union 4) Weak Boss-Weak Union. Of course everyone liked the look of workplace number 3. With a knowing smile the trainer informed us that despite our wishes number 2 was the preferred workplace. Most unions have internalised the ideology and logic of the Accord process and so foster the fantasy that there is some elusive but happy meeting place for labour and capital.

Who knows whether or not the officials responsible for this actually believe this crap. What is certain is that the bosses don't and are pursuing the "old-fashioned" class war approach like they always have. In accepting the need for Australia to be "internationally competitive", meet "world's best practice" and all the rest of it, the ALP, ACTU and mainstream Australian unionism are disarming, confusing and demoralising workers in their hour of need. Because there is no stable happy meeting point (the boss always wants more), most union officials see their role (whether consciously or not) as to cut a deal and keep the peace between the two sides. As the chair of the Tolls Port Kembla delegates' committee said in an open letter to the rest of the MUA, the Australian union movement is trapped in a "peace at all costs" approach. Without a fight it's inevitably the worker that gives up more than they get.

Dangerous categorisation?

The SD/WL comrades object to me identifying the fighting militant union current as being "class struggle" based and fundamentally different to the "class collaborationist" orthodoxy. But let's look at the facts:

- 1) These unions understand and explain to their members that they need to take industrial action to defend and extend their conditions.
- 2) Not only do they take industrial action but they are prepared to defy the anti-union laws.
- 3) They don't subordinate their members' interests to the priorities of the ALP electoral machine and its pro-capitalist policies.

Furthermore these unions don't tell their members that they have to hold back so the boss can make a profit. In my previous piece I mentioned a NSW MUA official who told P&O wharves that they "...have to be more flexible because Patricks is killing you for productivity". Compare this to WA CFMEU Construction Secretary Kevin Reynolds who told several thousand members at an "illegal" mass meeting late last year that, "...most building workers are casuals, you don't know when your next job will be, you don't know how long the building boom will last. Our job is to screw every fucking cent out of the bosses while we can and we make no apologies for it."

To deny that there is a qualitative difference between the militant unions and the rest is like denying that there is a difference between wet paint and dry paint because there's also in-between paint. To be sure labels are dangerous if we apply them schematically and forget that things can and do change. Militant unions can fall back and become tame-cat; militant unions can grow out of conservative ones; there can be degrees within categories, and so on. The SD/WL comrades suggest that the improvements won by the NTEU contradict my assessment. But they don't ask the following: Were that union's leaders compelled to fight because of pressure from the ranks? Are there militant members contesting for and winning leadership of the union? Is it a combination of both these things? Will the NTEU grow over into a consistently class-struggle union? I'll leave it to the comrades involved in that union to answer these questions.

One set of labels I think we should dispense with is describing unions as "left" or "right" based on their officials' ALP factional loyalties. These factions are devoid of any real ideological basis and give absolutely no indication of a union's industrial militancy or its attempts to raise the general political awareness of its membership. By way of example, the "Left" unions in WA who are in alliance with the "Right" have all accepted, without so much as a squeak, a serious reduction to workers' legal rights in government changes to the state Workers Compensation scheme. Meanwhile the "Centre-Right" CFMEU is very publicly leading the charge against the attacks in a state election year.

Paper members are not enough

In my previous piece I said that it's only by proving their worth in the battle for wages and conditions that unions will grow. The SD/WL comrades reject my argument that the union movement is incapable of stopping its historic decline as long as it stays attached to the peace-at-all-costs approach. They say, "despite Sam's categorical assertion, we confidently predict that the membership of the right-wing Health Services Union in NSW will rise after the introduction of a bargaining fee for non-members". Some general observations before returning to the question of bargaining fees.

Surveys show that the majority of Australian workers support unionism and the majority of non-unionised workers would join a union if they thought there was one they could meaningfully be a member of. Doubtless then just about any union could sign up new recruits by sending out an enthusiastic organiser who need do no more than preach the general benefits of unionism, but it won't be enough to keep them.

My last two discussions with former workmates in Sydney has centred on their desire to leave the MUA. After seeing the union trade away conditions without a fight, not even threatening industrial action during the legally sanctioned period - let alone taking it - they can't see the point. General lectures about the importance of unions won't save their membership. However, the example of fighting democratic unions in other states may give them strength to hang in there and fight another day.

The NTEU and AEU have recently won new members because they have led real campaigns, whatever limitations there might have been. To keep those new members and to consolidate them as people who can think and act for themselves, a union needs to press on. The SD/WL comrades claim, without a shred of evidence, that I "scoff" at the need for unions to recruit and build up basic union consciousness. Quite the opposite. What I reject is their implied premise that unions need to (or can) build themselves up first and then worry about fighting for their members' rights and conditions some time later down the track.

Union conscious workers rightly condemn the worker who refuses to join as a freeloader whose decision undermines the conditions of all. At first glance then, legally enforced bargaining fees seem like a good thing, but are they? Certainly no-one at my workplace has any sympathy for a worker who cops such a fee, they're all in the union anyway. However, the point is that 100% union membership is enforced at my workplace not by the state but by working-class solidarity. It's hard to quantify these things but I'd guess over 90% are in the union because they are convinced of the necessity, a small minority pay up because they know their life would be hell if they didn't.

Obviously trying to socially ostracise workmates who have not joined the union is futile and counterproductive in workplaces where the decisive majority of workers are not yet union members. In these places the union needs to show in theory and practice that it can defend and extend wages and conditions; it needs to win hearts and minds. The danger with bargaining fees is that they risk absolving the union of having to actually convince workers why they should join. All the more so if the union is moribund, undemocratic and piss weak. Bargaining fees don't necessarily encourage class consciousness. In fact, if you follow the fee-for-service logic, and consider also that plenty of unions are pushing agreements with below inflation wage increases plus trade offs, then a worker might reasonably demand a fee from the union in compensation! The point is that a union that's doing its job shouldn't need bargaining fees.

Defending the militant unions

The SD/WL comrades complain that I imply they are "soft" on Labor and used "intemperate" language in so doing. Let's be clear about the context here. Late last year AMWU National Secretary Doug Cameron went to the media about being assaulted in his driveway and immediately, if indirectly, pointed the finger of suspicion at militant opponents within the union. Despite the alleged assailants being unidentified and without known motive, and to the best of my knowledge there were no independent witnesses, the media lapped it up and speculated on a Workers First connection. This came not long after the AMWU national office tried to set itself up as the judge, jury, key witness and executioner to deal with a bogus claim that Craig Johnston had sexually assaulted another union member.

When the Socialist Alliance NE discussed a statement condemning the assault on Cameron but equally condemning the manipulation of the events for factional purposes, the SD/WL comrades sought to reduce the emphasis on the second part of the statement. So in short I do think they were going soft in the face of pressure from the union bureaucracy and capitalist media not to stick up for Craig Johnston. However, if the comrades are now keen to throw their shoulders to the wheel in defence of Craig then I welcome it.

Loudly shouting names?

The SD/WL comrades create a strawperson in their article, implying that I and other SA members confine ourselves to mouthing ultra-left slogans from the sidelines. At one point they instruct, "Illusions in Labor will not be defeated by shouting loudly that Latham is a right-winger and union leaders will not be defeated by calling them names". Are the comrades seriously suggesting that this is what we do or advocate? I think an examination of the materials published by SA members involved in the MUA, NTEU, AEU and other unions, whether in the name of SA or by the militant caucuses in which we play active roles, show we are conscious of the issues of immediate concern to workers in our industries and strive to connect them to a broader political understanding in a "user friendly" way.

We need active branches, not Head Office control

By Peter Murray (Wills branch)

There's the long and the short of the debate on leadership bodies and amendments to the Alliance Constitution, moved by Louise Walker on behalf of the "Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group."

The short of it: never buy a pig in a poke.

David Glanz's motion, on behalf of the ISO, is to lay this discussion on the table for a year. It is the only supportable position on this issue. FSP will vote for that motion and lobby for others to support it.

The "Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group" has done nothing to promote its vision of the Alliance amongst SA's rank and file membership. Simple working class democracy demands that members be fully informed of the arguments for and against a centralisation of power in the hands of the national conveners and other "office bearers." Simple democracy demands that the "Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group." explains the implications of its constitutional amendments.

It is the responsibility of the mover of a resolution to explain her reasons. She has not done so. In the absence of this, Comrade Walker's motion on Constitutional amendments can't be supported. Apart from my essential disagreement with the thrust of these changes, I have a long held belief that one does not vote yes to propositions one doesn't fully understand.

For example, the amendments introduce the concept of a "state delegation." What is this beastie? Delegates to this conference are elected directly from branches - which is in accord with a view of the Alliance being based on branches of grassroots activists. State delegations seem to be required to nominate non-aligned delegates at this conference, with

no reference to local branch members. How and when do these delegations meet? Who convenes the meetings? Who minutes the decisions and presents them to conference? Most importantly, to whom are they accountable? Certainly not local branches, it would appear. Comrade Walker nods in the direction of democracy by allowing that decisions of the ad-hoc delegations at the 2004 conference be ratified at a State or territory Conference. But then she tosses in this - in the "fine print" at the end.

"9.8 State or Territory conferences shall:

* ratify their unaligned State/Territory representatives on the National Executive"

In other words, local branches and individual members cannot dissent to the deals cobbled together by conference delegates. What about the socialist principle that delegates are subject to recall and are accountable to the rank and file? I've been a militant in the union movement for enough decades to recognise a shonk when I see it. In the name of "efficiency." Comrade Walker and her co-thinkers are proposing a structure which appears to destroy grassroots democracy where it matters most - the rank and file control of the peak bodies of the Alliance.

Democracy is messy, it is frustrating sometimes. But it is the only way to run a working class organisation. When I saw the original "Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group" proposals I asked others whether they had been lifted from the undemocratic constitution of one of our more reactionary corporate unions.

The revised proposal is worse, if anything, because it looks more democratic at the same time as it centralises power in the hands of the Conveners, specifically, of those full-time activists of the Democratic Socialist Perspective based in Abercrombie St, Chippendale.

Incumbents always have more power than oppositions or the rank and file. Every union militant knows this instinctively. I object to these proposals because they move the Socialist Alliance towards a bureaucratic corporatism. Ordinary members deserve a voice in who runs the Alliance. Comrade Walker's proposals remove this. "Smaller" affiliates also deserve a voice - in particular because if the proposal for a "Multi-Tendency Socialist Party" is genuine it assumes, well, a multitude of tendencies.

The National Executive is not working nearly as well as it could - in part from simple technological gremlins, but in the main because there is a disconnectedness between its decisions and the Alliance on the ground.

FSP supports an executive based on the following principles:

* All affiliates who wish to be seated on the National Executive must be able to nominate at National Conference.

However existing affiliates should not be given a second go. If an affiliate does not nominate at conference then it is off the NE until the next conference.

* Representation to the NE must be on the basis of branches, not states. Each local branch should have a delegate to the NE, and that, together with affiliate representation must comprise the NE.

* New affiliates to be accorded a position on the NE, regardless of any balance with "non-aligned" members. Why would any organisation affiliate if it has no voice on the organisation's peak body?

* The NE meets monthly, with sufficient preparation time, circulated concrete proposals and technological gadgetry to ensure that NE members can carry out the work of running the Alliance.

The long of it - our structure and constitution reflect the founding principles of the Alliance.

I came across this while considering how to intervene in this debate. It's the text of Alison Thorne's presentation - on behalf of the National Liaison Committee - now the NE - to the 2001 conference. It proposes the original SA Constitution, and I commend it to members as a pertinent contribution to the current debate:

Notes on the Socialist Alliance Constitution for Founding Conference

by Alison Thorne, representing the Socialist Alliance NLC

Comrades

The draft constitution before you today is recommended unanimously by the National Liaison Committee.

I'd like to briefly take you through:

* the process used to achieve this agreed position;

* a few observations about the type of constitution we require and the type of constitution we do not want;

* the key principles in the draft before you and some of the most important clauses which flow from these principles.

[1] The process

All comrades received an initial draft of a constitution in Pre-Conference Bulletin # 1. This first version was based on a draft by Comrade Peter Boyle incorporating amendments put forward to the NLC by Comrades Phil Sandford, Janet Burstall and myself.

The NLC agreed to circulate this work in progress to start the discussion.

The NLC revisited the question of our constitution at a later phone hook-up and adopted a further series of additions and amendments, proposed by the National Conveners and by myself, to the draft as circulated.

Finally, at our 27 July national hook-up we adopted a position on how to elect our National Leadership and we considered the amendments put forward by comrades and branches in Pre-Conference Bulletin # 5.

All proposals from Pre-Conference Bulletin # 5 which achieved the unanimous support of the NLC were incorporated into the draft which you have before you today. Where there was any opposition to a particular proposal - for example the question of asking parliamentarians to pre-sign a resignation letter prior to taking office - it was not included in the draft before you but, of course, it is open to conference to decide to include any of the proposals which did not achieve the unanimous support of the NLC.

[2] The type of constitution we need

On behalf of the NLC, I'm pleased to be able to recommend this draft to comrades today because this is the sort of constitution we need at this stage of our development.

A great deal of Comrades' attention has naturally gone into discussing our program. But our Constitution is equally important.

If we do not adopt the right type of Constitution for the stage of our development, then we risk retarding our political development and growth.

My experience over the last 5 years working within the Progressive Labour Party illustrates this point clearly in the negative.

The PLP adopted a highly centralised constitution which assumed the existence of a huge political apparatus - something the PLP did not have - which would be able to carry through decisions. This constitution also lacked accountability mechanisms.

The result? The PLP would pass motions but then quite often nothing happened!

The second problem with the PLP's constitution was some very undemocratic features - particularly multiple proxy voting. This often resulted in a room full of people who argued one way being out voted by a small number of people carrying a fistful of proxies for people who were not active and had not even heard any of the debate.

[3] Key principles in the proposal before you

The proposal before you is based on a number of key principles designed to make sure that the negatives learnt from PLP experience are not repeated.

We know we do not have a huge apparatus. In fact we all understand clearly that the success or failure of the Socialist Alliance rests on our ability to build strong, thriving, activist branches. Our constitution also needs to reflect this.

The draft we are considering today promotes decentralised decision making at the branch level within a democratically agreed national framework.

But the draft also includes clear mechanisms for coordination on a national level and gives sufficient flexibility and authority to a national leadership to enable Socialist Alliance to function.

This constitution gives responsibility and trust to the national leaders we choose, while at the same time enshrining clear accountability mechanisms.

Let's look at some of the features of the decentralisation/coordination equation within this draft.

* Clause 8.1 makes clear that the basic unit is the branch

* What does a branch do? In 8.4 we find that branches are responsible for promoting political discussion, carrying our campaigns in support of workers and social movement struggles as well as for running election campaigns. In 8.5 we find branches can produce their own material and raise additional specific demands providing these do not contradict the core platform of Socialist Alliance. Branches pre-select their candidate and they raise the funds and take political and organisational responsibility for running the election campaigns.

But we do not want to simply create a series of disconnected branches spread across the country. This is where the National Executive and National Officers have a key coordination and leadership role to play.

The national leadership has a key role in organising national or special conferences as outlined in section 6. And in section 7.1 we clearly specify the role of the National Office holders and National Executive which "shall be responsible for running of the organisation and for finance, membership, arrangement of meetings, communications with local groups and individuals, national bulletin production and distribution, liaison with other groups and organisations, and arrangements for seeking and enabling registration and compliance with electoral laws". Plus anything else we choose to delegate to them including as outlined in clause 6.8 implementation of policy between conferences.

The National Executive and National Officer holders have a big leadership role to play and we don't want them tied up in unnecessary red-tape which makes the role more difficult. But we do want to be clear where the accountability rests.

This constitution has checks and balances. It makes clear that the National Leadership is accountable to the membership through the National Conference. See clause 6.9. It also puts in place a mechanism for the membership being able to call a special conference.

In 6.7 we see that one third of the financial membership can call a special conference by presenting a petition to the National Executive.

So, the draft before you achieves the first key principle of putting power and responsibility in the hands of the branches - the basic unit of the Alliance - and coupling this with flexible and accountable national leadership to coordinate our work.

The second key principle in this draft is that we have kept it simple. We have not filled it up pages and pages of clauses to deal with every possible unexpected situation. The constitution has a mechanism in place to deal with anything.

In clause 13 we give the power to the National Executive to make interim decisions if needed. We also make clear that any such decisions must be ratified or can be overturned by the next conference.

This draft constitution has important features for an organisation which is both socialist and an alliance.

In clause 5.2 the draft constitution makes clear that we will encourage participation and leadership by all of our members and in particular working class women, Indigenous people, immigrants, queers, people with disabilities and young people.

In section 10 the draft also enshrines the right of oppressed groups to form caucuses. Oppressed groups are defined in section 2.

The NLC made slight changes to the section on caucuses from the original draft circulated to make clear that this section is referring only to caucuses of oppressed groups. The section on caucuses does not in anyway apply to political tendencies. This is clearly addressed in section 5 on membership.

The Socialist Alliance is currently just that - an alliance. Section 5.3 enshrines the right of Socialist Alliance members to keep their identity as members of parties, organisations and groups who join the Alliance. Section 5.5 makes clear that all members are expected to present decisions made democratically by the Alliance as the position of Socialist Alliance. But it also enshrines our right to indicate our agreement or disagreement with any position taken by the Alliance.

These clauses clearly entrench the principle of tendency rights within Socialist Alliance.

Section 4 on the accountability of Socialist Alliance Parliamentarians highlights the expectation that Socialist Alliance MP will be accountable and will represent the platform of Socialist Alliance. This section also shows how Socialist Alliance is different to mainstream political parties. Our stance on Socialist Alliance MPs pledging anything above an average workers' wage to the work of the alliance is very refreshing and will speak to working people.

This draft also contains all of the clauses required for us to meet the requirements of registration, including a clause about dissolution.

Comrades, this draft constitution:

- * encapsulates our aims and objectives;
- * it is simple, flexible and democratic;
- * it holds leaders and elected MPs accountable;
- * it is a constitution for a campaigning grass roots organisation with the serious mission of building a vibrant socialist alternative capable of capturing the imagination and winning the support of the working class in all of its diversity.

On behalf of the NLC, I commend this draft to conference.

Alison Thorne

I recommend the NLC's position of 2001 to the 2004 conference. Regardless of where any of us stand on the MTSP debate, it seems to me that any socialist organisation worth the name is based on the direct participation and control of members on the ground. As Comrade Thorne said we need a constitution which "promotes decentralised decision making at the branch level within a democratically agreed national framework=8A" None of the current proposals further this aim, and so we need more discussion.

In particular we need to shift the debate from leadership structures to membership involvement.

The problem we have, Comrades, is not how "inconvenient" are our current structures. It is about how we recruit more working people to and vote for - and participate in - the struggle to build socialism in this country. By building both the Socialist Alliance and the organisations affiliated to it. By resolving our differences politically - instead of through organisational schemes to paper over differences - we may well forge a truly united movement for a socialist Australia.

But we cannot do it by resolution. It has to be built on the ground, and that means through the organisationally difficult process of building branches, recruiting, educating and organising around agreed goals and policies. It means creating a Socialist Alliance that any socialist worker can walk into and recognise as a home for their ideas and a place where they can work for real social and economic change.

Comrade Thorne, speaking for the NLC in 2001, enunciated a principle that our constitution "holds leaders and elected MPs accountable. Where is the accountability in the "Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group" proposal?

Nowhere, comrades - it looks like a scheme to deliver control of the Alliance to a cosy bunch of insiders. And it's a scheme which, if adopted, might tear the Alliance apart.

The 2001 NLC position is still the most convincing method to create a structure for the Alliance to build an organisation to suit any worker who considers herself a socialist.

Our Socialist Alliance needs to be run from the community halls, lounge rooms, cafes and wherever else members can meet and discuss local, national and global politics - and act on their conclusions.

The Socialist Alliance does need tight, efficient, national co-ordination.

But we must have a political leadership based on the diversity of our socialist electoral party. We do not want leaders who are leaders of Head Office administration. We need leaders who are leaders of work on the ground. Leaders of active local branches supported by branch members.

Top-down "socialism" has never done workers any good.

The "Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group" proposal does nothing to foster branch-building. This is quite probably not the intent of Comrade Walker. However it is quite probably the effect of the proposals she has moved

Comrade Glanz is right, although he understates the problem in his usual diplomatic fashion.

Ill conceived quick fixes to organisational problems always result in more problems. If the "Non-Aligned Caucus NE Working Group" proposals are adopted they will almost certainly "muddle" the Alliance out of existence, morphing it into a centrally controlled Single-Tendency Socialist Party.

That is what happened to the Progressive Labour Party, which is now a rump organisation run out of Newcastle by a small clique.

The Socialist Alliance is too important an endeavour to toss aside for the sake of administrative efficiency.

Let's discuss this further. We'll get this right, comrades. But all of us need time to think - and to focus on the coming Federal Election. Leave these proposals on the table.

Socialists engaging in local politics

By Ron Linquist and Linda Waldron

The Socialist Alliance project offers socialist individuals and organisations an opportunity to move beyond the inner-city left and look to engaging more broadly with the working-class. It does require a thinking through of how to bring socialist ideas to more extensive layers in a relevant, accessible and meaningful way.

One important aspect of this new opportunity is about engaging in local politics in a principled, socialist way. The Scottish Socialist Party has oriented well to local struggles by showing leadership in campaigns against community centre closures, warrant sales, private landholdings of communal land, for free school meals etc. With such campaigns they are able to find ways of explaining how the particular issue at hand is symptomatic of the exploitative and oppressive capitalist system. Their journey from an alliance of socialist groups to a united socialist party with a mass working class base reflects their struggle with finding a balance between community campaigns and the broad issues of war, racism, terrorism and misogyny. We doubt we can find the correct formula for the relationship between global and local issues and how a socialist party works within both. What we do wish to offer in this contribution is some experiments the West branch has made with exploring the local arena. We were not interested in discussing 'local' politics with its yawn-inspiring reputation of pavement upgrades, council rates and waste disposal schedules but localised politics. What we were investigating was how we could bring the global struggle to people around us and how to relate to issues which local people were independently beginning to struggle around.

In Melbourne West we began wrestling with this issue in March 2003 when we contested three wards in the council elections. We ran in two wards in the Maribyrnong City Council and one ward in the Brimbank City Council. It seems that the balance we struck worked well as we enjoyed particularly high votes- 6.5% in Sunshine (Brimbank) and 4.5% in Yarraville/ Seddon (Maribyrnong). The Greens contested Maribyrnong but not Brimbank so the Yarraville vote was comparative with the Sunshine result. The Sunshine campaign focussed on campaigning to stop the war on Iraq and the issue of the local pool closure. From the council election campaign, Maurice Sibelle, our candidate, then was able to get involved in an ongoing way with the campaign, with floating involvement from other branch members. Maurice was a key organiser of the successful mobilisation of 100 people in October rallying to reopen the outdoor pool and prevent relocation to a new aquatic centre at the privately-owned mall, Highpoint Shopping Centre.

In Maribyrnong the geo-political scene gave us ample material to run a 'global in the local' council election campaign. Both the Maribyrnong Detention Centre and the Coode Island petrochemical waste processing plant are within the council boundaries. Coode Island was the site of one of Australia's most hazardous industrial accidents in 1991. We ran a punchy campaign against the war, for refugee rights, for solutions to the medical and social crisis of drug abuse, for jobs and a clean, safe environment etc. One Greens voter said to us, "I received your leaflet the other day in my mailbox. It is perfect- you've got the politics and the solutions. I'm preferencing you second." Other candidates in the council elections ran campaigns completely devoid of politics instead focussing on the personal biographies of individuals and whether or not they were paid up members of Western Bulldogs football club.

For a more detailed account of the local council elections we refer members to March 2003 contributions by Linda Waldron and Maurice Sibelle (number 3, volume 3.)

By engaging in council elections we had to take a considered look around us to see which issues were important to take up and how to provide socialist solutions. We did feel some frustration that we were not more familiar with the issues nor did we feel we had sufficient authority in the campaigns. The other concern was that particular campaigns had flared in the past but with the exception of the Sunshine pool campaign we were searching for ongoing local organising.

We did not give up on the local scene. We developed a multi-pronged strategy to get involved in a real way with local politics. We became localised activists by engaging in existing campaigns, initiating campaigns, responding to emerging struggles and educating ourselves about local issues. The results wildly exceeded our expectations. First the spectacular results. Our anti-racism campaign in Footscray saw the largest community rally in the West in decades (see contribution by Ray Fulcher & Linda Waldron for more detailed exposition of this campaign). As well as that particularly exciting experience we did do some very solid base building work. Well before the anti-racism campaign emerged we were learning how to do localised politics and getting some good results. Maybe if we had not been looking creatively and politically at the local scene the opportunity to be involved in the anti-racism campaign may not have presented itself.

Branch Expansion into Sunshine

The strong council election result in Sunshine, coupled with the large number of SA members and contacts from the area inspired us to try to pioneer a branch in Sunshine. While we have recently voted to not pursue a branch there at this stage, the mid 2003 decision forced us to think beyond our comfort zone, with very good outcomes. We initiated regular campaign stalls in the area, at which we enjoyed a high rate of newspaper sales and leaflet distribution. We organised a large branch mobilisation at the Sunshine shopping mall to run a campaign stall, in opposition to centre management's ban. As a result we sold a large number of newspapers with a good turnout of ISO and DSP comrades doing the joint stall. Three SA members were actively engaged in the local pool campaign and we helped build the October community rally, as well as provide marshals and the megaphone. We started attending public forums hosted by the Sunshine International Women's organisation and were able to meet and work well with some rank and file ALP branch members. We held an SA refugee forum which was covered with lengthy analysis from the local paper.

To help us find our feet in the new area we decided to hold every second branch meeting in the Sunshine council function room. One branch meeting was particularly successful with a video showing of the Venezuelan coup and a

large turnout of non-aligned SA members and close contacts. As well Jorge Gatica from the ETU and Chilean Communist Party (Australia), brought along a leading cadre from the CCP (Chile) Javier Chavez to discuss the revolutionary process in Venezuela and Chile. In all we had 25 people at the meeting with 8 attendees (members and non-members) who had not previously come to meetings. In October we showed Michael Moore's "Roger and Me" at the Sunshine Function Room to which 60 people came, at least half of whom were local young people from the Sunshine area. Ten people from the film showing expressed interest in SA and we therefore ran an 'introduction to Socialist Alliance' discussion group in the same room the following week. Only one person was free to come back, but we talked to him for 2 hours and he decided to join SA.

These results reflect the good base building we developed and the potential for further work in the area. With the upcoming Federal election we have decided to look to the suburbs within the electorate of Gellibrand rather than Sunshine for such work and therefore have postponed plans for a Sunshine branch. The experience has, however, given us some valuable lessons in introducing ourselves and our politics to an unfamiliar area. We wish to try a similar strategy in the lower end of the electorate, around Altona which is newly incorporated into the Federal seat. Our Sunshine activities also gave us a good working relationship with journalists from Sunshine local papers, who covered our forums and even did a photo-article on a campaign stump at Sunshine train station.

The Sunshine experience was therefore a combination of engaging with the existing save the pool campaign, initiating a mini- free speech campaign by taking on the local mall management and introducing big picture politics into the local scene via forums, meetings, film showings and discussion groups.

From the Footscray office

From our centre in Footscray we involved ourselves in local campaigns in a variety of ways. If an issue emerged we got involved and during quiet periods we initiated activity, ranging from media stumps to ongoing campaigns. In April the Western Suburbs Migrant Resource Centre was closed and its staff axed. 200 people came to a public meeting in the middle of the day at the Maribyrnong Council. Two of our members went along and made very well received contributions from the floor. Leigh Hubbard, the President of VTHC (Victorian Trades Hall Council) sought out our members there and said he thought the campaign needed Socialist Alliance involvement. We then attended the following meetings to save the WSMRC, but unfortunately the campaign was prematurely ended by the demoralisation of the workers and the refusal of the ALP leadership of the campaign to take up the struggle. The campaign was very instructive for our members in seeing the sabotaging power of the ALP. It also raised an interesting debate with a local Greens activist who criticised us for supporting the campaign as her experiences as a worker at the WSMRC, suggested its management was corrupt and highly exploitative. She was therefore in favour of the centre being closed and its services outsourced.

In early April we collected 300 signatures for the Socialist Alliance 'Block the Budget' petition and presented the sheaf of signed petitions to ALP member for Gellibrand Nicola Roxon. The presentation of the signatures was a good media stump, with a 10 branch members spruiking and leafletting outside her office. Lots of staff and students from the nearby VUT campus signed up, while Roxon's office staff nervously looked on.

From July we initiated a free-speech defence campaign for our member, Tony Iltis, who was fined for handing out leaflets and selling GLW at Footscray Station in the lead-up to the Feb 14, 250,000 strong anti-war demonstration. We worked well with the local media to get the issue publicised. As well Tony was represented by the well-known progressive legal firm, Rob Stary & Associates, based in Footscray. Not long before Tony's case Rob Stary had represented Jack Thompson, a western suburbs resident, arrested on suspicion of terrorism in Pakistan. Rob Stary was also representing another of our branch members, Craig Johnston in the Skilled 6 campaign. So we felt in very lofty company. This enabled us to make personal contact with leftwing lawyers who would prove invaluable later in the year with the anti-racism campaign. Oh and the firm did its job OK- Tony's case was dismissed. Keeping Tony out of the clink provided us with a number of media opportunities. Through this campaign we also learnt navigate the confused and confusing world of council by-laws, with some confidence.

The anti-racism campaign was our spectacularly successful response to an emerging campaign (See Linda's joint article with Ray Fulcher in AV vol 4, number 9). We were aware of police racism and violence prior to the campaign (it was so rampant in Footscray, nobody was unaware of it), but could we have run the campaign by putting out a call? Probably not at this stage of SA's development. It is unlikely that the Somali youth would have found us if we had not been so active on the local scene. Significantly our previous local work had given us our links in the local media which we could immediately activate for the anti-racism campaign. We were also able to line up, Hussein Farah, the youth whose assault initiated the campaign, with effective, experienced and sympathetic legal representation from the firm of Rob Stary and Associates.

The above actions were some of the more locally focussed activities. Alongside we were of course engaged in building the big picture issues of war, terrorism and racism, through forums, meetings, film showings, campaign stalls etc. We will not address this sort of campaigning as it is familiar to most SA members. To highlight some success we had in bringing the big picture politics to those around us in a meaningful way I will however point out that in October last year we had a very strong showing of western suburbs branch contacts at the Stop Bush protest in the city. We had previously found it a little tricky to mobilise new contacts to SA, or activists who were not already part of a socialist organisation. In October 3 non-aligned members and contacts joined (largely of their own accord) the Stop Bush organising committee (introducing themselves as West SA members). At the 1000 strong rally SA west contacts come along with friends and workmates. At the rally itself they took on SA tasks such as leafletting, holding SA banners and placards and introducing their friends to branch activists. We counted 15 SA west contacts who had been sufficiently

inspired by West members building and organising the rally to come out in support of the cause. One of these has since donated \$20.00 to the Gellibrand Federal Election campaign and is considering joining SA, others have become financial members.

We found by turning our attention to the local arena that there is a wealth of important issues to address. We have been planning for sometime to have more branch discussion about the struggles that emerge in the local media and discuss the more complicated ramifications of particular issues. Such examples might include the Newport Mosque expansion, military contracts by the Tenix ship building corporation, the Western Suburbs business leaders plan to upgrade Footscray CBD into a major shopping complex, the tendering processes to private companies for childcare provision and the upgrade of the Maribyrnong river, the safe operation of the Coode Island petro-chemical facility.

The Newport Mosque is an interesting example. The Newport Mosque is run by a progressive community organisation which has been actively involved with the peace campaign and Palestinian solidarity. Their current mosque is little more than a large hall. When Friday prayers are particularly well-attended some members are obliged to pray out in the carpark. The community raised funds to build a sizeable mosque and community centre by purchasing council property attached to a public park. A very vocal opposition campaign was run, which behind its rhetoric of concern for keeping green spaces for all western residents showed anti-muslim bias. In a district well serviced by many churches and church hall of most denominations, the need to increase resources for the large Muslim community of the West created a big backlash in the local letters pages and in public forums. Our branch would like to investigate this issue in more detail as while we stand against the privatisation of public land in this situation might support the Mosque application. Other complicated issues are the awarding of military contracts to Tenix, which is promoted as advantageous for the local industry (job losses and factory closures throughout the West is a recurring issue). The vessels built however would be used by the Federal Government for its own imperialist needs in the Asia-Pacific region. This issue, if we engaged with it, would allow us to explain the traditional cry of nationalising the industry and employing workers to make ships for community need, such as food and transport, not military offence.

For some time we have subscribing to the local papers to find out more of these struggles and think about some of the issues. We would like to expand this process into incorporating more detailed branch meetings with debates, expositions etc. Even if we do not have the resources to be directly involved in the campaigns, we can certainly educate ourselves more about the issues. As well we can profile Linda as candidate by intervening more often in the letter page of the local media.

Amended resolution on trade union work

Adopted by the National Executive (majority) on 2 May to be presented to the 2004 national conference in the trade union perspectives report:

This motion sets out general goals for the next year in the framework of the Trade Union resolution adopted at the 2003 conference, which is reaffirmed, as well as concrete proposals to help achieve these goals:

Goals for Socialist Alliance union work:

1. Defend the militant union current which has the leadership of some unions in Victoria and Western Australia.
2. Extend the militant union current into other unions and interstate either through the development of Socialist Alliance union caucuses or through Socialist Alliance members working with pre-existing groupings of militants. This means SA unionists taking a lead in building the confidence of workers in our own workplaces to take action in defence of their interests, as well as pushing union leaderships to defend and extend members' interests through the mobilisation of the rank and file.
3. A major goal for Socialist Alliance is to promote the tradition of solidarity in our union work - solidarity with other unions, with other sections of the working class which are under attack such as refugees, and solidarity with the working class of other countries such as the Iraqis. This solidarity shouldn't be limited to supporting specific workers' struggles but also play a key role in supporting campaigns such as the campaign against the war in Iraq.
4. Train and develop SA members as union activists and leaders.

Proposals to achieve goals:

1. Build the capacity of workers and unions for solidarity in effective defence of their own working conditions and interests.

Working class strength and solidarity begins at home. Workers need unions with clear demands and policies for their own interests, a commitment and determination from leaders and members to campaign for these goals, and union democracy. Therefore the SA aims to build the strength, membership and effectiveness of all unions, especially where SA members work..

This includes:

- Making the top priority of all SA trade unionists to be effective advocates, organisers and delegates for the interests of our fellow workers and union members, especially in our own workplaces, including recruiting union members. From this work flows the credibility to conduct all other union work.
- Developing a Workers' Charter which identifies the issues facing workers and how they can unionise effectively. This includes taking stock of declines in union membership, changes in the nature of work, the workforce and

family life over the last 2-3 decades, analysing the various perspectives for developing comprehensive proposals for solving the problems of working life.

- Being in the forefront of campaigns to unionise unorganized workers, especially young workers and casuals. Where possible, assist workers who are trying to unionise their workplaces.
- Helping members in non-militant unions develop as workplace delegates and develop unionism in the workplace.
- SA unionists seeking to win positions as delegates in order to advance the position of building militant unionism.
- Building alliances with other members of our unions to develop militant union currents to campaign for strong policies in defence of members, for rank and file control, democracy and accountability.

2. Defend the existing militant union leaderships

While the militant current of unions is small and restricted to Victoria and WA, their emphasis on rank and file control and militant defence of members' interests have inspired the development of militant caucuses in other unions and interstate.

The example of the militant unions taking militant action without the sky falling in has inspired individual unionists in other unions and interstate that it is worthwhile to become more active in their unions. Some of the militant unions which are facing attack at the moment include Workers First in the Victorian AMWU, the AMWU printing division in Victoria, the WA MUA, the Victorian and WA CFMEU and the Victorian postal union and the Victorian TCFU.

- The Alliance will defend all unionists attacked for defending their members' rights and workers' rights more generally.
- Campaign for the charges against Craig Johnston to be dropped, and build a nationwide campaign to free him if he's jailed. Immediately, this means a big SA contingent at the 10 May demonstration on the first day of his trial.
- Support the campaign by the CFMEU and other construction unions against the recommendations of the Cole royal commission.
- Defend other militant unionists who come under attack, regardless of whether they are attacked by employers, governments or opponents within the union movement.

3. Coordinating the SA trade union effort

The work of co-ordinating the Alliance trade union effort has been assisted by the decisions of the 2003 Conference and follow up actions. This can be further developed.

- Socialist Alliance members in each union should caucus and assess existing rank and file caucuses, the prospects for broader caucuses and work as a SA caucus within the broadest framework possible for pursuing the immediate needs of union members. This means consolidating the existing SA union caucuses and developing new caucuses where necessary.
- Develop better interstate collaboration between SA unionists in the same union..
- In some cases the Alliance may support groups contesting union elections. The decision on which groups to support will be taken by the SA members in that union in consultation with the National Executive and National TU Committee.
- Continue with the National Trade Union Committee but seek to involve more of the participants in-between meetings. The National Trade Union Committee will coordinate links between Alliance members, the development of a unionists' education program and assist in the production of pamphlets and leaflets.
- SA branches or districts to organise trade union seminars and educational programs regarding the history of struggles, debates in the union movement, and organizing methods as well as strategy, tactics and critical analysis skills.
- Publish more pamphlets taking up issues of concern to militant trade unionists. Two pamphlets which are currently being worked on are one on new unionists getting organised and one on protectionism.
- Build a big profile for Socialist Alliance's election campaign amongst unionists through getting SA candidates and members to address union meetings, and seeking the endorsement of unionists and financial contributions for our campaign. Through the campaign, seek new members for SA.
- Later in 2004, SA needs to make an assessment as to whether a national conference of unionists is feasible. Considerations will include:
 - the number and strength of militant caucuses in unions which would be committed to such a conference
 - the strength of the campaign to repel the attack on militant unionists
 - other trade union struggles which emerge and the need for national solidarity

4. Extend the tradition of solidarity to other workers.

On the basis of the understanding of solidarity that union members gain from being part of an effective union or unionised workplace, we advocate extension of the principles of solidarity to other struggles:

- Supporting all struggles by workers and unions in defence of jobs, wages and conditions, and union rights wherever possible. For example, organising solidarity when there are outbreaks of struggle such as the NSW rebel train drivers
- Seek to win support among workers for the campaign against the Iraq war as well as seeking to build solidarity with the genuine unions in Iraq.
- Campaign within the union movement to popularise the demand for 12 months' parenting leave fully paid by employer contributions to a publicly managed scheme rather than a taxpayer-funded welfare scheme.
- Build links with militant unionists overseas, especially in Asia, where many Australian companies operate.

- Promote the Aboriginal stolen wages campaign
- Campaign against policies which foster racism in the working class, such as the ALP's proposal for an ID card for overseas workers or the dobbing in of "illegal" workers to the immigration department. Instead, unions should seek to unionise all workers and involve them in union campaigns without asking questions about their background.

Defend Militant Unionism. Build strong unions from the ground up.

By Riki Lane (Wills branch)

Our 2004 Union resolution has caused lively and useful discussion amongst National TU Cte and NE members over the last two weeks. The resolution going to conference has been much improved.

However it does not get the balance right. The vital political task - defending militant unionists and leaderships like Craig Johnston and the Vic AMWU Workers' First - overshadows the equally vital industrial task - longterm grassroots work of building up union organisation. These amendments aim to restore that balance.

The phrase "militant union current" takes centre stage in the resolution – yet it is not defined other than by naming certain union leaderships. It tends to divide the unions into two opposed camps – the "militants" and the "conservatives" – where there is really a more complex continuum. Our situation today is not like the '30's, when the Militant Minority Movement was a clear political and industrial current.

For example, the CFMEU (and the AMWU) nationally is a militant union compared to most – and we defend it against government attacks.

The Vic CFMEU is especially well organised, militant and political – yet it's Forestry division members have been quite reactionary against environmentalists at times. Even within the Vic CFMEU construction division, there are officials who are in no way left wingers. The Vic CFMEU (and other Vic left militant union) solidly backs the ALP at elections – it would not call for a vote for SA, because we preferenced Greens before ALP. Of course we defend this militant union. I am sure that Joan Doyle of the Vic Posties would be flattered to be mentioned in the same paragraph as the Vic CFMEU – she said at a SA TU seminar "we're not the most militant bunch." Elected on the basis of over a decade of grassroots work, her leadership group is doing great work to salvage their union from decades of right wing leadership that had brought it almost to its knees. But, apart from Joan, they are mostly not experienced in class-struggle or socialist politics. Of course we defend them against attacks from the bosses and the right-wing national leadership. Combining these different concrete cases into one "militant union current" does not help us understand our tasks better – it clouds that understanding

The best way to defend militant unionism is to build up the strength of the unions where Alliance members work. This may take years (as it did in the Vic AMWU, Vic Posties, and WA CFMEU), but it is the only way to create unions where militant leaderships are based on solidly organised rank and file structures.

Proposed Amendments to NE TU resolution

1. Replace "goals for SA union work" section with:

Socialist Alliance has interrelated industrial and political goals in the unions. The political context is that militant union leaderships face major attacks. The industrial context is that our members are mostly in unions that do not have a militant tradition or work in poorly unionised areas.

Our industrial goals are based on building the strength of the unions from the ground up. Through long term rank and file work with other militants, we can help build strong workplace and delegate structures and create the conditions to build militant union leaderships. The central industrial goals are:

- SA unionists taking a lead in building the confidence of workers in our own workplaces to take action in defence of their interests;
- training and developing SA members as union activists and leaders; and
- improving the effectiveness of SA union work.

Our central political goals are to:

- defend the existing militant union leaderships that are under attack; and
- promote the tradition of solidarity - with other unions, with other sections of the working class which are under attack such as refugees, and with the working class of other countries such as the Iraqis. This solidarity shouldn't be limited to supporting specific workers' struggles but also play a key role in supporting campaigns such as the campaign against the war in Iraq.

2. Add an extra point at the end of section 1

Reclaiming the traditional union slogan "in unity is strength". We need to seek and propose unity in struggle as widely as applicable in each union and across unions, in order to allow the rank and file to call officials to account. The responsibility for divisions and consequent weakness in the union movement should not be seen to be that of SA members or militant activists, but due to the actions and politics of leaders who will not fight. This will increase understanding of the need for a leadership that will fight for the wages and conditions of the membership.

3. Replace the first paragraph of section 2 with:

Some union leaderships, including Vic AMWU Worker's First, WA MUA and Vic CFMEU, are better at building rank and file control and militant defence of their members interests. They also have taken the argument to their members on unpopular political issues such as opposition to the war on Iraq and support for refugees. Their emphasis on

rank and file control and militant defence of members' interests have inspired individual unionists in other unions and interstate that it is worthwhile to become more active in their unions and the development of militant caucuses. It is an important political task for the SA as a whole to campaign to defend them against attacks made by governments and bosses.

Constitutional amendments proposed by National Executive

At its May 2, 2004, meeting the National Executive agreed unanimously to move the following 7 amendments to the Constitution of the Socialist Alliance at the national conference. The rationale for each change is included after each proposed amendment.

1. Change the second sentence in 3.1, which presently reads:

The Alliance also seeks to build campaigns around the demands of the action platform, etc

to read

The Alliance also seeks to build campaigns around the demands of the action platform and policy as adopted, etc.

Rationale: The body of adopted national Alliance policy was already extended well beyond the founding platform by the Second National Conference. That process will continue at this conference, and as the Alliance grows and develops more specific policy responses, will continue even more. This body of adopted policy is the political basis of the Alliance.

2. Change 8.7, which presently reads:

Providing their material does not contradict the core Alliance platform, local Alliance groups shall be free to raise additional, specific demands within their material

to read

Providing their material does not contradict the Alliance platform and policy as adopted, Alliance branches shall be free to raise additional, specific demands within their material

Rationale: As for amendment (1). Also the original formulation "local Alliance groups" isn't clear. The section covers the rights of branches and should be so specified.

3. Change the last sentence of paragraph 11.1, which presently reads:

The pre-selected candidate shall be the person with the most votes

to read

The pre-selected candidate must receive an absolute majority of votes. If no candidate receives an absolute majority in the first round of voting, the candidate with the least number of votes shall drop off and further rounds of voting conducted until one candidate gains an absolute majority.

Rationale: This simply specifies a voting method that guarantees that in the case of many candidates for pre-selection, the ultimate winner shall have the support of a majority of the branch (or other body conducting the pre-selection).

4. Change the first sentence of 14.1, which presently reads:

The Socialist Alliance may be dissolved by a special conference called for this purpose by the National Executive, or by one third of the membership (as above)

to read

The Socialist Alliance may be dissolved by a special conference called for this purpose by the National Executive, or by one quarter of the membership (as above)

Rationale: A mistake left over from the last conference. We changed the percentage of financial members on whose petition a Special Conference must be called from a third to one quarter, but left the original figure unchanged in this paragraph.

5. Change 6.3, which presently reads:

National Conference shall elect a National Executive, and any National Officeholders and national bodies

to read

National Conference shall elect the National Executive.

Rationale: The present wording contradicts 7.3 of the Constitution, which states: "The National Treasurer shall be appointed by the incoming National Executive after each National Conference". It also contradicts the established practice in SA of facilitating all members' participation in SA's national thinking and work by allowing the ad hoc national working groups to admit new members as they volunteer.

6. Change the second last point in 6.5, which presently reads:

If in case (ii) no unaffiliated member can be found to act as proxy a member of an affiliated group may be elected, who shall have voice but not vote at meetings of the National Executive.

to read

That in the event of a non-aligned member of the National Executive being unable to attend a particular NE meeting, they be empowered to appoint a proxy with voice and vote for that meeting from among all financial members of Socialist Alliance, and that the National Conveners be advised of the proxy in writing or in person by the NE member before the NE meeting concerned.

Rationale: This change was adopted unanimously by the National Executive on September 19, 2003. The NE decision was based on the recognition, after some experience, that non-aligned members of the NE require at least as much flexibility in proxying as that enjoyed by the affiliates' NE representatives, who can proxy to any member of their organisation nationwide.

7. Change the second sentence in section 8.1, which presently reads:

A branch shall have at least seven members and will be organised on the basis of federal electorates

to read

A branch shall have at least seven members. Each new branch must be ratified by the National Executive taking into the location of other branches, including in relation to federal and state electoral work.

Rationale: In practice, this section of the Constitution no longer accords with the development of Alliance branches; in the last 12 months, the National Executive has had to waive this section twice to enable the formation of new (and ongoing) branches. Section 11.4, which states: "In the event of disputes about candidates within or between branches or affiliate organisations the National Executive shall have the final say", provides an adequate mechanism for dealing with any disputes that the original wording of section 8.1 may have been intended to prevent.

A draft immigration policy

Moved by Sarah Stephen (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

[Note from National Conveners: This resolution for the national conference was submitted on April 30, before the deadline for resolutions, but was mistakenly omitted from the last issue of Alliance Voices.]

Context

Australia is a nation of immigrants. More than six million people from almost 200 countries have migrated to Australia since 1945; one in ten of those were refugees. During the 1990s, 900,000 people migrated to Australia. Forty-three per cent of Australians were either born overseas, or had at least one parent born overseas.

But Australia's history of immigration has an ugly side, cultivated by decades of racist misleadership by governments, trade unions and the media. Selection of immigrants during much of the last century was based on the colour of their skin – the White Australia policy. And a hostility and suspicion of "foreigners", particularly those who are not white-skinned, lives on.

Racist governments and the corporate media have conditioned large numbers of working-class people to have a "blame the migrants" mentality, inculcating us with the racist notion that the most recently arrived migrants are responsible for many of our social and environmental ills.

As the shortage of labour and the prosperity of the post-war boom dried up in the 1980s, governments have tightened the criteria for entering Australia as a new migrant, and have reduced the intake of refugees to a mere token gesture. To justify this, there are arguments that Australia is already overpopulated, that we have limited resources, which migrants contribute to unemployment.

During the 1990s, Australian governments began following in the footsteps of Europe. Irregular migrants and refugees (those arriving without prior authorisation) became the focus of a new fear campaign – the "flood" that threatened jobs, security and a way of life.

Globally, wealthy countries' migration policy has increasingly locked out those without wealth or skills. In Australia, the "points" test favours wealthy and skilled migrants. Family reunion places have been dramatically reduced. There are increasing moves to bond new migrants to regional areas as a condition of entry. Migrants are barred from access to social security payments for their first two years. Today's new migrants are treated as second-class citizens.

If new migrants are second-class citizens, refugees who arrive on our shores are two rungs below them.

Since the early 1990s, successive Labor and Liberal governments have singled out for punishment and demonisation those asylum seekers who have arrived by boat on Australia's shores. They are punished, the government argues, because they have jumped the "queue". But even the UN High Commission for Refugees admits that, with almost 20 million refugees worldwide, there is no such thing as a queue. Those who get resettled through quota systems like Australia's are not those most in need; they are simply the lucky ones.

Particularly since 1999, the few thousand refugees who have been desperate and determined enough to find their own way to our shores have been the subject of the most vitriolic campaign of fear and loathing, a campaign designed to do two things: undermine solidarity between Australian working people and the world's most persecuted, to mistakenly see them as the enemy; and to divert our attention from the work of the real enemy – the government and its economic masters who, meanwhile, have been privatising our services, Placement of detention centres in the remotest parts of the Australian desert and restricting media access was a way of keeping people from view, limiting the extent to which asylum seekers could be humanised. The "Pacific Solution" took this to its most extreme by outsourcing refugee prison camps to poverty stricken island nations, far from the Australian population.

Since 1999, three-year temporary protection visas (initially proposed by Pauline Hanson's One Nation party) have condemned thousands of refugees to perpetual uncertainty and as a result, profound trauma and mental distress. Combined with limited social welfare support, no avenue to reunite with their family and no assistance with English language classes, TPVs have barred refugees from feeling that they have a place in the community and have prevented them from feeling the security and support necessary to begin to rebuild their lives.

The Socialist Alliance believes that a fundamentally different approach to immigration is both possible and necessary. This country has the wealth and resources to be able to accept far greater numbers of people, and to do so on a humanitarian and not an economic basis. If Australia has a shortage of doctors and nurses, the government has no right to poach skilled professionals from countries that need them even more.

An immigration policy for the Socialist Alliance

- End the policy of mandatory detention, close all detention centres, and free all asylum seekers imprisoned within them
- End the Pacific Solution: close the detention centres on Nauru and PNG's Manus Island and grant all asylum seekers
- Abolish the concept of a "safe third country" which is used to screen out those who would otherwise be assessed as refugees
- Return Christmas Island, Ashmore and Cartier islands, and Cocos (Keeling) islands to Australia's migration zone
- Establish a category of complementary protection for those not found to be refugees under the UNHCR definition, but who face persecution if they were to be returned to the country they fled from
- Abolish temporary protection visas
- End all deportations
- Immediately restore the annual refugee resettlement quota to its pre-1990s level of 20,000
- Immediately resettle all UNHCR-assessed refugees stranded in Indonesia, which is not a signatory to the UN refugee convention
- Recognise as grounds for refugee status gay and lesbian discrimination and violence against women, where the government in question condones or permits it
- Abolish the Refugee Review Tribunal; replace with a fully independent merits review tribunal for refugees to appeal against adverse decisions
- Restore access to all levels of judicial appeal; allow adverse decisions to be appealed on matters of substance as well as matters of law
- Remove the rule which prohibits asylum seekers in the community from working or receiving social security if they submit a claim more than 45 days after they arrived in Australia
- Extend funding and specialist services for settlement, including assistance with recognition of skills
- Free and widely available English classes for all migrants and refugees
- Full citizenship rights, including the right to vote, for all migrants and refugees
- Abolish the pro-business points system which favours skilled and wealthy business migrants
- Abolish the requirement for sponsors to pay an up-front bond
- Abolish the two-year waiting period for new migrants to access social security payments
- End unequal treatment for gay men, lesbians and transgendered people in immigration; recognition of same sex relationships
- Remove HIV status from health tests for visas
- Give preference to places for migrants from poor countries, especially countries in the Asia-Pacific region
- Abolish all family reunion waiting lists, and remove the quota restriction so that partners, siblings, parents and extended families can be reunited in Australia if they choose.