

Dossier on the unity talks between Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative

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1. Introduction

The unity negotiations between the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative ended after the latter's National Committee decided on October 26-27, 2013 that the unity process had “reached an impasse and consequently we are for ending the negotiations with the Alliance”.

The [unity process began](#) a year ago at the initiative of Socialist Alliance.

Five meetings were held between leadership delegations of three each from the two organisations and joint public meetings were held by the two groups on the subject of left unity in Brisbane, Sydney, Wollongong, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth. Joint caucuses were held in a number of cities for various areas of movement work.

A Socialist Alternative delegation attended and addressed the 9th National Conference of Socialist Alliance, Socialist Alliance participated in, endorsed and promoted Marxism 2013 (organised by Socialist Alternative) and Socialist Alternative participated in and addressed Socialist Alliance's Organising for 21st Century Socialism seminar in June 2013. Following the latter seminar, a joint public meeting with Paul Le Blanc was held in Melbourne.

In addition, the two organisations participated in joint contingents in May Day marches around the country, and members from both organisations attended some of the others local events and forums. Socialist Alliance left the negotiation of city-wide joint meetings and activities to its local branches and various initiatives where taken at the local level.

Since February the two groups had agreed on a process for progressing the unity talks and in July the Socialist Alliance submitted a first draft of common perspectives for discussion. However, Socialist Alternative had not been prepared to discuss that document in the last two negotiation meetings, held on August 11 and September 15.

Following those two meetings, the Socialist Alliance informed Socialist Alternative of its preparedness to persist with the agreed process and that it was open to other ways of proceeding to take the unity process forward. The Alliance also that it was also prepared to consider other forms of ongoing cooperation should the two groups be unable agree on organisational unity.

Socialist Alternative's decision to end the unity talks was conveyed in a November 8 email to the Socialist Alliance. This email said the Socialist Alternative National Committee had also agreed:

“The unity process has led to more collaboration and joint activities between us and the Alliance and this has been a step forward. We don't want the unity discussions to end in pointless acrimony. The situation may change at some point in the future and greater possibilities for revolutionary unity may open up and we should be alert for that possibility.

“We want the collaboration between ourselves and the Alliance to continue wherever possible in union, student and campaign work. We have invited a number of their comrades to speak at our upcoming union activists’ conference in Melbourne. We will be approaching them about having speakers at next year’s Marxism conference.”

The Socialist Alliance National Council had met earlier on October 5-6 and resolved to persist with the attempt to negotiate a common political program as a basis for a new united organisation. It also reaffirmed a political approach to the unity process that it had adopted in a resolution at its June meeting:

“We do not have to reach absolute agreement on a detailed revolutionary program with Socialist Alternative. We can unite around a general agreement on political objectives, what to do now to take the struggle forward (not necessarily agreement on all historical assessments or assessments of political processes in other countries) and a democratic structure based on unity in action with freedom of discussion and freedom of opinion.

“An effective united program of action — i.e. what to do now to take the struggle forward — should encompass the strengths of the current political interventions of both Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative. A new united organisation should not abandon any significant areas of political engagement of either group. If it does, a united organisation might be bigger than either of the two existing groups, but this would not strengthen the socialist movement as a whole.

“In parallel with leadership negotiations with Socialist Alternative around an effective united program of action, the Socialist Alliance is also prepared to have discussions with Socialist Alternative about more practical matters associated with unity and organise other confidence building measures, including joint membership meetings.

“However, such supplementary activities cannot substitute for a serious leadership negotiation on agreed political objectives, what to do now to take the struggle forward and a democratic structure based on unity in action with freedom of discussion and freedom of opinion.”

The Socialist Alliance’s National Council had also empowered the organisation's negotiating team to prepare practical solutions to disagreements on issues such as participation in parliamentary elections.

The Socialist Alliance remains open to collaboration wherever possible with Socialist Alternative and to continuing a broader political discussion in the left about how to advance the struggle for socialism. We remain confident that in the future all groups and individuals persisting in the struggle for socialism will find the ways to unite.

Socialist Alliance has agreed to participate in a one-day trade union activists' school organised by Socialist Alternative on November 16, 2013 and has also been invited to participate in and endorse Marxism 2014 as a supporting organisation. Socialist Alliance will reciprocate with similar offers to Socialist Alternative to participate in some of its major events, and to leave all doors open to the possibility of resuming unity talks in the future.

2. Recent correspondence

Socialist Alliance to Socialist Alternative June 14, 2013

Dear Comrades

Thank you for Socialist Alternative's participation in the Organising for 21st Century Socialism seminar in Sydney last weekend. The rich and comradely discussion has proved very useful in developing the unity process.

On June 10, a meeting of the Socialist Alliance had a thorough discussion of the ongoing unity process and adopted a resolution which will guide our National Executive in the next period.

We'll be moving as rapidly as possible to preparing a first draft of a document exploring the basic programmatic agreement between our two organisations and as soon as this is complete we can arrange the next leadership meeting.

We will be publishing this resolution in the next *Green Left Weekly* and on our website.

Comradely regards

Susan Price and Peter Boyle
Socialist Alliance National Co-convenors

[The resolution adopted by the Socialist June 2013 National Council was appended to this email. See section 3. Resolution on unity process adopted by June 2013 National Council, below, for text.]

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Socialist Alternative to Socialist Alliance July 6, 2013

Dear Comrades,

We welcome the resolution on unity with Socialist Alternative adopted at the recent Socialist Alliance National Council meeting as a very positive step on the road to unity. In particular we strongly agree that unity between our two organisations needs to be based “around an explicitly revolutionary socialist perspective and an agreed program of action to advance this perspective today.”

We also endorse your very important point 6:

“We should not have to reach absolute agreement on a detailed revolutionary program... We can unite around a general agreement on political objectives, what we do now to take the struggle forward (not necessarily agreement on all historical assessments or assessments of political processes in other countries) and a democratic structure based on unity in action with freedom of discussion and freedom of opinion.”

Socialist Alternative is very serious about unity. We want to see a unity that lasts, not something that tears itself apart two years down the track. We want a unity that is a real advance for the revolutionary left. We want a unity that not only unites our two organisations but draws in newly radicalising forces that want to see a militant fightback. We have seen some of the benefits that unity can bring in our fusion earlier this year with the Revolutionary Socialist Party. For all these reasons we need a well prepared unity. We are not for artificially forcing the pace of the unity process.

However, having said all that, it is also very important to seize the time. To drag out unity negotiations too long will mean we lose momentum and it can lead to a certain cynicism developing amongst those outside our ranks who are following the unity process and who might be inspired to join a new united organisation which would be easily the largest organisation of socialist activists in Australia for quite a number of years.

So we need to do all we can to maintain the momentum of the unity process between our two organisations. One aspect of this as you state in your point 8 is that “the two organisations should seek to broaden united activity involving their memberships”. We are in full agreement on this score. We need more joint external work in the unions, in the student movement and in progressive campaigns, more joint public meetings and forums, more combined educationals and further discussions to clarify a range of political issues, the priorities of a combined organisation, constitutional issues, organisational arrangements and so on.

Specifically we want to propose:

- That we have joint contingents at demonstrations and where possible produce joint placards.
- That we publicise each others public meetings in our publications (Green Left Weekly and Red Flag) and encourage our members to attend each others public events.
- That we organise leadership discussions and joint members’ meetings at a local level to discuss political issues about which Socialist Alliance have raised concerns about our approach. These include a) Women’s oppression b) The environment c) Election campaigning.
- That we organise joint caucuses in unions, student work and campaign work.

To turn to some further specifics.

Under point 4 you state “we would be open to taking part in a broader political formation if/or when objective conditions in Australia made this possible, and if this was a step forward in bringing together broad forces into a sustained independent struggle against capitalist rule.” We agree with this as a general orientation. A radical left formation like SYRIZA in Greece within which revolutionary socialists are active as an organised left wing force would be an incredibly positive development. However no such possibility presently exists in Australia.

What is possible in Australia today is the building of a larger united revolutionary socialist organisation. If we can achieve that then the revolutionary left will be much better placed to relate to opportunities that open up in the future to advance the class struggle and play our part in building a new militant working class party to challenge the stifling hold of the ALP over the broader labour movement.

We agree with your statement in point 7 that “A new united organisation should not abandon any significant areas of political engagement of either group.” Reflecting this approach, as you note in point 9, Socialist Alternative’s National Committee previously decided to support the Socialist Alliance’s 2013 federal election campaign as a positive step in the unity process.

However we feel it would be dishonest of us not to make clear that Socialist Alternative does not share Socialist Alliance’s emphasis on the importance of electoral work for the small revolutionary left in the current political period in Australia. The amount of energy and resources a united organisation puts into to electoral work compared to other areas of, from our point of view, more important political intervention is an issue about which we will need to reach a formalised agreement.

We agree with your statement in point 8 that “There now appears to be a common position...on unity in action with freedom of discussion and opinion. However, we would have to agree on the constitutional and structural embedding of these principles.” This is something we need to start drafting. However as you rightly say “Ultimately, political practice and political culture – as much as constitutions and structures – will determine the real democratic character of a new united organisation. The ultimate guarantee of this practice and culture is an active, educated and engaged membership.”

We endorse your point 10 that “organisational unity between Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative will need to involve ... the construction of a new united left organisation. Attempts to combine our memberships by simply putting them all into either the current form of the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative is unlikely to work.”

As to your point 11 that any proposal for unity “must be taken to a National Conference or Special Conference of the Socialist Alliance for consideration and decision”, we agree that this is obviously necessary and Socialist Alternative will be adopting a similar procedure.

The Socialist Alternative National Committee will be meeting on 13-14 July and will have a detailed discussion of how to advance the unity process.

Yours comradely

Mick Armstrong
Socialist Alternative National Executive

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Socialist Alliance to Socialist Alternative July 12, 2013

Dear comrades

This is the document we drafted to start discussion at the leadership level on what programmatic agreement between our organisations we may be able to reach. It is only a draft for discussion purposes and we will not be making this a public discussion at this stage to allow us to have the most productive discussion possible.

What we need to do next is work out a time and place for another leadership meeting between our two organisations. We can discuss some of the other practical steps you suggested in your last email at this meeting.

Regards

Susan Price and Peter Boyle
for Socialist Alliance National Executive

[Draft perspectives document for discussion attached. See section 5. Draft documents for unity discussion, below, for text.]

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Socialist Alternative to Socialist Alliance July 18, 2013

Hi Comrades,

Thanks for the draft. We have only had time for a preliminary discussion of it on our NE. We will begin working on a written draft ourselves.

We agree about not making this a public discussion at this early stage.

But just one question your draft seems to combine large elements of a general political program plus sections on how a united group would operate, including political priorities, internal functioning etc. I agree we need to discuss all these questions but would not it be better to have them in separate documents?

In the meantime we should definitely arrange a time and place for a further leadership meeting to discuss a range of practical issues. What suits you?

Comradely

Mick Armstrong

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Socialist Alternative to Socialist Alliance August 23, 2013

Dear Comrades,

We are writing to you in an attempt to clarify some issues arising from our joint leadership meeting on Sunday 11 August.

At that meeting you said that you no longer wished to have joint membership meetings and discussions at the local level and instead wanted to confine discussions to the national leadership level. You also said that you did not want to have joint contingents on demos, joint placards and other joint activities.

You stressed that in your view we were still in the very preliminary stages of discussions about the possibility of unity and that things had rushed ahead too fast and that this had created confusion.

We were surprised by this turn of events given that your June National Council meeting had resolved under point 8:

“Further, with more collective experience in united action, the members of the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative can develop greater mutual confidence and greater political agreement. While the unity discussions are in progress, the two organisations should seek to broaden united activity involving their memberships.”

Nonetheless, as an act of goodwill, we did not oppose your call to confine discussions to the national leadership level and to slow down the pace of the unity process.

However, since the national leadership meeting on 11 August our members in Brisbane have been approached by Socialist Alliance members to have a joint forum on Racism after the 24 August refugee rally and to have a joint stall. Our Brisbane members have been understandably confused about what is going on and have asked us to clarify the situation.

In Perth there are a couple of joint events that were in the pipe line prior to our 11 August national meeting. Should we be telling out Perth branch not to proceed with these events?

An additional reason it is important to clarify these questions is that our comrades have reported to us that some of your members are mistakenly saying that the Socialist Alternative leadership is opposed to joint events. We want to make it clear that that is definitely not the case.

As we stated in our response to the Socialist Alliance National Council resolution on unity we are for more joint activities, membership meetings and discussions. We see them as vital for a successful unity process. Furthermore given that unity discussions first commenced almost a year ago having such joint membership discussions and events does not seem to be particularly rushing things.

Yours comradely

Mick Armstrong
On behalf of the Socialist Alternative National Executive

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Socialist Alliance to Socialist Alternative September 8, 2013

Dear Comrades,

Thank you for your email and apologies for the delay in responding, which has been due to the pace of activity of late.

We wish to assure you that we were not ruling out joint meetings or joint contingents, but merely recognising that the stage we are at in the unity process means that some joint activities are either unrealistic at this time — while we have not yet fully clarified the political basis of agreement between our two organisations — or at the very least, that such activities should be assessed on a case by case basis.

Given that our members in Brisbane approached your branch for a joint forum on racism, and given that we were in the midst of finalising together a joint forum on Chile in Sydney when we met on August 11 (which your branch subsequently decided not to go ahead with) shows that there was no intention by us to categorically rule out joint activities by our branches. Our Sydney branch had earlier also proposed a joint meeting to explain our election campaign, but that was declined by your branch.

It is regrettable that this misunderstanding arose and led to your branches being advised not to approach our branches for any further joint meetings. In hindsight, it would have been helpful if we had produced an agreed summary of the meeting, and we would suggest that this would be good practice for all future meetings, to avoid such confusion.

Far from wanting to slow the process down, we want to get on with the discussion of the political and programmatic convergences (and divergences) between our two organisations, and had anticipated that our August 11 meeting would have focussed more on these. We provided on July 8 a draft programmatic document for your feedback, to enable us both to move the unity discussions to the next stage in the process we had agreed upon at our earlier meetings.

While the general discussion about the refugee rights movement and other topics at our August 11

meeting was useful, we hope that our next meeting will focus more on the draft document and the amendments and additions you agreed to provide ahead of this meeting. In our opinion, this discussion is as important as joint practical work in the process of exploring the basis for unity between our two organisations. We hope that these discussions will then also provide a concrete framework and program of topics for discussions at the membership level between our two organisations.

We note that in Sydney our two organisations continue to jointly caucus on a regular basis in Community Action Against Homophobia and in refugee work and around student work on an as-needs basis, and we also continue our collaboration in the Activist Teachers Network within the NSW Teachers Federation. We have also had a series of unity meetings in a number of cities to date, which have been very positive. In Perth, our organisations recently held a joint informal leadership dinner, where there was agreement to hold future joint activities (a forum and educational) as a result, and we continue to collaborate together in the Civil Service Association. In Melbourne, we are collaborating on a broad progressive ticket in the RMIT student elections, and in Adelaide on a joint ticket at Adelaide University. In Brisbane, we are collaborating on a ticket in the student elections at the University of Qld, and we have held a couple of joint discussions on the refugee rights movement and in relation to the upcoming G20 protests.

We look forward to discussing your proposal for a joint statement on the election outcome, a combined union conference in November, and participation in Marxism 2014, at our next meeting on September 15.

We believe that there is an opportunity for further collaboration over the imminent threat of war on Syria, and we would certainly hope our two organisations could work together to build the broadest anti-war movement possible, in the cities where we both have branches.

Comradely

Susan Price and Peter Boyle
on behalf of the Socialist Alliance National Executive

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Socialist Alliance to Socialist Alternative September 16, 2013

Dear comrades,

As agreed, please find below a draft of the agreed outcomes of yesterday's meeting.

Please let us know if you have any changes.

Regards
Susan Price
cc: Peter Boyle

Draft agreed outcomes of meeting between leadership delegations from Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance on September 15, 2013:

1. There would be a prompt exchange of correspondence between the two organisations to clarify the process for unity negotiations going forward.
2. That both organisations are open to a variety of ways of proceeding including leadership

meetings to discuss the political basis of unity, joint internal meetings of members to discuss specific areas of political agreement and disagreement, or a combination of both.

3. That Socialist Alternative would consider the draft no poaching protocol (which was drafted by Socialist Alliance as suggested by the Socialist Alternative delegation, and agreed at the August 11 leadership meeting).

4. The two organisations could schedule a discussion on practical options to consider in a unification process, which could promptly follow agreement on a basic political program for a united organisation.

5. The Socialist Alliance delegation offered to proceed with the discussion on a united political program either on the basis of its draft presented to Socialist Alternative on July 12, 2013, or on the basis of an alternative draft from Socialist Alternative.

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Socialist Alternative to Socialist Alliance September 17, 2013

Hi Susan,

Thanks for that. Our NE is meeting on Thursday and I will get back to you after that.

Mick

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Socialist Alliance to Socialist Alternative September 18, 2013

Dear Comrades

We are writing to confirm Socialist Alliance's willingness to persist with an attempt to negotiate a common political program as a basis for a new united organisation combining Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance.

We first communicated this to your National Executive in our letter of January 23, 2013 which said:

“Thank you for the attendance of your leadership delegation at the Socialist Alliance national conference. Our delegates and members greatly appreciated the delegation, the presentation by Comrade Mick Armstrong and the many informal discussions that were had between comrades of our organisations at the conference.

“This has done a lot to strengthen our membership's confidence in further exploring prospects for greater cooperation and unity between our organisations.”

On Sunday January 20, the delegates at our conference voted:

“As a next step in the process, following this conference, the Socialist Alliance will propose to Socialist Alternative that we collaborate on a common draft statement that covers the key points of political perspective our two organisations agree on.

“We are writing to convey this proposal to your organisation. Please let us know what you think.”

We received a reply from your National Executive, signed by Corey Oakley, on February 8, 2013 which said:

“We were also pleased to receive your proposal that we collaborate on a draft joint statement that 'covers the key points of political perspective our two organisations agree on.' We agree that such a project would be a useful step forward.

“Can we suggest an initial meeting at a time that suits you to discuss the details of this face to face?”

That meeting took place in your offices in Melbourne on Sunday March 17 where it was agreed by both sides that we would do the first draft of the document for discussion. Further it was agreed that we would not publish this draft so that we could have a free flowing discussion and one that allowed us to make adjustments to our positions and find agreeable compromises.

It was understood that with a busy period ahead (including your Marxism Conference, in which we were happy to participate and support) this may take a little time. In addition, we cooperated on May contingents, the Paul Le Blanc visit and held a number of joint public meetings in several cities on left unity.

When we sent you our draft of the paper canvassing possible common political perspectives on July 12, we received a reply from your leadership, signed by Mick Armstrong, which acknowledged receipt and said:

“Thanks for the draft. We have only had time for a preliminary discussion of it on our NE. We will begin working on a written draft ourselves.

“We agree about not making this a public discussion at this early stage.”

That letter also raised suggestions that the document be separated into different documents on general political program, how a united group would operate, including political priorities, internal functioning etc. We indicated we were happy to have the discussion in parts as you requested.

Our next scheduled meeting of leadership delegations from our two groups took place at our Sydney office on August 11.

Our delegation came to that meeting prepared to discuss the document but your side was not ready for that discussion. However, your delegation agreed to prepare written notes to send to us in preparation for having the discussion at the next meeting, which was last Sunday September 15 in our offices in Melbourne.

It was also suggested by your side, after discussion about some recent experiences in Sydney, that Socialist Alliance draft a “no poaching” agreement [see section 5. Draft documents for unity negotiations, below] for consideration at our next meeting (we prepared that draft and brought it to our September 15 meeting).

There appears to have been some misunderstanding about what we said at the August 11 meeting which we subsequently wrote to clarify in our letter of September 8. That letter stated that we were not ruling out holding more joint meetings or joint contingents, but that such activities should be assessed on a case by case basis. The letter gave examples of moves by in a number of branches to organise joint meetings and joint caucuses for some movement interventions, and noted:

It is regrettable that this misunderstanding arose and led to your branches being advised not to approach our branches for any further joint meetings. In hindsight, it would have been helpful if we

had produced an agreed summary of the meeting, and we would suggest that this would be good practice for all future meetings, to avoid such confusion.

Far from wanting to slow the process down, we want to get on with the discussion of the political and programmatic convergences (and divergences) between our two organisations, and had anticipated that our August 11 meeting would have focussed more on these. We provided on July 12 a draft programmatic document for your feedback, to enable us both to move the unity discussions to the next stage in the process we had agreed upon at our earlier meetings.

While the general discussion about the refugee rights movement and other topics at our August 11 meeting was useful, we hope that our next meeting will focus more on the draft document and the amendments and additions you agreed to provide ahead of this meeting. In our opinion, this discussion is as important as joint practical work in the process of exploring the basis for unity between our two organisations. We hope that these discussions will then also provide a concrete framework and program of topics for discussions at the membership level between our two organisations.

In a phone conversation with Susan Price on September 10, Corey Oakley said that Socialist Alternative's comments on our draft document on the political perspectives for a united organisation would be sent to us before the September 15 meeting.

We did not receive those comments and, on September 15, your delegation advised us that you were not prepared to have the discussion on the document and that your delegation had only come to the meeting clarify if Socialist Alliance was serious about the unity process.

On behalf of the Socialist Alliance we re-affirm our organisations preparedness to negotiate organisational unity with Socialist Alliance around “an explicitly revolutionary socialist perspective and an agreed program of action to advance this perspective today”, as we explained in our organisation's National Council resolution which has guided our approach.

Our National Council resolution, which we sent you on June 14 and your National Executive welcomed in a July 6 letter signed by Mick Armstrong, clearly spelled out what we meant by such an agreed program of action:

“We should not have to reach absolute agreement on a detailed revolutionary program with Socialist Alternative. We can unite around a general agreement on political objectives, what to do now to take the struggle forward (not necessarily agreement on all historical assessments or assessments of political processes in other countries) and a democratic structure based on unity in action with freedom of discussion and freedom of opinion.

“An effective united program of action – i.e. what to do now to take the struggle forward – should encompass the strengths of the current political interventions of both Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative. A new united organisation should not abandon any significant areas of political engagement of either group. If it does, a united organisation might be bigger than either of the two existing groups, but this would not strengthen the socialist movement as a whole.

“There now appears to be a common position between Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative on unity in action with freedom of discussion and opinion. However, we would have to agree on the constitutional and structural embedding of these principles. Ultimately, political practice and political culture – as much as constitutions and structures – will determine the real democratic character of a new united organisation. The ultimate guarantee of this practice and culture is an active, educated and engaged membership. Further, with more collective experience in united

action, the members of the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative can develop greater mutual confidence and greater political agreement. While the unity discussions are in progress, the two organisations should seek to broaden united activity involving their memberships.”

Our organisation has worked to proceed with the negotiations on this basis.

We strongly believe that this is the principled, constructive and practical way for our two organisations to advance towards building a new united organisation that will last.

As our delegation explained at the September 15 meeting we are happy to engage in such a process around a different initial draft document (one drafted by Socialist Alternative, if that is what you prefer), to include other discussions about more practical matters associated with unity, and in parallel with other confidence building measures, including joint memberships meetings. However, such activities cannot substitute for a serious leadership negotiation of agreed political objectives, what to do now to take the struggle forward and a democratic structure based on unity in action with freedom of discussion and freedom of opinion.

We also explained that if in the process of negotiating the political perspective for a united organisation, the two groups cannot come to sufficient agreement then we should agree that we cannot proceed with organisational unity for the moment but go on to discuss what other forms of ongoing cooperation we can agree on.

At the very least, we should acknowledge that greater political discussion between our two organisations and their memberships has been an advance that we should build on. Therefore we should seek to continue such exchanges through our publications and through conferences and seminars the two groups organise.

If we cannot reach agreement on how to proceed with negotiations for a united organisation at this stage, then at least we should act in a way that leaves open the prospect for best taking on that challenge again in the future.

Comradely regards

Susan Price and Peter Boyle
National Co-Conveners Socialist Alliance

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Socialist Alternative to Socialist Alliance September 20, 2013

Dear Comrades,

Thanks for your email. As it raises a whole series of very important questions we will be calling a meeting of our National Committee to discuss it and then we will get back to you.

Yours Comradely

Mick Armstrong

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Socialist Alliance to Socialist Alternative October 21, 2013

Dear Comrades

The Socialist Alliance National Council met on October 5-6 and discussed progress on the unity discussions between our two organisations. It adopted the following resolution which we are forwarding for your information.

Regards

Susan Price & Peter Boyle
Socialist Alliance National Co-convenors

[For appended text see section 4. Resolution of Socialist Alliance October 2013 National Council, below.]

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Socialist Alternative to Socialist Alliance November 8, 2013

Dear Comrades,

We are writing to you to report on the discussions at our National Committee meeting on 26/27 October concerning our approach to unity of the revolutionary socialist forces in Australia. Socialist Alternative's conference in December 2012 adopted the following motions relevant to the unity process:

"1. Conference supports merging with the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP) and empowers the National Executive to carry through the merger. The basis for unity is agreement on a socialist program for Australia today: for revolution; for a Marxist party; against imperialism; against all forms of oppression; against the capitalist state and for workers' power.

"2. Our approach to the Socialist Alliance is necessarily quite different to our approach to unity with the RSP. The RSP is a self-declared Marxist organisation with which we are seeking unity on a revolutionary basis. In contrast the Socialist Alliance does not have a Marxist program and you don't have to be a revolutionary to join it. Nevertheless it is worthwhile engaging with the Socialist Alliance in order to clarify whether unity is possible. Conference empowers the National Executive to continue with the discussions we have begun with the Socialist Alliance."

We spelt out our approach to unity in more detail in an article in Socialist Alternative magazine in December 2012:

"We are for unity around a clear cut revolutionary program – a socialist program for Australia today. Such a revolutionary program would not rehash all the theoretical disputes of the past. It would not demand that the organisations involved in the unity process disown their heritage or political traditions.

"But it would be an unambiguously Marxist program that stood for workers' power and the overthrow of capitalism. It would be a program for a fighting party of committed activists that took up the immediate fight today against the bosses and their governments and intervened in those struggles to win workers and students to understanding the need to totally transform society."

It was on this basis that at the Marxism conference at Easter this year we successfully finalised

unity with the RSP.

After more than a year of leadership discussions, participation in each other's forums and various joint activities it has become apparent that unity between Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance is not a viable prospect in the current political period. The overall political projects of both organisations are not sufficiently similar to carry through a sustained and productive unity that could advance the cause of the revolutionary left in Australia and the broader class struggle.

The differences in approach were clearly illustrated in the article [Revolutionary unity to meet the capitalist crisis](#) in *Marxist Left Review* No 6 by leading Socialist Alliance members Nick Fredman, Pip Hinman and Susan Price. The differences were developed further in the article by leading Socialist Alliance member Dave Holmes, Australia: [How should a united socialist party work](#), with which no one in the leadership of Socialist Alliance has publicly disagreed. Both articles stress the need for a so called transitional method, place a very strong emphasis on the centrality of electoral work and argue against the classic Marxist position that a mass insurrection is necessary to overthrow capitalism.

In the context of the current low level of struggle and a broad depoliticisation in society the "transitional method" advocated by Socialist Alliance just leads to a watering down of socialist politics resulting in an inability to attract and educate as socialist cadres those workers and students that are moving to the left. It means that your focus is not on relating to the radical minorities that do want to take a stand or fight back but on more conservative forces in campaign groups and the like. This was reflected in our differing approaches to the lively protests that erupted in the lead up to the elections against Labor's racist refugee bashing. This difference in approach as to how to relate to a radicalising audience is particularly important in the light of the new challenges and opportunities opened up for socialists following the election of the Abbott government.

In the lead up to a joint Socialist Alliance/Socialist Alternative leadership meeting on 11 August 2013 we wrote to Socialist Alliance arguing that it was: "very important to seize the time. To drag out unity negotiations too long will mean we lose momentum and it can lead to a certain cynicism developing amongst those outside our ranks who are following the unity process".

We made a number of concrete proposals including joint members' meetings to discuss some of the political issues that the Socialist Alliance leadership had raised concerns about, more joint caucuses in unions, student work and campaign work, joint contingents at demonstrations and so on.

However at the 11 August meeting the Socialist Alliance leadership rejected all our proposals and pulled back sharply from the unity process out of what seemed to us to be concerns that we were too radical. Even though discussions had been going on for nearly a year at that stage the Socialist Alliance leadership stressed a number of times that in their view we were in the very preliminary stages of discussions about the possibility of unity. They claimed that things had rushed ahead way too fast. In particular they were determined to pull back from joint membership meetings and only have discussions at a national leadership level.

Socialist Alternative remains committed to revolutionary unity. However we want to see a unity that lasts, not something that tears itself apart two years down the track. We want a unity that is a real advance for the revolutionary left. We don't believe that is currently possible with Socialist Alliance. This was confirmed in our minds in the course of discussion at the 15 September joint leadership meeting when Peter Boyle raised the idea that we could have "unity" on the basis of both our organisations keeping control of their own assets and maintaining their own separate publications.

The situation may, of course, change and at some point in the future greater possibilities for

revolutionary unity may open up. We want to continue to collaborate on a comradely basis with Socialist Alliance wherever we can in union and campaign work and to involve the Alliance in our events such as our annual Marxism conference.

We fully agree with the statement in the 18 September letter to us from Susan Price and Peter Boyle, the National Co-Conveners of Socialist Alliance:

“At the very least, we should acknowledge that greater political discussions between our two organisations and their memberships has been an advance that we should build on. Therefore we should seek to continue such exchanges through our publications and through conferences and seminars the two groups organise.

“If we cannot reach agreement on how to proceed with negotiations for a united organisation at this stage, then at least we should act in a way that leaves open the prospect for best taking on that challenge again in the future.”

It was on this basis that the Socialist Alternative National Committee unanimously adopted the following motions:

“1. The National Committee considers the unity process with the Socialist Alliance has reached an impasse and consequently we are for ending the negotiations with the Alliance.

“2. The unity process has led to more collaboration and joint activities between us and the Alliance and this has been a step forward. We don’t want the unity discussions to end in pointless acrimony. The situation may change at some point in the future and greater possibilities for revolutionary unity may open up and we should be alert for that possibility.

“We want the collaboration between ourselves and the Alliance to continue wherever possible in union, student and campaign work. We have invited a number of their comrades to speak at our upcoming union activists’ conference in Melbourne. We will be approaching them about having speakers at next year’s Marxism conference.”

Yours comradely

Mick Armstrong
Socialist Alternative National Executive

3. Resolution on unity by Socialist Alliance National Council June 2013

If socialism is not just to be a good idea, it has to become a movement of the working class and other oppressed groups. It flows from this that to build the socialist movement we have to have a permanent focus on linking up with the activists and leaders of the working class and oppressed groups who are fighting capitalist oppression. We see the current unity discussions with Socialist Alternative as a step toward building a pole of attraction to socialism as part of this process.

The ruling class is intensifying its attacks on the working class and other oppressed sectors and on the social concessions won through years of struggle. In the midst of these attacks, the ALP (which still dominates the labour movement) has severely weakened the fightback by consistently restraining any militant fightback and, furthermore, confusing, disorienting and dividing the working class by promoting the racist scapegoating of refugees and asylum seekers.

In this way, the ALP is paving the way for a Tony Abbott-led Coalition victory in the next federal

election — and the escalation of neoliberal attacks that will follow.

Therefore, as the two largest socialist organisations in Australia today, we have the duty to see if we can work together to build a stronger pole of socialist leadership for the desperately needed fightback and to win more of the working class and other oppressed sectors to the struggle to end the class dictatorship of capital.

The Socialist Alliance came out of a process that — for nearly five years — brought together socialists from several small revolutionary socialist groups with socialists who had come out of the ALP or the Greens or who have never been in the organised left before.

The Socialist Alliance started with initial points of agreement on a platform of struggle against the capitalist neoliberal attacks between various small revolutionary socialist groups that worked together to form it in 2001. There was agreement to set aside the relatively minor theoretical differences the various left groups had with each other, work with what we agreed on and then — over time and on the basis of new collective experience in united action — seek to develop greater political agreement.

The Socialist Alliance's politics have never been that of a “broad party” of revolutionaries and reformists around a program that does not go beyond seeking reforms to capitalism. However, we would be open to taking part in a broader political formation if or when objective conditions in Australia made this possible, and if this was a step forward in bringing together broad forces into a sustained independent struggle against capitalist rule.

The prospect of developing a new united organisation with Socialist Alternative is on the basis of a different, more extensive initial political platform to that which initially brought together the groups and individuals to launch the Socialist Alliance in 2001. It is around an explicitly revolutionary socialist perspective and an agreed program of action to advance this perspective today.

We should not have to reach absolute agreement on a detailed revolutionary program with Socialist Alternative. We can unite around a general agreement on political objectives, what to do now to take the struggle forward — not necessarily agreement on all historical assessments or assessments of political processes in other countries — and a democratic structure based on unity in action with freedom of discussion and freedom of opinion.

An effective united program of action — what to do now to take the struggle forward — should encompass the strengths of the current political interventions of both the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative.

A new united organisation should not abandon any significant areas of political engagement of either group. If it does, a united organisation might be bigger than either of the two existing groups, but this would not strengthen the socialist movement as a whole.

There now appears to be a common position between the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative on unity in action with freedom of discussion and opinion. However, we would have to agree on the constitutional and structural embedding of these principles.

Ultimately, political practice and political culture — as much as constitutions and structures — will determine the real democratic character of a new united organisation. The ultimate guarantee of this practice and culture is an active, educated and engaged membership. Further, with more collective experience in united action, the members of the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative can develop greater mutual confidence and greater political agreement.

While the unity discussions are in progress, the two organisations should seek to broaden united activity involving their memberships.

We welcome the recent decision by the Socialist Alternative national committee to support the Socialist Alliance's 2013 federal election campaign as a positive step in the unity process.

In our assessment, organisational unity between the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative will need to involve — in substance — the construction of a new united left organisation. Attempts to combine our memberships by simply putting them all into either the current form of the Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative is unlikely to work.

This meeting of the national council authorises the national executive to continue unity discussions with Socialist Alternative within the framework of this resolution. However, any proposal to enter into a new united organisation with Socialist Alternative must be taken to a national conference or special conference of the Socialist Alliance for consideration and decision.

4. Resolutions on unity discussions adopted by October 2013 Socialist Alliance National Council

Resolution 1:

That this meeting reaffirms Socialist Alliance's willingness to persist with an attempt to negotiate a common political program as a basis for a new united organisation combining Socialist Alternative and Socialist Alliance.

We do not have to reach absolute agreement on a detailed revolutionary program with Socialist Alternative. We can unite around a general agreement on political objectives, what to do now to take the struggle forward (not necessarily agreement on all historical assessments or assessments of political processes in other countries) and a democratic structure based on unity in action with freedom of discussion and freedom of opinion.

An effective united program of action – i.e. what to do now to take the struggle forward – should encompass the strengths of the current political interventions of both Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative. A new united organisation should not abandon any significant areas of political engagement of either group. If it does, a united organisation might be bigger than either of the two existing groups, but this would not strengthen the socialist movement as a whole.

In parallel with leadership negotiations with Socialist Alternative around an effective united program of action, Socialist Alliance is also prepared to have discussions with Socialist Alternative about more practical matters associated with unity and organise other confidence building measures, including joint membership meetings.

However, such supplementary activities cannot substitute for a serious leadership negotiation on agreed political objectives, what to do now to take the struggle forward and a democratic structure based on unity in action with freedom of discussion and freedom of opinion.

If in the process of negotiating a united program of action, the two groups cannot come to sufficient agreement to proceed with organisational unity, Socialist Alliance proposes that the two groups go on to discuss what other forms of ongoing cooperation can be agreed on.

Resolution 2:

As agreed, Socialist Alliance has drafted a document as a possible basis for discussion leading to the development of this program. However, Socialist Alliance is prepared to proceed with this discussion by any method suggested by Socialist Alternative. For example, Socialist Alternative has raised suggestions that the document be separated into different documents on general political program, how a united group would operate, including political priorities, internal functioning etc.

In Socialist Alternative's statement of July 15, it explained that given the different emphases of the two organisations "on the importance of electoral work for the small revolutionary left in the current political period in Australia, the amount of energy and resources a united organisation puts into to electoral work compared to other areas of, from our point of view, more important political intervention is an issue about which we will need to reach a formalised agreement."

Socialist Alliance will therefore draft a possible agreement for this area of work based on the organisation's agreed stance that "A new united organisation should not abandon any significant areas of political engagement of either group." We will also consider preparing drafts related to other areas of work where similar considerations apply.

The negotiating team will have responsibility for determining when to present these drafts.

5. Draft documents prepared by Socialist Alliance for unity negotiations

Draft points for joint leadership discussion on the politics of a united socialist organisation (sent to Socialist Alternative on July 12, 2013)

Climate crisis poses: Socialism or barbarism?

1. Humanity has reached a critical crossroad. Capitalism cannot advance society as a whole. Already, large sections of the world live in a barbarism of poverty, repression and endless war but in addition the irrational and insatiable drive for profits by a highly monopolised and globalised capitalism is driving towards irreversible and catastrophic climate change.
2. Capitalist governments – and the giant corporations they work for – are refusing to act on the desperate warnings of the great majority of the world's leading scientists to avert this crisis.
3. 21st century capitalism's threat to our common future is a chronic and systematic problem that arises out of the unprecedented drive for profit at all cost by a tiny rich elite and the giant corporations that now own or control most of the world's wealth. To free itself from a descent into barbarism, humanity has to liberate itself from capitalism.

Revolutionary perspective

4. To assure itself a truly democratic, peaceful, just and ecologically sustainable future, the ownership and control of society's productive resources must be taken out of the hands of the capitalist minority and transferred to society as a whole.
5. Humanity's collective wealth and technological capacities needs to be urgently invested in a radical transformation to an ecologically sustainable society that is just, equitable and freed from all

class divisions. This can only be achieved through a qualitative expansion in direct democracy and democratic planning at all levels.

6. Such a change is possible. The technology exists and capitalism has brought into being a global working class that has a tremendous potential for collective organisation and collective action and the historic potential to liberate the whole of society through its struggle for self-emancipation.

7. However, this potential can only be realised through a decisive struggle to defeat the state power of the capitalist class and the transfer of political and economic power to the working class to begin a transition to a socialist society.

8. All previous attempts to end the rule of the powerful capitalist minority have been met with violent repression. The working class majority can defeat this repression only with the most thoroughgoing self-organisation.

9. A revolutionary transfer of power will require the complete replacement of the institutions of capitalist power – including the corrupted and rigged capitalist parliamentary systems – with new democratic institutions of popular power based on the independent self-organisation of the working class and other oppressed groups.

10. The bureaucratic one-party “Communist” dictatorships that emerged in countries such as Russia and China – amidst economic backwardness, imperial military siege and isolation – were based on a total suppression of the socialist democracy that is required to liberate society from capitalism. These dictatorships wiped out the socialist revolutionary movement in those countries and have embraced the return of the most ruthless capitalist exploitation.

11. Only with the most thorough-going socialist democracy can the creativity and energy of the working class needed to build a classless society be unleashed. Further, after the direct or indirect experience of the tyranny, corruption and economic misery that millions of working people have suffered at the hands of these dictatorships, socialists today can only win mass working class support if we are seen as the most consistent and resolute defenders and builders of democracy.

We need to build a pole of socialist leadership today

12. Our strategic aim should be the construction of a mass socialist party to educate, organise and mobilise the Australian working class and other oppressed groups in a struggle for its own power to replace the power of the capitalists.

13. We need to start organising these forces, however we recognise that any organisation we form today is but one step in a much bigger, and still to unfold process of the formation of such a party capable of leading such a struggle. A party capable of leading real revolutionary struggle will have to unite the real socialist leadership that develops in the course of class struggle. Hence any united organisation we can form today cannot even claim to be the embryo of such a party. We are but one small step towards the development of such a party and we will continue to be open to uniting with all those prepared to join us in our strategic aim.

14. We need a mass revolutionary force to lead the struggle for a socialist transformation. But the kind of mass movements and mass consciousness that would allow a mass revolutionary party to develop have yet to crystallise in Australia. The responsibility of a serious socialist group is to help create the preconditions necessary for the emergence of such an organised force among radicalising sectors of the working class. It should become a space for radicalising elements to act collectively and to discuss in order to advance the struggle for socialism.

15. Small revolutionary socialist groups should help shape and initiate struggles, or join in already-existing struggles, to win improvements in the here-and-now for the working class and all oppressed groups. Such struggles, combined with revolutionary socialist popularisations and educational outreach to more and more people, can help us to work towards building the mass revolutionary socialist party needed.

16. A serious socialist organisation does not start out with the illusion that it has a finished, “correct” program. It will develop its political program in the process of engagement in such struggles through which it seeks to win real leadership and political authority in the working class and seek to unite around the struggle for socialism with the real leaderships that emerge in the working class.

17. A serious collective engagement in the class struggle and the development and testing out of an effective political program requires organisation around the principle of unity in action with freedom of discussion and opinion.

18. A united socialist organisation needs to have democratic constitution and structure supported by democratic political practice and political culture. The ultimate guarantee of this democracy is an educated and engaged membership. Therefore, the new organisation must promote – and facilitate through systematic education – an organisation where all members are active consistent with their circumstances (work/study, age, health, family responsibilities, location) in the building of the organisation, its political campaigns and projects.

19. A united socialist organisation must seek to increase its weight and influence in the working class as socialism remains simply a dream unless it can become a movement of the working class. As such the united socialist organisation must constantly strive to be, in the main, a party of workers. Its structures and culture must be accessible to workers and the organisation has a duty to provide the political education and collective support needed to enable the equal and effective participation of workers in the political life of the organisation.

20. Any active socialist organisation also needs to pay special attention to the recruitment of young people, who can be the most confident and energetic activists. Young people are relatively free from the pressures of family life and from the weight of past defeats suffered by working-class and other oppressed groups. While we should seek to recruit young people from the working class, the unemployed and from high schools, it is critically important for socialists to have a well-organised presence on universities and other higher education institutions and to engage in political activity on these campuses. To develop the experience and confidence of younger activists, the organisation should encourage leadership structures that allow youth to develop through taking leadership responsibility.

For independent mass action of the working class

21. Socialists advocate, encourage and seek to organise the independent (of the capitalist class) mass struggle of the working class in defence of its own immediate, historic and global interest. But socialists face powerful competition from political forces that seek to limit working class struggle to reforms or changes within the context of the capitalist system.

22. The Australian Labor Party, formed more than a century ago by trade union officials and sections of the intelligentsia, now acts as a systematic agent for capitalist rule in the labour movement. ALP governments have always defended the interest of the capitalist system and worked to contain trade union and other social movement struggles within the framework of capitalist

parliamentary politics.

23. The ALP has fostered class parliamentarism, collaboration, racism, xenophobia and protectionism as ways to diverting the working class from seriously confronting the capitalist class. It has promoted the false idea that workers in Australia have more in common with their “Australian” bosses than they have with the working masses in other countries – particularly in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

24. Therefore, a central part of socialist struggle in this country today is to win the working class away from the conservative domination of the ALP.

25. While it still retains a significant base in the working class, since the 1980s all ALP governments have played a leading roll in the capitalist neo-liberal offensive and with the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy have severely weakened the trade union movement and constrained it from taking independent mass action. In this period the ALP has increasingly abandoned championing new reforms – or even defending previously won reforms – in the interest of the working class and other oppressed groups.

26. As the neo-liberal ALP has increasing effectively abandoned much of its historical social-democratic program of reforms to ameliorate the worst effects of capitalism, the Greens party has emerged out of some of the environmental and other social movements and taken up some of the reforms that the ALP once championed. In doing so they have won some of the forces deserting the ALP.

27. However, the Greens party also limits itself to seeking changes within the framework of the capitalist system and primarily through the mechanism of parliamentary politics. The Greens do not stand for breaking from the capitalist system even if some of their politicians and leaders may have come from the left or even still consider themselves “socialist”. This can be seen in their unwillingness to campaign even for the urgently needed solutions to the climate change crisis, which necessarily involved major imposts on the rights of ownership of big capitalists. Instead the Greens have tailed behind the false “market solution” of the ALP's carbon price/emissions trading scheme.

28. Therefore, socialists also campaign to win labour and other social movement activists away from the Greens' utopian politics of “greening capitalism”.

29. It is necessary, but not sufficient, to expose through our propaganda the politics of the ALP and the Greens. The struggle to win militant trade unionists and other activists away from the capitalist politics of these parties also requires socialists to have a united front approach to these parties, wherever it is possible, to advance the independent mobilisations against all oppressions of the capitalist system.

Socialists and capitalist parliaments

30. Both the ALP and the Greens attempt to channel popular struggles into their parliamentary campaigns. This weakens the independence of struggles and tends to demobilise them on the promise that the politicians of those parties will provide a solution through parliamentary means.

31. A united socialist party should reject parliamentarism but should not abstain from parliamentary politics. To break the hold of the parliamentarist ALP and Greens, socialists need to engage in this arena of politics, not in order to reform capitalism, but above all to put forward socialist ideas in this arena that is still regarded by the mass of working people as the main political forum and vehicle for

satisfying their social needs. This is particularly so in periods of comparatively limited mass activity, when the masses see the ballot box as their only or main means of redressing their grievances.

32. Socialist need to engage in parliamentary elections to effectively expose the limitations and essentially anti-democratic nature of the system of capitalist parliamentary institutions and to explain how a genuine system of popular self-government, based on social ownership of the decisive means of production, would immensely increase the real participation of the masses and their control over decisions that affect their lives.

33. Socialists should be seen as the strongest defenders of democracy, exposing the limitations of capitalist democracy and campaigning for the extension of democracy to the economic sphere.

34. However, the primary goal of socialist parliamentary electoral campaigns is to develop the political awareness and self-activity of the masses and to draw all progressive organisations into mass political activity.

35. Socialists elected as representatives at any level of government should act as “tribunes of the people,” seek to use these positions on government bodies to organise campaigns and public mobilisations in the interests of the working class and oppressed sectors and take all progressive measures possible within the framework of these institutions. They will also use these platforms to present the our socialist positions, including the need to build new institutions of popular power.

36. Socialist elected representatives should work under the close direction of the organisation, retain no more than the wages of a skilled worker and at all times put forward the party's political positions and support the development of new forms of democratic organisation of the working class and other oppressed groups that are independent of the apparatus of the capitalist state.

A working-class program of action against all oppressions

37. Socialists advocate, encourage and seek to organise the independent (of the capitalist class) mass struggle of the working class in defence of its own interests and against all oppressions. By engaging in struggles against all oppressions, socialists seek to build a bridge between immediate struggles of the working class and other oppressed groups with the broader anti-capitalist struggle. It is only through such struggles that the working class can develop a consciousness of the need to replace capitalism and emancipate itself.

38. The systematic championing by socialists of struggles against all the ills of the capitalist system is part of the process of development of the working class – at first through its politically advanced elements, and then eventually through the broadest layers of the class – from the subject of capitalist oppression to its function as the new ruling in a necessary transition to a classless society. This is another important reason why today, in the midst of the global climate change emergency, it is essential for socialists to offer political leadership in the struggle for real solutions to the greatest crisis facing humanity.

39. Socialist intervention in and leadership of the struggles against various oppressions should always be aimed at maximising independent mass action. Socialists should be serious builders of the movements and advocate steps that advance the movement, connect with the working class and bring the greatest possible number of people into action.

40. The trade unions are only encompass a small part of the working class today but they remain the basic organisational vehicles for the workers' day-to-day defence of their economic interests against

the capitalist class.

41. They also remain the key institution through which the ALP maintains its dominant political influence over the working class. This remains the case despite the fact that trade union density has shrunk from 46% in the early 1980s to 18% today. As such the battle for political leadership in the trade unions remains a important priority for socialists.

42. Socialists should struggle in the trade unions to maximise their effectiveness in the defence of the immediate interests of the workers and, in the course of such struggles, win the workers to a socialist perspective.

Trade unions

43. Socialists strengthen the union movement by promoting trade-union democracy, labour unity and class independence. Trade-union democracy involves the right of the union ranks to freely determine the union's goals and policy, and to elect and recall the union's leaders. The ultimate guarantee of such democracy is the involvement of the entire membership in the union's activities, particularly at workplace level. A strong workplace delegate structure is needed for this.

44. Socialists also strengthen the union movement and the working class as a whole by:

- Campaigning for unionisation of unorganised workers.
- Extending solidarity to all workers in struggle.
- Breaking down narrow craft divisions and promoting democratic amalgamation into unions that embrace all workers in a given branch of industry.
- Promoting full participation in the life of the unions by specially oppressed groups of workers, such as women, migrants, the young and the unemployed.
- Promoting international working class solidarity.
- Urging unions to take up the struggles of the oppressed and struggles for a sustainable environment.

45. Socialists in the trade unions, especially any holding leadership or organiser positions, should work under the political direction of the organisation.

46. Socialists in leadership positions in the trade unions should offer political leadership not only on the immediate bread and butter concerns of the union's membership but also on all the major political issues of the day that impact on the working class and other oppressed groups. They should seek to present the independent interest of the working class on all political questions and mobilise trade unionists around these questions wherever possible.

47. However the working class movement comprises much more than the trade unions and socialists should seek to win leadership in the various other organisations, institutions and campaign groups that working class seeks to organise against capitalist exploitation and oppression.

48. In addition, socialists should seek to provide political leadership in the struggles of all other groups oppressed by capitalism. Such leadership could be provided through reporting and exposing these oppressions through the propaganda of the organisation and through direct participation in the actions and/or organising bodies of such struggles.

49. A small socialist group is limited in the areas of struggle it can directly engage and offer active leadership to. However, a new organisation uniting the Socialist Alliance with the Socialist Alternative with ample resources to maintain the key interventions currently being organised by both organisations and reach out into more areas of struggle.

Racism, sexism and the working class

50. Socialist interventions should always respect the democracy and independence of movement structures. This is particularly important in movements against oppressions in which the capitalist class exploits and fosters entrenched prejudices to divide the working class, for example through racism and sexism.

51. Because of Australia's modern history as a European colonial settler state which brutally dispossessed, massacred, imprisoned and marginalised its original inhabitants and because of its continuing status as an imperialist nation, racism is a power weapon of division and manipulation used by the ruling class in this country.

52. The capitalist class uses racism to scapegoat refugees and blame them for the pain and insecurity caused by the capitalist system and to justify imperialist wars of aggression and occupation in the Third World.

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55. The capitalist class uses racism to scapegoat refugees and blame them for the pain and insecurity caused by the capitalist system and to justify imperialist wars of aggression and occupation in the Third World.

56. Sexism and misogyny are also deeply entrenched in all class societies – although some important gains have been made through struggle. This is because the oppression of women is institutionalised in the family system enables the transmission of private property and the perpetuation of class divisions from one generation to the next and allows the capitalists to abrogate social responsibility for the economic well-being of those whose labour they exploit.

57. The family system imposes a social division of labour based on the subjugation of women and their economic dependence on an individual man, their father or male partner. Upon this material foundation, an all-pervasive sexist ideology is fostered by the exploiter classes. This portrays women as physically and mentally inferior to men, and biologically unfit for roles other than procreation and domestic labour. The low status of women in class society becomes the source of anti-woman violence, including rape, domestic violence and other forms of misogynist violence. It is this oppression of women that also underpins women's concentration in lower-paid traditionally "female" occupations and makes possible the super-exploitation of women's labour by the capitalist class.

58. The oppression of women as a sex constitutes the objective basis for the mobilisation of women in struggle through their own organisations. While all women are oppressed as a sex, the effects of this oppression are different for women of different social classes. Women workers experience sexist oppression in its most acute forms and, unlike women of the propertied classes, have no interest in the maintenance of the ultimate source of that oppression — the private-property system.

59. Socialists supports the construction of a mass women's liberation movement organised and led by women, and whose first priority is the fight to win and defend women's rights. However, if the women's liberation movement is to be successful, it must take up the demands of working-class women and involve them in the leadership of the movement. Only by fusing the objectives and demands of the women's liberation movement with the struggle of the working class and other progressive movements will the necessary forces be assembled to achieve the liberation of women.

END

* * *

**Draft no-poaching agreement submitted by Socialist Alliance at September 15, 2013
leadership delegation meeting**

Socialist Alliance and Socialist Alternative are currently exploring the possibility for greater unity potentially leading to a new united socialist party.

While individuals are free to join whatever organisation they want, in order to build goodwill and mutual confidence while these discussions take place, the two organisations agree not to target members of each others' organisations for recruitment.

In addition, the two organisations agree not to intercept people approaching or engaging with the other organisation's stalls at rallies, on campus, and at other movement events.

[At the August 11 leadership delegation meeting it had been agreed that Socialist Alliance would draft this agreement for the next meeting on September 15. However, Socialist Alternative was not prepared to discuss the draft no-poaching agreement at that meeting.]

END DOSSIER