

Alliance Voices

Socialist Alliance Discussion Bulletin

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NOTE: DEADLINE FOR RESOLUTIONS/MOTIONS FOR THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE IS MIDNIGHT, FRIDAY APRIL 30, 2004. PLEASE EMAIL TO THE NATIONAL CONVENERS AT: ne@socialist-alliance.org

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Policy proposals for National Conference

By Jorge Jorquera for the National Elections Working Group

At its February 20, 2004, hook-up the National Elections Working Group (NEWG) decided to make a priority of producing updated draft policy in the following areas for presentation to the National Conference: health, education, international, refugees, democratic rights, workers rights, environment and welfare.

The NEWG decided to ask specific comrades to put together new policy proposals in these areas (where required) and otherwise to adopt existing SA policy as a *starting point* for policy discussions at the conference. Any policy newly drafted by comrades asked to do so by the NEWG would simply be starting points for discussion and not policy motions being moved by the NEWG.

Below are reprints of already adopted policy now being put forward by the NEWG as *starting points* for discussion at the 2004 conference on education, workers rights, welfare and refugee rights.

Also included below are proposed changes to Socialist Alliance environment policy, put forward by comrade Jim Green on the request of the NEWG.

The NEWG is proposing that the Policy session at the conference *begin* with a brief introductory report and discussion on the eight prioritised areas. These areas were prioritised by the NEWG due to their importance in our current election campaign. This of course does not exclude comrades raising discussion on *any* policy areas they think warrant our attention at the conference.

Education for all, not just the rich

Adopted by Second National Conference (2003). Content to be incorporated into the present Socialist Alliance platform, but with the style and form of presentation to be determined by the National Executive (see Second National Conference minutes, in Discussion Bulletin, Volume 3 Number 8).

Education is a fundamental right for all people, yet the policies of successive governments has been to turn education into a privilege; with wealth as the main entry qualification. At all levels, the public education system has been systematically dismantled, while private schools enjoy billions in taxpayer subsidies. Early childhood education is increasingly out of the reach of most working people, leading to increased pressure on parents, in particular mothers, to exit the workforce. This is in fact privatisation by stealth. From the beginning of primary school to the end of secondary school, parents are required to pay for what is ostensibly a “free education system”. Public school buildings are often in disrepair, class sizes are too large, and the virtual monopoly of text book publishers leads to vastly inflated prices for essential education materials. Higher education is becoming a lottery where the winning ticket is a wad of banknotes. Socialist Alliance will fight to restore public education at all levels, creating a universal, free, quality secular system open to all those who need and want it. This would preclude the need for taxpayer subsidies to private institutions, which would be fully funded by those who choose to provide and use them.

- *Universal, free access to quality childcare and preschool and after.* School programs for all; recognise the skills of childcare and early education teachers and mandated wage parity with other education professionals.
- *Free, quality, secular education.* No upfront university fees; abolish the Higher Education Contribution Scheme; abolish all TAFE fees and fees for post graduate and overseas students; Stop public schools from imposing fees in the form of “voluntary” levies.
- *A guaranteed independent income for students.* A fully indexed, living wage for students set well above the poverty line; abolish the student loans scheme, pay apprentices at least the base rate for a qualified tradesperson during their training.
- *Increased funding for public education.* Fund tertiary and TAFE places for all who qualify; end government funding of private training providers and schools; halt forced amalgamations and school closures; increase corporate taxes to fund education and training.
- *Needs-based, diverse staffing of public education from kindergarten to university.* Improve quality through hiring more permanent teaching staff to reduce teacher workload and class sizes; end the casualisation of employment in all sectors of education; no discrimination in employment; affirmative action programs to train and hire more Indigenous educators and more women in non-traditional areas; stop the harassment of union activists and other dissenters.
- *Guaranteed access for all.* Develop, fund and enforce policies to ensure that women, migrants, Aboriginal people, gays and lesbians and people with disabilities have access to an education free from harassment, stereotyping and discrimination; education in an atmosphere of respect for all viewpoints and for dissidence and non-conformity. Full funding for literacy programs: every person has the right to learn to read and write. Ensure full funding for English as a Second Language programs; provide courses in Indigenous and other community languages; fully fund resources to integrate students with disabilities; expand childcare places at universities and TAFE colleges.
- *Curricula which serves the needs of students.* Eliminate stereotyping in curriculum materials and resources; run courses which explore and teach about the history of oppression, including women’s studies, Indigenous studies, ethnic studies, gay and lesbian studies and labour studies; education for life, not just for work; quality, factual and non-moralistic sex education in schools; education programs to counter homophobia and anti-gay violence in schools.

- *Students, staff and community control of education-student control of student affairs.* Independent student unions; replace business representatives on governing councils with elected union, student and community representatives.

Defend and extend workers' rights

Adopted by Second National Conference (2003). Content to be incorporated into the present Socialist Alliance platform, but with the style and form of presentation to be determined by the National Executive (see Second National Conference minutes, in Discussion Bulletin, Volume 3 Number 8).

“Deregulation of the Labour Market” is a mantra of neo-liberalism, espoused by both major parties and right-wing journalists and academics. Like all corporate spin, it is meant to obscure the huge volume of anti-worker legislation aimed at reinforcing the master-servant relationship which underpins working life under capitalism. Socialist Alliance, building on the historic experience of workers here and overseas, knows that all genuine gains by working people have come through battles on the picket lines and on the streets. Conversely, intervention by capitalist governments-of all political views-is aimed at weakening our ability to struggle and snatching back hard-won concessions. The Alliance will campaign to overturn all anti-union laws and to halt government intervention on the side of employers. On top of this, the Alliance will campaign for the introduction of constitutional protections of wages and working conditions.

- Repeal the Workplace Relations Act and all laws against “secondary boycotts”.
- Abolish all regulation of strikes, picket lines, street marches and rallies.
- Full legal recognition of unions and union representatives.
- Enact a “Workplace Bill of Rights” providing guarantees of conditions, including a living wage for all workers-employed, unemployed, disabled and retired- equal pay for work of equal or comparable worth, generous maternity and childcare entitlements, protection of workers’ entitlements and a sliding scale of working hours to ensure full employment.
- Abolish all “work for the dole” schemes and so-called “mutual obligation”.
- Mandatory jail for company directors responsible for workplace deaths and injuries.
- Full, unlimited, employer-funded injury and sick pay.
- Quality, employer-funded childcare and after-school programs.
- Restore all workers’ rights to civil action in the courts.
- Remove homophobic exemptions which exclude gays and lesbians who work with children from anti-discrimination protections; full support for gay and lesbian teachers and childcare and youth workers.
- Affirmative Action plans to redress Australia’s outrageously gender- and race-segmented workforce.
- Enact heavy fines for employers who breach Equal Opportunity laws; end sexual harassment in the workplace.

Defend and extend welfare

Adopted by Second National Conference (2003). Content to be incorporated into the present Socialist Alliance platform, but with the style and form of presentation to be determined by the National Executive (see Second National Conference minutes, in Discussion Bulletin, Volume 3 Number 8).

Socialist Alliance supports universal welfare rights for all who are in need. The welfare system was fought for and won by the working class over generations in order to protect its members from the unemployment and poverty intrinsic to capitalism. The “old age pension” was introduced in 1908 and, the last big win was the introduction of the “supporting mother’s benefit” in 1972. The end of the post war boom saw the start of efforts to roll back the welfare state. The ALP introduced the assets test on the age pension, ended non-means tested family allowances and reduced young people’s access to payments. This signalled the start of hundreds of changes, all designed to reduce payments, tighten eligibility criteria or impose waiting periods. Welfare rights are now under renewed attack from the Coalition Government, which argues that the family is the best provider of welfare.

Under the guise of “welfare reform” the government is imposing “mutual obligation” on older workers, parents and disabled people, putting pressure on all workers’ wages by requiring welfare recipients to volunteer or take low-waged jobs. Like governments around the world, the Howard Government is attacking the welfare state because this is what the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank requires. Socialist 24 Alliance says welfare payments for all those in need are a right!

- A guaranteed independent income for all at a living wages. No to State-enforced dependency-end assessments based on relationship status or parental income.
- Abolish work for the dole, immediately pay all Community Development Employment Program workers an award wage and abolish all mutual obligation requirements.
- Scrap the 104-week waiting period for newly arrived migrants.
- Establish voluntary, well-staffed, quality, public programs for those who wish to enter the workforce; provide free education and training; tackle child care, workplace accessibility, discriminatory employment policies and other barriers to employment.
- Eliminate unemployment by reducing working hours with no loss of pay.
- No further outsourcing of welfare services; keep Centrelink in public hands; renationalise the job network.
- Scrap funding for the war machine-money for welfare not warfare!

Fight corporate globalisation

From Socialist Alliance Platform, as adopted by the 2001 National Conference and amended by the 2003 National Conference.

- For international solidarity, to gain union rights, basic public services, and a living wage for workers around the world.
- Cancel Third World debt. Withdraw Australia from the WTO. The agents of global capitalism, the WTO, IMF and World Bank must be replaced with a global plan of economic reconstruction to end poverty.
- Promote peace and international co-operation.
- Open the borders.

Refugee rights

Various sources.

Free the refugees, migrant rights

From Socialist Alliance Platform, as adopted by the 2001 National Conference and amended by the 2003 National Conference.

- Close the detention centres; end mandatory detention.
- Full rights for asylum seekers and migrants; abolish the two-year waiting period which prevent newly arrived migrants accessing social security.
- End all deportations.
- Remove all restrictive and discriminatory immigration regulations; abolish the pro-business “points” system.
- Funding and specialist services for resettlement.
- Unlimited and free English classes.
- Full citizenship rights including the right to vote for all refugees and migrants, with abolition of the temporary protection visa.

Refugees

Adopted by Second National Conference (2003).

- Socialist Alliance confirms its support for asylum-seekers in Australia, whether in detention centres, in the community on temporary protection visas (TPVs) or bridging visas, or whether in hiding.
- The Alliance condemns the Liberals’ crude racist lies and their attempts to divide workers in Australia by fomenting hatred against our brothers and sisters fleeing persecution and hardship. The Alliance deplores the ALP’s acceptance of much of the Liberal agenda.
- By contrast, the Alliance calls for the abolition of mandatory detention, the closure of the camps, permanent protection for all refugees and asylum seekers not just those who meet UN criteria, and the scrapping of TPVS, amnesty for those who have escaped the camps, and the end to harassment of those refugees from countries including East Timor, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan or elsewhere who face deportation to so-called safe homelands.
- The Alliance pledges its continuing support for the refugee rights movement. In particular, Alliance branches will contribute to mobilising for the World Refugee Day rallies around the country on June 22.

Environment policy proposals

Submitted by Jim Green (Adelaide branch)

1. THE SOCIALIST ALLIANCE PLATFORM

As adopted by the 2001 National Conference and amended by the 2003 National Conference.

For ecological sustainability

- Extend and socialise public transport, not freeways.
- Effective action on greenhouse gas emissions; develop renewable energy sources;
- No uranium mining, no reactor; no logging old growth forests; no genetically modified organism (GMO) crops or field trials.
- Worker-community-green alliances to counter profiteering developers.
- Fund public housing.
- **Replace with:**
- Extend and socialise public transport, not freeways.
- Effective action on greenhouse gas emissions; develop renewable energy sources.
- No uranium mining, no nuclear reactors, no radioactive waste dumping.
- No logging of old growth forests.
- No genetically modified organism crops or field trials.
- Worker-community-green alliances to counter profiteering developers.

Reasons:

1. Public housing demand belongs in a different section of the platform.
2. Otherwise just tidying up.

2. CEASE THE VANDALISM OF THE ENVIRONMENT

[This is a proposal for a longer statement incorporating material from the FSP proposal submitted to the Second National Conference, Michael Morphet and North Sydney Socialist Alliance.]

Capitalist globalisation is destroying the earth. We live under the reign of a class willing to jeopardise our lives and those of future generations for quick cash.

Capitalism destroys habitat and renders species extinct, yet the survival of animal and plant life is essential for human progress and should not be counterposed to so-called “development”. We are bombarded with chemicals in our food, water and air. We are assailed by poisons at work, at home and in our communities. In our hands, technology will be used for human progress; in the hands of capitalists, it is used to plunder our world. The destruction of the once-mighty Murray-Darling river system, the mobilisation of megatonnes of salt which threatens not only agriculture but many rural towns (and, in time, cities); the lunacy of open-cut and acid leaching uranium mines; the huge volume of asbestos released from decaying cement sheeting and insulation -these are disasters which may take centuries to rectify, even in a socialist Australia.

“Capitalism” and “sustainability” are mutually exclusive concepts. Only socialism is sustainable. But it is necessary to stop the destruction of our world now, as a matter of urgency. Socialist Alliance demands the commencement of a comprehensive environmental restoration and employment program, fully funded by a tax on corporate bank transactions; including full training and award wages for all workers; preference to be given to displaced timber and agriculture workers, rural unemployed, Indigenous communities and displaced small farmers.

This restoration and employment program should include the following:

FORESTS

- Ban logging in old growth forests and other high conservation value native forests.
- Ban the export of woodchips from native forests.
- Initiate public-sector plantation programs giving high priority to employment and ecological sustainability.
- Replant forests in dry-land and other salt-affected regions.

LAND MANAGEMENT

- Phase out agribusiness farming in the Murray-Darling basin; stop all new farming and commercial development in salt-affected regions.
- No Genetically Modified Organisms - ban all importation of GMOs and their production in Australia. Compulsory labelling of all genetically modified products.
- Strict controls on land clearing.
- No mining or mineral exploration in national parks and other areas of high conservation value.
- Reconstruction of salt-damaged infrastructure.
- Mandated humane treatment of animals and full protection of endangered species and habitats.

WATER

- Replace of open irrigation channels with pipes.
- Removal of exotic species such as willow and carp from river systems.
- Reduce water use by steeply increasing prices to big companies; mandate the use of recycled water for all industrial purposes.
- End the confiscation of Indigenous land for mining and agribusiness;

ENERGY

- No new coal-fired power stations. Construct renewable energy infrastructure instead.
- Subsidise solar heating and solar electricity in domestic dwellings.
- Stop and reverse privatisation of energy/electricity industries.

CLIMATE CHANGE

- Ratify the Kyoto Protocol.
- Establish an industry-funded 10% renewable energy target by 2010.
- Fund public transport not the spiral of more-roads-more-cars-more-roads. Establish limits on emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants for all new vehicles. Abolish the tax subsidies which encourage production and use of petrol-guzzling large vehicles.

NUCLEAR ISSUES

- No new nuclear reactor at Lucas Heights (or anywhere) and shut down the HIFAR reactor currently operating; invest in cleaner, safer technologies such as cyclotrons.
- No dumping of radioactive waste; waste producers to manage their own waste in secure, monitored facilities at their own expense.
- No nuclear waste dump for international commercial use in Australia;
- Close the operating uranium mines (Ranger, Roxby Downs, Beverley) and no new mines to be approved.
- No Australian support for the US government’s missile ‘defence’ program and renewed, active support for non-proliferation agreements in place.

- No nuclear power plants.

WASTE

- Force manufacturers of electronic equipment, whitegoods and various other products to initiate recycling programs.
- Prohibit the export to Third World countries of electronic and whitegood wastes under the guise of 'recycling'.
- Establish comprehensive recycling systems for all wastes.
- Mandated container deposits.
- Remediate contaminated industrial sites.

Green Left Weekly and Victoria's Militant Unions

By Michael Bull (Wills branch)

The decision of Socialist Alliance to trial a relationship with *Green Left Weekly* as a weekly political voice for the Alliance is an important one, in terms of the Alliance's solidarity work with the militant unions. In order for comrades to understand the role that *GLW* plays in Victoria and therefore what the Alliance stands to gain from its relationship with *GLW*, I wish to reflect on several points.

As a CFMEU official, I believe that *GLW* is fast becoming a key tool in the transfer of information amongst militant unionists nationwide. For example:

- Several unions provide us with distribution outlets for the paper. In Melbourne, these are the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union (CFMEU), Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and the Maritime Union of Australia (MUA). In Geelong, the CFMEU and the ETU office, and in Western Australia, the CFMEU and the ETU offices. These are all fairly new developments, just over the last two years, and we expect that this will expand further into other progressive unions and even some progressive Trades and Labor Councils. Some other unions and TLC's already have subscriptions but as of yet are not taking bundles.
- *GLW* has been used as a media for campaigning amongst unionists. Some examples of the campaign that *GLW* supporters have been involved in more recently are the Skilled Six and the Defend Craig Johnston campaigns. *GLW* also covered the formation and activities of Workers Against War, the siege and slaughter in East Timor in 1999, built support for the MUA pickets in 1998 and numerous other picket lines and industrial disputes.
- *GLW* also plays a role in publicising militant tickets in union elections. Its national coverage brings together workers from around the country who are organising such election campaigns. For workers beyond the capital cities, the paper plays a unique role in providing them with information difficult to obtain elsewhere. Examples of these militant tickets include: Workers First in the AMWU, other militant tickets running in elections in the MUA, CPSU, AEU, NTEU and the ETU.
- *Green Left Weekly* also publicises the advances of the militant unionists, for example, Workers First's Campaign 2000, the Victorian CFMEU's 36-hour week campaign, the WA CFMEU's walk-out against the war in Iraq, the NSW rebel train drivers and the Queensland nurses' dispute in 2002 have re-inspired union activists interstate that it is possible to rebuild militant unionism. The coverage of the Victorian AMWU's campaigns has popularised the idea amongst many left unionists around the country that it is possible to defy the industrial laws. Martin Kingham has said that *GLW* has the best coverage of the building industry royal commission.
- Increasingly, militant union leaders have begun to develop trust in *GLW* and see it as a credible paper. Union leaders such as John Cummins, Martin Kingham and Kevin Reynolds (CFMEU), Dean Mighell (ETU), Michele O'Neil (TCFUA), Kevin Bracken and Chris Cain (MUA), Tom Watson (FEDFA), Steve Dargavel and Craig Johnston (AMWU) have all been willing to be interviewed and contribute to the paper. Some of these unionists have circulated copies of particular articles or issues of the paper, which they have found particularly useful. Most also subscribe to the paper in some form and are willing to give quotes of support to the paper when we ask for promotion. This shows that they trust and respect the paper and believe that it is a useful tool for them by which they can engage with the broader political debate.
- The unions I mentioned above only produce their own internal journals or leaflets for their own membership and not the broader community. And their union journals aren't very frequent. Therefore they rely on the mass media, through press releases, and the progressive media to broadcast their views to union members interstate and to the broader public. Needless to say the mass media will largely only print what is useful for its own interests. Of the progressive media in Melbourne, the progressive union leaderships see 3CR and *GLW* as the two main sources.
- The conservative union leaderships have their own media outlets such as 'Workers Online' and 'LabourStart'. Workers Online is published by the conservative NSW Labor Council. *GLW* plays an important role in clarifying and debating much of the misinformation circulated by the NSW ALP right, the ACTU and their media outlets.
- Because of the influence that *GLW* is having in the trade union movement, the more conservative union leaderships have been forced to become avid readers of the paper. AMWU national secretary Doug Cameron complains about *GLW* and even threatened to sue *GLW* for reporting the 2002 AMWU national conference's decision to strip power from state branches of the union. *GLW* was the only public source of this information. The NSW CFMEU state secretary, Andrew Ferguson, often complains to myself and the *GLW* editorial committee about certain articles, particularly articles challenging the ALP line and also the NSW CFMEU's policy of dobbing in 'illegal' immigrant workers to the immigration department and the federal police. The CPSU and AMWU national leaderships check *GLW* as soon as it is uploaded onto the web. At the recent CPSU national council, the officials

put a copy of Alison Thorne's *GLW* article about the Members First motions on everyone's seat before the start of the council.

- Union issues, which are extensively covered by *GLW*, are the main attraction for unionists but we cannot underestimate the influence that other articles have on the political development of unionists. *GLW* is a key source of information for many union activists over issues such as the war, refugees and racism. The progressive union leaderships are happy for *GLW* to play the role of raising debates that may put some of their own membership off side such as gay rights, women's rights and migrant rights, and play a role in educating members. *GLW*'s coverage of the Socialist Alliance and SA unionists' work in the unions, has attracted unionists towards SA and will continue to do so.
- All of the above has led to a much greater circulation of *GLW* to the rank and file members of the union movement. Even though *GLW* is being circulated through the fore-mentioned union offices, the sales rate at union demonstrations has quadrupled over the last five or six years. Whereas in the '90s we would sell 30 to 50 *GLW*s at construction workers' rallies, at the last major rally, over the defence of John Setka, we sold around 100 papers. We had similar or even higher results at the Kingham rallies. The same ratio increase is also being reflected in sales at shop stewards meetings and the amount of unionists subscribing to *GLW*.

All in all, Socialist Alliance needs to develop its influence by using a vehicle such as *Green Left Weekly* to continue and expand the relationship between militant unionism and individual militants and Socialist Alliance. An SA newspaper must be at least weekly and needs to be national to have the level of influence which *Tribune* and *Vanguard* had in their hey day.

A quarterly magazine such as *Seeing Red*, as good as it is, cannot play this role. It is pitched at a different audience (more academic) and it is far too infrequent.

The newspaper needs to be well-resourced. My preferred position is that all affiliates should pool their resources by rolling all our newspapers or magazines into a weekly (for starters) national newspaper. But, unfortunately, in my personal discussions with members from most of the other affiliates, they are not prepared to give this commitment.

Therefore, if we are to continue to improve SA's influence in the union movement, I see no other option than turning *Green Left Weekly* into SA's main propaganda tool for this purpose.

A 2-day workshop for trade union activists delivered by Mike Newman

Reviewed by Janet Burstall (Sydney Central branch)

People can and do change their values, their whole life perspective, *and* radical educators can help them to do this - according to Mike Newman. Mike gave a 2 day crash course for Socialist Alliance activists in Sydney in November.

As activists do we teach choice? Do we teach morals? Mike challenged us to think about these questions by telling us stories about radical activist adult educators. Most of them were unknown to most of us, but they had all been involved or influential in important struggles for change. Rick Turner was a white South African writer who was first banned then assassinated by the apartheid regime, widely referred to by veterans of the struggle within South Africa. He was conscious of human choice, the choice to live or die, to pursue wealth or voluntary poverty, to eat jelly or ice-cream. Gordon McColl had been at the helm of the Meat Inspectors Union in Australia at the time of Mudginberri. He went on to work with trade unions in Pakistan in struggles for children in brick kiln families to be allowed to attend school instead of working. The unionists he worked with once kidnapped a kiln owner's child in order to force him to allow the workers' children to attend school. Gillian Nicholson was a white South African woman who stood with a group of Black Sash women between South African police and black mourners at funerals, saving lives. Mike characterised each of these people as primarily an activist of one of three worlds - the intellectual, the social and the physical.

Mike interspersed his stories with exercises. First we paired up and chatted. We then paired our pairs, where we had to speak on behalf of our first pair, as "we" not "I". This was an unusual way of speaking for us and made us think about our right to speak on behalf of someone else and legitimately include collective views. Mike placed an object at the centre of each group and asked us to discuss it. It changed the nature of our conversations, which were no longer about ourselves but something external. Mike moved us onto metaphors, and their power in getting us to identify, understand and speak of problems and issues that tend to remain hidden. We returned to the question of teaching choice and morals. "Teaching morals" provoked some resistance - aren't "morals" the province of the right-wing?

Later Mike told us about 4 more adult educators.

Myles Horton worked from the 1930s to the 1990s in the American south, at the Highlander Folk School. There he educated trade unionists and anti-racists. His school was attended by Martin Luther King and by Rosa Parks, who is credited with sparking US anti-segregation struggles by sitting in a white only area of a bus. The version of 'We shall overcome' which became the anthem of the civil rights movement was created around the piano at Highlander. Myles Horton worked in and with local communities, inviting people to his school to form groups who could learn with and from each other. Their experience formed the curriculum, and analysis of experience was the learning. He did sometimes lecture, but his main method was to pose questions and point the learners towards researching and looking for answers to the problems they posed themselves.

Paolo Freire is the best known radical adult educator of our time. His methods have been widely employed, including by a South African woman called Pumla Coleman. Mike met Pumla in Sydney, She had had to flee South Africa when she was informed that she was on a hit list. What had she done that was so dangerous? As a nurse at a health clinic, she had awoken the consciences of black South African women in her area to the total mismatch of power when their children used stones as weapons against the troop carriers and guns of the apartheid state. She had done this using a Freirean technique of naming and renaming in response to a depiction of daily existence, in this case to talking about the significance of a set of photographs of black children and white soldiers.

Finally Jane Thompson worked in England with a program offering second chance education as a pre-university course for working class women. Jane insisted on women only courses. Mike summarised her method as follows. "Thompson affirmed each individual woman's identity but did so in the company of other women and then, by adding in a feminist analysis, affirmed their identities conceptually in solidarity with all women." The shared identity was fundamental to her method. Mike sees this as transferable to other identities - "trade unionist", "working class", "indigenous" etc.

Our homework was to prepare our own stories and a question to make our listeners think and interpret the stories.

Day two, we came armed with our stories. Mike got us to think about ourselves as educators, and how conversations and questions work.

He defined 3 types of conversation:

1. serial monologues, in which each person says what he or she wants the other person to hear or learn
2. questioning so that the asker can learn from the answers.
3. questioning so that the answerer can learn from answering the question.

In turn we asked questions for the 3rd purpose - a surprisingly difficult exercise - but the most powerful if we are wanting to stimulate others to learn

Mike had told us many stories the previous session, and we had been surprised at how engaging and memorable they were. Now we had to tell a story that would provoke discussion, learning. We needed to pay attention to and practice, to collect and retell powerful stories.

After these exercises Mike claimed his turn to lecture us about Jack Mezirow. Once again he told us the story of how he had encountered the person, before he told us of Mezirow's idea - of perspective transformation. "Perspective transformation is the emancipatory process of becoming critically aware of how and why" our lives are constrained, unfree, oppressed. "Disorienting dilemmas" are fundamental to a person being likely to transform his or her perspective. A contemporary political illustration of what distinguishes this "critical consciousness" was Mike's experience as a trade union trainer during the Accord in the 1980s. The standard training that he was required to present included a history of "Taylorism" the old, to-be-rejected way of organising production. The participants in the groups were quite intellectually stimulated and angered to hear about the evils of Taylorism in their historical context. But when it came to the Accord, Mike realises in retrospect, that the prescribed training method was different, took the Accord for granted and was uncritical, not emancipatory at all. Fundamental to "critical consciousness" is the history and origin of the ideas being studied. The critical consciousness achieved is like Albert Camus's description of "a mind that watches itself".

Could the kind of perspective transformation that leads to critical consciousness happen to an individual outside of being part of a much larger experience of political struggle? We had some strong discussion of that point.

Mike told us about three inter-related domains of learning. Physical skills are in the technical domain, learnt through practice and transmission of expertise. (In politics this corresponds to skills such as making banners, chanting, setting up a PA, linking bodies on a picket line) Social skills are in the domain of communicative knowledge, corresponding to our human interest in being able to make meaning, interpret and communicate. We need the skill to establish our right to be listened to by fulfilling Jurgen Habermas's three conditions - truth, right and rightfulness, in order to be accepted as being worth learning from. (In politics this corresponds to effective speaking and listening, questioning and conversations with groups and individuals, persuading people to work together, creating alliances). And thirdly there is the emancipatory domain, in which we seek freedom from external control, in which we think critically - what Mike had presented to us as the "intellectual world". This is the domain of "perspective transformation". (In politics this means critically questioning all ideas including our own, situating present conditions and ideas, including our own in history, ability to comprehend a range of perspectives and views and integration of facts and theory).

On reflection I kept seeing how Mike had put many of the ideas he explained to us, into practice over our 2 days with him.

How can we as socialists, activists and educators try to make use of what we've learnt in this workshop?

1. Individual and informal group conversation.

We can re-think our approach to conversations, with a conscious intention of generating learning and new thinking. Can we learn to ask the questions that will lead others to learn? Can we get to understand what matters most in the lives of the people we hope will learn to stand up for their rights and freedoms? Can we find the stimuli, the images, the depictions of their lives that can provoke the conversations in which they will name and rename their world to uncover the injustice in it? Can we ask the questions that will arouse a "disorienting dilemma" and lead to learning? Can we learn to recognise the assumptions of people we talk to and their personal dilemmas that might conflict with that assumption, thereby opening up a contradiction that could lead to a perspective transformation?

2. Speaking in meetings.

We can re-think this too, and improve our skills, especially at making our "validity claim", i.e., establishing our right to be listened to in the minds of the audience. We can also aim to pose questions that are engaging and challenging, and to reduce a general tendency to rely on lecturing.

3. Constituting groups of contacts around educational/activist projects.

Could and should we work towards trying to incorporate an educational intention into activist projects as often as possible? Could this be initiated by being more critically aware ourselves of the problems posed by the issue, and being able to arouse interest in explicit educational activities through careful questioning? What might be more powerful educational activities than guest speakers/topics and discussions at meetings?

4. Running "courses".

4.1 We might identify types or groups of people we seek to work with, on the basis that they have a potential interest in working class struggle, and socialism. The impetus for Mike's workshop was the proposal for SA trade union education at the 2003 national conference, by Craig Johnson and Chris Cain. Then we need some basis for bringing a particular group of people together to learn, for example AMWU members, MUA members, that relates to a need that they have. How do we research such need prior to setting up a group/course? The grouping of people (including the educator) is important, because it is essential to be able to establish trust and communication among the group of learners, a common problem, interest or identity. Where could we best do this?

The work of Myles Horton, Paolo Freire and Jane Thompson suggest that we should spend quite some time trying to understand the people we want to work with. We need to try to find out what people's concerns are and to propose learn together around that topic or interest. It should be possible, with some practice, for us to find the relevance in our ideas to anyone on the underside of capitalism, and to make one point of relevance a starting point for education towards "critical consciousness" and critique of capitalism.

4.2 Where there are potential groups of learners, do we have potentially suitable "educators"? Would we need to "team teach" for example, with a group of unionists, pairing up a willing unionist with a socialist educator to make a credible educational team?

4.3 Content for learning. The implication from Mike is that the problem/issue should be learner driven, therefore we should not start by teaching our ideas, and a pre-planned curriculum may not work (people get bored, drop out, etc). We need flexibility in developing an "engaging" curriculum that leads from the broad need on which the group came together, explores and defines the issues, then arouses critical thinking by offering ideas, and theory, including socialist ideas, for the learners to make their own critical choices.

4.4 Content is obviously important. The educators need relevant content/ideas/expertise to be available in the form of people, reading material, videos, etc. Compilation of lists of such learning resources would be helpful

For the Socialist Alliance to develop an educational practice and a culture of radical learning, we need a national pool of people who are available to act as "educators".

Mike did not teach us delivery techniques for training people in how to train people. This method is not for imparting skills, with a teacher/expert/trainer passing on knowledge to the learner/novice. That would be to try to transfer an educational method that is drawn from the physical/technical world, to areas of learning which are primarily intellectual/critical, emancipatory, and social/communicative. Critical education requires the educator and the learners to be self-critical, socially critical, conversational, good at listening and questioning, and it generates new thoughts and ideas. It will be a challenge for us to convert what we learned into education programs for the Alliance, but if we can succeed in doing this, our education programs will be part of a much deeper political education than we had previously understood was possible.

Socialist Alliance's GLBTQI (Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex) work in Sydney

By Maurice Farrell (Sydney Central branch) and Rachel Evans (Marrickville branch)

Sydney district Socialist Alliance marched for the second time this year in the annual Lesbian & Gay Mardi Gras parade under the banner of "MEDICARE NOT WARFARE", and also promoted our politics with a stall at the Mardi Gras' cultural festival's annual Fair Day (which attracted a crowd in excess of 20,000)

Fair Day

Initially started as a fundraiser for the old Mardi Gras organisation (which collapsed in 2002), the Fair Day is now the second biggest drawcard of the Mardi Gras festival after the parade and party. This year Socialist Alliance had a stall garnering us dozens of contacts. We strongly campaigned around the racist police attacks in the Block, and distributed our NSW election policy statement on GLBTQI (Gay, Lesbian, Bi-sexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex) rights). The strength of SA's campaigning on the Redfern issue (that week cops had chased a young Aboriginal to his death) impressed one person at the fair so much they gave a \$100 donation to us on the spot! We chanted loudly on that day, "From Stonewall to Redfern: Fight Bigotry!"

We also distributed leaflets advertising the upcoming March 20 rally against the occupation of Iraq.

The New Mardi Gras organising committee showed it's right-wing nature, money at all costs policy by stopping Queeruption, an inner city queer rights group, from distributing the March 20 rally leaflets. They hadn't paid the \$110 for the official stall so were told they would have incurred a \$5000 fee if they continued to hand out "unauthorised" material. Cops were bought in and Queeruption played dodge and hand out for the rest of the afternoon. NMG also stopped a prominent drag performer from handing out condoms on behalf of the Bobby Goldsmith foundation because they were a different brand to that of the condom company sponsoring the "lube slide" attraction.

SA Sydney East branch sold badges with slogans including “Unfuck the World”, “Make love not War”, “Money for AIDS care, not Warfare” & “Recognise same sex couples now” (complete with a picture of Dubya and Howard looking very close). The sales of those badges – making us \$500 plus in under 5 hours - allowed East branch to finance their council election propaganda and also set the theme for our upcoming “MEDICARE NOT WARFARE” parade entry.

Why march?

Historically, Mardi Gras Parade committees have censored float applications for being “too political”. Read: “too left-wing”. This year the Socialist Alliance scraped in, after being refused once, through concerted campaigning. Stop the War Coalition, Community Aid Abroad and the Raelians (a feminist group who argue that women’s inherent nurturing nature will stop wars) weren’t so lucky. NMG refused these groups on the basis that they were not “gay” enough. The refusal of these floats cost the NMG Committee dearly in reputation – there will be hell to pay next year if they block these groups again.

NMG charges a fee of \$250 to participate in the parade - money we recouped prior to the start of the parade by canvassing the crowd with our literature and selling our badges. It was vital that we marched in this year’s parade as every other political party - except the Liberals - had an entry in the parade. Despite torrential rain this year’s parade was watched by over 250,000 people. While we were selling badges and yelling chants along the parade route before the march (and before the record breaking attempt at the world’s largest number of people doing the “YMCA” at once), one thing that was striking was the positive comments from the crowd. People who would proudly talk about how they were there for their gay friends /relatives who weren’t able to be, or did not want to come. People made sure they could be there to show their support for gay and lesbian rights - a far cry from the stereotype of people venturing in from the suburbs to peek at the “freak show”.

The parade marshals, who were meant to restrain all parade entrants in the “start area”, allowed us to walk up and down the parade route once they heard our megaphone chants of “Same sex marriage now!” and “Lesbians have a right to IVF and marriage!”. In some areas we managed to get chants going in the crowd.

NMG’s initial refusal to have Socialist Alliance in the parade was based on their assessment that our “Medicare Not Warfare” theme was “not gay enough”. The following is excerpted from our response to the committee:

"Our entry description was under the Banner of "Medicare not Warfare".

Socialist Alliance is a fairly new formation, formed in 2000 and one of it's first state policy papers was around gay and lesbian rights. As a formation made up of 9 different socialist groupings, the Alliance has Iraqi feminists, student and worker activists, gay activists who were involved in the early Mardi Gras demonstrations, and, overall, people that proudly involve themselves in the struggle to rid the world of homophobia, sexism, racism and war.

The Alliance was proudly in last year's Parade and wants, again, this year to highlight one of the burning issues of the GLBTQI community. With HIV infections on the rise, hospitals not getting enough state or federal funding while our PM spends over \$800 million on war, we feel we must take up this issue "Medicare Not Warfare". We stand in complete solidarity with all the struggles of the GLBTQI (namely the issue of same-sex marriages), but this issue of defunding our health care system is one we simply must promote at this historic yearly action for GLBTQI rights.

Our float will encompass a banner stating "Medicare Not Warfare", "Dance Proud, Fuck Safe, Make Revolution", and placards stating "AIDS research NOT War Research", "HIV on the Rise/Prevention \$ NOW", "Fight AIDS/Generic Drugs For ALL", "40 million with HIV/\$ to prevent AND Cure NOW". Chants such as "Not the Church, Not the State; QUEERS will decide our fate" will also pepper our contingent!

We hope this contingent meets with your approval.

www.socialist-alliance.org

Thanks in advance and yours in struggle."

On the march, SA's credentials as a fighting political force for gay and lesbian rights was vindicated. Labor had placards plastered over a truck demanding "Put a big ONE on Mark Latham's box". The Greens had the pun "We've been doing it for years" and marched under the title "Green is a colour of the rainbow".

Our contingent had 40 comrades - and 2 people from the crowd whom we convinced to join us! We were smaller than the Greens (about 100 participants), but more lively and clear in our political message. Our chants were taken up by sections of the crowd.

Our banner, "From Stonewall to Redfern - FIGHT BIGOTRY", was particularly cheered on. Socialist Alliance took the political high road - our approach to the parade is definitely not one of patronising slogans and viewing gay and Lesbian "issues" as "niche markets" or a voting bloc that lives in it's own self-contained world in Darlinghurst.

"Medicare not Warfare" is a gay demand as much as it is a straight, bisexual, transgender or intersex demand, and the crowd on the night understood that and loudly cheered us on.

This year's parade was run on 30% of the prior year's budget, which in itself was a fraction of the 2002 budget of the old organisation prior to it's collapse. The spending sprees of the mid-'90s and the huge losses of the dance parties as fundraisers is almost over and certainly winding down, yet the actual Mardi Gras parade not only survives but continues to flourish and give this community a central focus and collective organisation to claim as their own.

What next?

How does Socialist Alliance continue to lead the gay and lesbian community, recruit the best activists and win some victories against the sexist and homophobic federal and state governments?

We feel the key issue to lead the community into action around is the HIV crisis. The increase in the transmission rates of HIV (18 to 29% increases amongst gay men in Melbourne/Sydney over last two years) are extremely alarming

and the lack of discussion outside of the GLBTQI community is a very real concern when you consider that Australia was a world leader in prevention campaigns that actually worked (until recently) in slowing the new transmissions of HIV.

The National AIDS strategy has been stalled by the Howard government and AIDS councils around the country are facing decreases in funding and funding crises.

The silence about the increases and the lack of awareness of the global magnitude of the AIDS pandemic should be ringing alarm bells (40 million people, 50% of them women, are now HIV positive worldwide). Why is the President of the AIDS council of New South Wales repeatedly badgered on world AIDS day at a press conference with the line of questioning, "But Gay men know the risks of anal intercourse? So why don't they use condoms?"

A virus is spreading like wildfire throughout the globe, yet the debate in Australia is going towards rhetoric that makes HIV sound as though it's a sexually transmitted moral dilemma rather than a virus which could be cured if modern medicine was free to treat disease rather than treat for profit.

If we don't confront the re-emerging demonisation of lesbians and gays as diseased/depraved, which political party will? Do we really want to slip into early '80s hysteria again?

That's why we should support the development of a more detailed SA policy on these issues, like the proposal put forward by Alison Thorne in the last issue of AV.

We're already carrying out in practice campaigning for GLBTQI rights; a detailed policy formalises our stance.

SUB = United action

There are two activist GLBTI groups we have been relating to in Sydney and that could coalesce into an activist alternative to the pro-establishment politics of NMG and the powerful AIDS bureaucracies. Canterbury/Bankstown Gay and Lesbian Group (with over 200 members) and QueerRuption.

QueerRuption organised a lively protest outside Archbishop George Pell's church against his homophobic statements and organised a meeting on "The Fighting History of Mardi Gras" in the lead up to the big event. The CBGLG are a great group with a lot of potential, very open to Socialist Alliance activists. They are still mostly a social group, but do courageous work handing out information about Their existence in beats out in the west.

There is potential to do more work with these group, and to unite them around some common activist projects. A national day of remembrance for Stonewall day, a march on World AIDS day, some joint meetings, are all good ideas to start with.

The actions taken by ACTUP in the 1980s in the US - with leafleting at beats and mass spray-ups/T-shirts/publications are all actions that we can take to fight the spread of HIV and raise the banner of fighting activists once more.

Below is the text of the leaflet we handed out at Mardi Gras:

Reclaim the spirit of the original Mardi Gras!

Fight Homophobia, Bigotry & Racism!

Mardi Gras arose out of the courageous struggle of gay and lesbian rights activists fighting for public recognition of their relationships and love. Back then, activists who marched up Oxford Street were met with police brutality and jailing. Repeated attempts to place us back in our closet were met with larger protests and stronger demands for equality. We have made gains – but there is a long way to go.

In no country in the world do lesbians/gays/transgender people enjoy full and equal civil rights with heterosexuals – rights relating to employment, housing, parenting, partnership, inheritance & protection from abuse and discrimination. In every Australian state, the situation is the same. Employment discrimination within teaching and child-care, lack of same sex information in schools, lack of legal recognition for relationships, government indifference to homophobic violence and cop bashings are all part and parcel of being gay and lesbian here.

A recent report, '*You Shouldn't Have to Hide to be Safe*', from the NSW Attorney General shows rates of homophobic violence have not changed over the last 10 years. 85% of lesbians and gay men have experienced harassment or violence during their lifetime with 1 in 4 report being physically attacked at some time in their life.

And while Tasmania recently won the most progressive laws in relation to legal recognition of same sex relationships, it is not full equality. In every state we need full same sex marriage equality. The Labor Party's recent back down on support for same sex laws at their recent National Conference shows how much this Party supports our community. International Women's Day march and rally is a great opportunity for queer activists to beat back Howard's conservative "family" first agenda.

HIV is on the rise in unprecedented levels across Australia. In Victoria there has been a 28% rise in the last year, in NSW 18% in the last 6 months. Syphilis and gonorrhoea are also on the rise, particularly amongst young people, due to a lack of safe sex education in schools and across the community. The Labor Party is in power in every state across Australia – they have the power to flood schools and the community with safe same sex and heterosexual sex information. They lack the political will.

And our Federal government spends \$600 million on going to war but slashes funding for public health, education, transport and child-care. Over 1 million Iraqi civilians have been killed over the last decade by US and company bombing, and the UN backed economic sanctions. Lives lost because of the US/ Britain and Australia's hunger for oil. Corporate greed has also designated the 40 million people infected with HIV to a short life and a horrible death. Cheap generic drugs can be produced – but pharmaceutical companies want to make a profit and world leaders have realised preventing AIDS is less profitable than curing it. Join us at the March 20 International Anti-Occupation Day of Action against the occupation of Iraq and stand up against corporate tyranny.

Election year has seen the inevitable “moral” crusade by both Liberal and Labor to instill “normal” family (read: heterosexual) values. It will see a whipping up of fear around crime and accusations that Aboriginal people, refugees and the Muslim community are terrorists, stealing our jobs, raping our women and/or threatening “our” national security. It’s wedge politics strategy. Accuse the minority groups of undermining the “normal” way of life and no-one will notice it’s your fault.

We stand in total opposition to their bigoted strategy! Socialist Alliance urges you to join us! We want to build a movement for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. From Stonewall, Oxford St. to Redfern, Socialist Alliance is helping lead the fight back. Join us to demand Medicare Not Warfare! this Mardi Gras and on March 20. Reclaim Mardi Gras’s radical past and be part of a queer radical future! We have a world to win!

The Socialist Alliance, the ALP and the Greens

By Carlene Wilson for Workers Power

Amendment to the "Australian politics today and the tasks of the Socialist Alliance" resolution:

Delete the first two sentences of paragraph 3 of the "Australian politics today and the tasks of the Socialist Alliance" document and replace it with the following:

"The rise of the Green vote is an indicator of a move away from class politics in Australian society. Whilst we will seek to work with the Greens and organise joint electoral platforms with them and Labor, we will preference ALP candidates above the Greens."

Then continue with the original paragraph.

An explanation of why we think this is necessary

What's the big problem that we have as an organisation? It's convincing people that we have something to offer that other political parties don't.

Elections provide us with a perfect opportunity to do this. This is recognised in our document on Australian politics.

But we need our election message to be consistent and strong: Class struggle is definitely not dead, and therefore the class nature of the parties and candidates we vote for is critical.

We're running into an election year and one which our document on Australian politics explains will be about Howard's wars - at home and abroad. That document acknowledges that the election is the major focus of the work of the Alliance in the coming period and that this election in particular allows us widened opportunities because of the new Latham leadership of the ALP and because of the distaste many people have for Howard's warmongering.

All well and good. We have a clear idea of our tasks. But what we don't have is an approach to those elections which is consistent when it comes to analyzing and understanding the other parties that our audience - the Australian working class - votes for.

For those of us who are already socialists, particularly revolutionary socialists, this seems straight forward. We're for building a completely different world, based on a different system - all the other parties are for making minor changes, reforms.

Traditionally the major reformist party in Australia has been the ALP. The ALP was born out of workers struggles and the recognition of the need to represent the working class not just industrially but also politically. The ALP was built on an assumption that the only way to change the system for the better was from within. But it was also built directly on the organisations of the working class - the trade unions.

So traditionally the ALP has been seen by the working class in this country, particularly the organised and class conscious parts, as being "our" party - at some base level under our control. And it's a perception that contains some truth. The block union vote at conferences and the continuing weight, particularly financially, of the unions in the ALP are an essential part of the link that the party retains with the working class.

That's without beginning to discuss the fact that a substantial proportion of the working class continue to both vote Labor and believe that it is in some fundamental way better than the liberals or anything else on offer. It's this belief that socialists call reformist illusions - the idea that real, lasting changes and improvements can be made through Parliament and that the election of a Labor government will achieve this.

But as we all know nothing in political life is stable or constant. Over the years as ALP governments at State and Federal level have failed to carry out the kinds of reforms people want, or have outright attacked workers rights, wages, living and working conditions - some of those illusions have been challenged and some of those links with the organised sections of our class have been weakened.

This is without the attacks from within the ALP on the affiliation of unions - like the measures that Simon Crean had in mind. The ALP, like social democratic and labour parties around the world has been trying to find the now infamous Blairite Third Way - a way to retain its working class vote but also attract big business.

In this sense Mark Latham is the perfect leader for the ALP in its current state. Moulding himself on Gough Whitlam he retains the rough edges of his working class roots - he knows how to talk about the socially progressive policies that traditional Labor voters associate with their party. But he is an economic conservative. In fact during hi time as mayor in western Sydney, it was him that contracted out many council services introducing the right-wing ideas of privatization and casualisation of the workforce into council.

At the same time, Latham is saying all the right things about the war in Iraq, about refugees and about education. And it is his ability to make the distinctions in these policy areas between the ALP and the Liberals, that could help him win the election for the Labor Party.

But things are no longer as simple as Labor and Liberal. As we are all well aware, the Greens have for a long time been trying to lay claim to being the real left alternative in Australia.

And with good reason in some areas - at least till now, their policies on the war, and on refugees certainly sounded a lot better than anything that the labor Party was able to come up with.

But Latham has virtually pulled that rug out from under them with his promise to release children in detention and pull the troops out by Christmas.

It leaves the Greens rather weakly calling for a UN solution to the conflict in Iraq. In fact their call for UN troops in, rather than Australian troops out could in fact be seen as being to the right of Latham's current position.

What all of this highlights is the deeper problems with trying to characterize parties based just on their program or on the statements of their representatives.

Because this year, the Socialist Alliance have a very serious decision to make - and that's about who we should preference in the Federal Elections. And yes, this can be a situation sometimes of pragmatics - but it is also a question of principle. The choice we make in what order to preference on our how to vote cards is making a public political statement about what we think is the way forward for Australian politics. It is also a statement about how we think we're going to get there.

This is an old argument then - who should get our first preferences - some left independent if there's one standing, the Socialist Party, the Greens or the ALP? And the question isn't simple - there's not just one answer right in all times and places.

But I think there are a few things we should be using to consider what to do. The first and for me the most important is that the ALP should be preferenced ahead of the Greens. Why? Because unlike the Greens, the ALP is still the party connected directly to the organisations of the working class - the trade unions.

Of course we all know that there have been movements inside the unions away from Labor and possibly towards the Greens. But those have not gone far - and mainly because there is no facility within the Greens for the kind of union affiliation that the ALP has. This is because the Greens are not a party that have grown organically out of the working classes organs of struggle. In fact there is little connection between the grass roots and the parliamentary party.

Which is not to say that there are not militant and active Greens members and even whole branches. But our aim shouldn't be to get close to these people by second preferencing their party - it should be to show them why the Greens are a dead-end for the kind of social change we want as socialists.

We also all know that there are plenty of unions that have no party affiliation, the NTEU being an important example as a union in which Socialist Alliance has a significant caucus. But we have to understand this refusal to affiliate not as a progressive rejection of the ALP's sell-outs but as an apolitical refusal to be seen to be taking sides. The NTEU's lame leaflets for the election year are a case in point. They ask you to "think before you choose", rather than give you clear political direction.

Of course it has become increasingly obvious that the ALP are a dead-end - but a different sort of one. And this is the real point of the argument - the Greens make no pretence of being a party with any sort of connection to the working class - the ALP still do. And it is that connection that we should be in a position to use as a lever.

If we acknowledge the fact that the ALP remains a party with real links to the Australian working class, both through its more militant and active branches and through its connection to the trade unions - then we are in a position to put real demands on that party and to bring a lot of those ALP activists with us.

For a start, the ALP are likely to be the next government. We have to be in a position to put demands on them and to try and hold them accountable for the various positions they have already taken. We have zero credibility trying to do this if our position has been to say they are no different from the Liberals and people should not even preference them second after us.

The ALP have been making some big promises to win back their heartland - we need to be in a credible position to explain what has happened when, after an election those promises are forgotten.

And this is a very different process from the one that happens when people get pissed off with the Liberals. No one in our class has ever believed that the Liberals actually support or represent the working class in any way. But lots of people feel that way about the Labor Party.

As for the rise of the Greens, we should, rather than seeing this as something positive, actually recognize it for what it is - a move away from class politics.

Rather than being a "...welcome indicator of the shift to the left...", the increased vote for the Greens is an abandonment of the idea that the working class should have its own party, that is based on its own organisations and which specifically fights for its needs. While some of the policy statements of some Greens have a radical sound, they are not based on an acceptance of the different classes in society and the need for the working class to have some class independence.

Certainly the ALP is not much of a working class party itself, but it retains that connection - a conscious identification with the unions and working people.

The Greens, despite some progressive policies in no way even attempt to represent the working class. This doesn't mean working class people haven't and won't vote for them. In fact in a period when the ALP is still fighting to regain its heartland, there will be many people disoriented by the radical sounding Green rhetoric.

But the Socialist Alliance should not be tailing this disorientation. We should instead be saying to good militants in the Greens that the way forward for them is to make a turn to class politics - to join us. And most importantly we should not be turning our backs on the hundreds of thousands of our class who still think the Labor Party is the solution.

To this end, we call on the Conference to delete the first two sentences of paragraph 3 of the Australian politics today and the tasks of the Socialist Alliance" document and replace it with the following:

"The rise of the Green vote is an indicator of a move away from class politics in Australian society. Whilst we will seek to work with the Greens and organise joint platforms with them and Labor, we will preference ALP candidates above the Greens." Then continue with the original paragraph.

As far as Independents, particularly class-struggle or single issue candidates go - though there have been obvious errors of judgement in the past, its clear that the variety of on-the-ground scenarios can differ to such an extent that these decisions need to be left to the best judgement of the Branch. But that doesn't mean we can't set some basic guidelines. These should include being very wary of single-issue campaigns, checking candidates credentials in terms of working class organising and asking questions about a much broader range of policies. As we well know, even some Liberals can be very radical on issues of say sexual oppression or ecology.

Response to NAC NE Minority Working Group Revised Proposal on Leadership Changes

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

Comrades,

It is with a sense of outrage that I reply to the latest offering from the NAC NE Minority Group (Vol. 4, No. 6). It is disingenuous and embodies all the worst features of this group's last effort, smudged in with distasteful spin. There is a wealth of devil in the detail.

Paragraph two, beginning "We propose", is instructive. Here this group is signaling it's intention to indulge in the bureaucrat's folly, that of the continual restructure to give the illusion of progress.

Comrades, it has been a disappointing year for the Alliance at the level of the NE. We have been preoccupied and bogged down with administrative matters none of which we have got right. For instance we are about to have launch number three for the finances proposals at the conference. Yet here this group asserts that they would like to take the next year to "assess and develop" more administrative changes.

The statement in the same paragraph, (to) "make interim arrangements based upon the existing NE structure" is simply not so when what they are proposing amounts to a gross distortion of the existing structure and adds significant new elements to that structure. The criticism of the current NE is that it is dysfunctional. This can be attributed in part to the fact that the conveners have taken most of the decisions themselves, presenting the NE with a fait accompli requiring only ratification. In full knowledge of this the minority working group proposes that the NE be expanded to the unworkable number of "perhaps 33" and that it meets "bimonthly or as required". Required by

whom, on what mandate and what the minimum number of meetings is is not spelt out. Bimonthly meetings would ensure that the NE, the Alliances' highest authority outside of conference, would be further isolated from real and immediate decision making than it already is, and thus less relevant. Then we have the concept of the working groups/committees having a role in the leadership of the Alliance. As outlined in my article in AV vol.4 no.4 this is attendant with disadvantages and dangers and is intrinsically undemocratic. Call them "volunteer" if you like but they are essentially self-selected. See also the above mentioned article for the ways in which these groups and committees already have considerable influence on the Alliance, and the impracticality of a continuous role for at least some of them.

Take the composition of the proposed NE; expanded to 33 on the basis of the DSP being underrepresented with the non-aligned contingent expanded to match. The last offering from the Minority Working Group would have seen the non-aligned members disadvantaged. While I welcome the statement that "50% non aligned representation is indispensable" I think it too sudden to be heartfelt, and in any case the statement applies only to the NE and looking at the detail of what is proposed it seems as if the NE is being shunted sideways to talk amongst themselves.

The only thing I can say about the DSP being underrepresented is this; the reasons why they agreed to the current arrangements have not changed and if they want to change those arrangements then they should present and argue for a motion to that effect themselves.

And what of the powerful office administrator, the only one with their finger on the pulse continuously and day to day? No mention at all in this offering from the Minority Working Group.

The most objectionable feature to me of this group's proposals is that it is so reminiscent of the way our bureaucrats and politicians deal with the community. Essentially the same unpalatable stuff served up time after time in various guises, complete with a veneer of novelty (spin) and a wealth of virtually impenetrable detail all requiring detailed analysis and rebuttal with the apparent object of wearing everybody down till they give in.

Why national conference should support the Non-Aligned Caucus proposal on leadership bodies

By Dick Nichols (Canterbury-Bankstown branch)

This contribution argues that national conference should support the most recent proposal from the Non-Aligned Caucus (NAC) Working Group on reforming the Socialist Alliance's leadership bodies (see *Alliance Voice*, Vol 4 No 6, pp.18-20). While not "perfect", this is a clear step forward in giving our multi-tendency socialist party the sort of leadership structures it needs to operate democratically and effectively.

It also seems to me to be about the best that can be achieved at our present stage of development.

Some general points

A proper leadership structure for the Socialist Alliance must fulfil four broad needs, often in unavoidable tension with each other. It must be:

- Democratic and truly representative of the all the different "souls" — political, ideological, geographical and social — that make up the Alliance;
- Able to implement effectively the decisions of the Alliance, and able in particular to produce Alliance positions and initiatives at the pace of real-time political life;
- Capable of involving as many Alliance members as possible as much as possible in its work; and
- Flexible enough to adapt to changing political circumstances.

Any contribution to our leadership discussion that doesn't try to provide answers to all these four concerns doesn't really deserve to be taken very seriously.

Of course, it goes without saying that to achieve these goals we need to have a thoroughly democratic culture within the Alliance, one in which each and every member in every Alliance body feels comfortable and certain that their views will be listened to and "given a go", and where our agreed procedures are observed scrupulously. It also means each and every one must have timely access to the information relevant to any decision we are being asked to make.

At the same time, as the Alliance grows and engages in ever more work we need to build our collective capacity to *actually carry out* our decisions (with whatever specialisation, working groups, etc). That means electing leaderships with the real ability and commitment to do the work voted on, and to assemble the resources needed to carry out the job, and with a clear understanding of their responsibilities.

In short our main leadership principle must be: "Those who lead shall work, those who work shall lead."

When these two aspects of Alliance life and leadership are functioning properly they will give rise to a healthy cycle of debate and discussion, decision-making (hopefully unanimous or by large majorities), implementation and experimentation, and then collective assessment of the results — before setting off on a new cycle of discussion, elaboration and implementation.

Some Alliance branches are beginning to approach this state of affairs, but after a year of work it is clear that our present national leadership structures, adopted at the 2003 National Conference, are restricting the further development of an effective cycle of discussion, implementation and balance-making at the national level. Why? How?

Here I will give my reading of the situation, and in passing comment on comrade Michael Morphet's article "Leadership Changes Proposals" (see *Alliance Voices*, Vol 4 No 4).

Shortcomings in our present national leadership structures and methods of work

After a year of operation, the National Executive — composed of two representatives for each large affiliate (DSP and ISO), one representative for each small affiliate and a majority of non-affiliated members drawn for the States and Territories — shows the following shortcomings and problems:

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

Because they are neither elected by nor responsible to state or territory conferences the non-aligned members on the National Executive "represent" their state or territory in a merely formal way. They do not give reports nor bring proposals from state and territory bodies. This guarantees that there is an almost complete gulf between the political life of the average Alliance member at the local level and Alliance political life nationally. The minority who belong to an affiliate or participate in a national working group may have their own national information loops, but the basic state of affairs is that the Alliance is yet to develop a functional national structure. That would mean (a) every member seeing how she or he connects from the local level with Alliance life nationally (by making criticisms, putting proposals) and (b) "best practice" examples from one branch or area of work being taken up as quickly as possible throughout the organisation.

This requires a structural change that introduces accountability of state and territory representatives. In its absence, comrade Michael Morphet's proposals (hold more frequent state and territory conferences, make it a duty of NE representatives that they visit the branches in their region, advise members that they have the right to put motions directly to the NE) will change nothing essential, even while they may be useful supporting suggestions.

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

In order to get the perspectives voted on at the last National Conference and afterwards done, the National Executive had set up a series of national working groups for overseeing our work in the trade unions, the anti-war movement and the federal election campaign, as well as editorial boards to produce *Seeing Red* and develop the trial relationship between the Alliance and *Green Left Weekly*. While the work of these bodies has been reported to NE meetings and the

NE has in most cases rubber-stamped their work, the real state of affairs is that the NE is usually *not* the body that thinks through the main directions of Socialist Alliance work or develops overall plans of implementation. NE meetings are more often than not preoccupied with the job (absolutely necessary, of course) of developing political stances on the issues of the day. This situation is exacerbated when there is little or no overlap between the membership of the NE and the membership of the national working group in question.

3. Those who are taking responsibility for important areas of national Alliance work are not on the NE.

This is directly related to point 2 above. The present structure of representation on the NE excludes comrades who are taking direct responsibility for national areas of work. These are mainly, but not exclusively, members of the Democratic Socialist Perspective. They include DSP comrades co-responsible for the Alliance's work in the trade union and anti-war areas. (The DSP accounts for 25-30 per cent of the financial membership of the Alliance, much more of the active membership, yet less than 10 per cent of the National Executive.)

Comrade Michael Morphett thinks that because such working groups largely provide the content of Alliance work, we don't need to bother about such comrades being excluded from the National Executive. Quite the reverse. Until the National Executive is structured so that it can really take responsibility for all Alliance work, there's actually a danger of such work not being balanced against or integrated with other priorities. Also, if the National Executive isn't restructured to allow direct oversighting of the work of the national working groups there's actually a lot less chance of getting new non-aligned Alliance members actively involved.

4. 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 national Alliance work.

With the exception of our planned book on socialism, we have achieved most of what we set out to achieve at the last national conference, a result with which we can be satisfied (*Seeing Red*, a regular national newsletter, better coordination of the trade union work, launching a major federal election campaign, etc). However, the basic method by which this was achieved — through incessant working of an overstretched national apparatus of two-and-a-half comrades — is both unsustainable and completely undesirable. It risks setting in place a vicious circle where those comrades who are charged by the NE with carrying out the bulk of the work simply don't have time to plan and experiment with the many ways needed to get other Alliance members involved. That is, we risk setting up an unbridgeable gap between a tiny, overworked "centre" and a large body of passive members who may wonder from time to time how they might make a contribution but never get asked. This is a classic warning sign to which we must pay heed.

In particular, we are not yet sufficiently geared to have the sharp, timely interventions in political developments in the run-up to the federal election. We have already failed to produce statements on the increasing range of issues that are making up the Howard-Latham "debate", and need to set up structures that can reverse this state of affairs.

Let's be clear. To note these shortcomings is not to *blame* the present National Executive. It is simply to register the fact that, given the development of the Alliance over the last 12 months, the present structures — agreed unanimously last year — are now getting in the way of further developing Socialist Alliance work. Pointing this out is the *reverse* of pushing restructuring for restructuring's sake, as comrade Morphett claims. It's the first step in tackling our weaknesses seriously.

The general model we need

So what alternative? I think the model we need to move towards is obvious enough in general terms. The Socialist Alliance needs to have:

A National Council whose primary (but not exclusive) function is the full representation of all affiliates and the states and territories, as well as all major areas of work. This council should develop our major priorities and initiatives and reorient us at major turning points in politics. It should be elected by proportional representation:

A National Executive whose primary (but not exclusive) function is to ensure that the work decided by National Conference and the National Council is carried out as effectively and in as involving a way as possible. It should continue to be elected by slate, with suitable safeguards such as 40 per cent maximum representation for any affiliate and minimum presence of, say, four affiliates. Any working groups would, via their conveners, be directly responsible to the National Executive, and the National Executive should be responsible to the National Council.

However, we should not move to implement such a model *except on the basis of broad agreement within the Alliance*. This is because creating an effective National Executive would necessarily involve *selecting* a smaller team and *excluding* some affiliates and Alliance members who would be on the National Council. The very idea is already causing a deal of disquiet. For the step to succeed the Alliance as a whole should be convinced from its own collective experience of the need to take it and of the way to take it.

Discussions to date

An original proposal along these lines from the Non-Aligned Caucus Working Group was published in *Alliance Voices* (Vol 4 No 2). Since then we in the DSP — also taking note of some points made in the contributions by comrades Riki Lane and Michael Morphett (see *Alliance Voices* Vol 4, No 4) — have participated in three-way negotiations with the NAC Working Group and the International Socialist Organisation to see if a broadly agreed proposal for restructuring the leadership bodies could be achieved.

Unfortunately, despite headway in many areas, agreement could not be reached on two important points: the method of election of the National Executive (slate or proportional representation) and the maximum number of members any one affiliate would be allowed (20 per cent or 40 per cent).

While these seem to be rather minor, even technical, issues, they actually go to the heart of different conceptions of how a National Executive that operates in relation to a National Council should in reality work.

Electing an NE by proportional representation would have meant that there could be no real discussion at national conference of what leadership *team* would be best for the Alliance (as in a comparison between competing slates of candidates — the method we have used in our national leadership elections to date). Also, an election based on proportional representation conditioned by maxima and minima (for affiliates, non-aligned and women) would have been a technical nightmare, almost certainly guaranteeing a rancorous final session at our forthcoming conference.

As well, an NE in which any affiliate was limited to a presence of three out of 15 would have excluded up to half of those comrades who are presently centrally involved in carrying out the Socialist Alliance’s work — precisely the people who should be on a National Executive whose main task is to guarantee effective implementation of the decisions of the organisation.

Steps forward are possible

In the presence of concern about the proposal itself, and in the absence of agreement about its specific form, the DSP became convinced that the Alliance needs a longer, more considered and thorough discussion of how to reshape our national leadership bodies. It certainly doesn’t need a national conference scarred by a debate over methods of voting and leadership quotas.

However, that doesn’t mean that there’s nothing we can do to improve the present leadership structures. The NAC Working Group’s revised proposal does this in three ways.

While maintaining a built-in majority for non-aligned members it makes them directly answerable to the states and territories, creating a valuable channel from local to national Alliance political life and creating a clear responsibility for these representatives to fulfil. The state and territory delegations to national conference would elect their representatives according to proportional representation and these would be subject to ratification by the next State or Territory conference (see example below);

By making the five National Conveners directly responsible for areas of work/national working groups, the overall work of the Alliance is placed in the hands of the National Executive, and the division of labour needed to carry out this work is made its direct obligation. Each convener acquires a clear portfolio and NE members will be asked to contribute in one area or other. It will directly fall to the NE to think through how best to structure the Alliance’s work and involve members in it, and;

By introducing proportional representation as the basis for election of all tendencies, it adopts a fundamental democratic principle into Alliance functioning.

What would this NE look like?

A National Executive elected along the lines of the NAC Working Group’s revised proposal would look roughly like this:

1. Affiliate representation (at 1 to 50 members of the Socialist Alliance or part thereof):

Democratic Socialist Perspective 5-6
 International Socialist Organisation 2-3
 Freedom Socialist Party 1
 Workers League 1
 Workers Power 1
 Worker Communist Party of Iraq 1
 Socialist Democracy 1
 Workers Liberty 1
 Resistance 1
 TOTAL 14-16

2. State and Territory representation (15 –17, i.e. an NE majority, with at least one per state and territory (8) and the balance (7 to 9) distributed in proportion to each state or territory’s share of total national membership.

EXAMPLE: Suppose there are 1062 financial members nationally, the remaining state and territory delegate positions would be divided as follows:

State/ Territory	Membership	Extra delegates		Total delegates
		<i>For 7 extra delegates (Quota 151 or greater part)</i>	<i>For 9 extra delegates (Quota 118 or greater part)</i>	
SA	36	0	0	1
Qld	108	1	1	2
ACT	81	0*	1	1-2
NT	9	0	0	1
Tas	45	0	0	1
WA	90	1	1	2

Vic 279	2	2	3
NSW 414	3	4	4-5
* rounded down			
TOTALS	7	9	15-17
FULL NATIONAL EXECUTIVE 29-33			

In a nutshell, this proposal would expand the present NE to allow participation by those who are leading key areas of Alliance work as well as new non-aligned members who are beginning to lead Alliance work at the local level.

Some questions answered

In this last section, I anticipate some objections against the NAC Working Group proposal.

1. Why wouldn't a National Executive of 29-33 be more unwieldy than the present one?

There's no doubt that a larger National Executive would produce longer meetings — if it operated with the same long grab-bag style of agenda as the present NE. However, this National Executive would operate with a clear division of powers with the national working groups, and would be free to focus on proper discussion of one or two areas of work each meeting, on the basis of well-prepared reports and lists of recommendations.

For example, under what conditions should the Socialist Alliance decide to launch a national rank-and-file conference of unionists? That decision would be the result of a serious discussion of a properly prepared recommendation from the trade union committee.

On the technical side: the number of points of contact for telephone hook-ups need not increase; use could also be made of 1800 numbers, as suggested by comrade Riki Lane; and one face-to-face meeting in the year considered.

2. Why wouldn't less frequent National Executive meetings which is allowed for in the proposal concentrate power in the hands of the National Conveners, and make them less accountable?

The National Conveners would still be elected according to the present formula, with at least two non-aligned representatives, and no affiliate holding more than one position. Clearly, in a case of unresolvable disagreement among the National Conveners, recourse would be made to a National Executive meeting.

The point of allowing for more infrequent meetings of the National Executive is to allow for more time for participation in national working groups, but it does not prevent more frequent National Executive meetings if the National Conveners (or, indeed members of the NE) judge they are needed.

3. Doesn't this formula increase the power of the affiliates at the expense of non-aligned members?

Quite the reverse. The non-aligned members' majority is maintained, regardless of the relative proportion of non-aligned members in the Alliance. Any increase in affiliates must be offset by an increased non-aligned representation from the states and territories. This will actually help “increase the pool of trained non-aligned members from which to select leaders”, as stressed by comrade Michael Morphet.

4. Won't this entrench those members of affiliates who are presently leading Alliance work as permanent members of the National Executive?

No. The proposed structure is a transitional arrangement while we have a thorough and considered discussion about the kind of structures the Alliance will need on a more permanent basis. All those elected under this arrangement will have to face a vote at our next conference.

The most important feature of this NAC Working Group proposal is that no-one “loses”, while at the same the prospect of bringing more organised energy to bear on our growing workload is increased. That should be enough to recommend it to all delegates at the national conference.