

Towards a Socialist Australia

**Programmatic Document
of the Socialist Alliance**

Third revised edition 2018
ISBN 978-1-876646-78-3
Resistance Books: resistancebooks.com

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Introduction

Humanity has reached a critical crossroad. Capitalism cannot advance society as a whole. Already, large sections of the world live in poverty, repression and endless war, but in addition the insatiable drive for profits by a highly monopolised and globalised capitalism is leading to irreversible and catastrophic climate change.

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 the climate crisis.

This threat to our common future arises from the unprecedented drive for profit at all costs by a tiny rich elite and the giant corporations that now own or control most of the world's wealth. To free itself from an unprecedented climate and social crisis, humanity must liberate itself from capitalism, by taking ownership and control of society's productive resources from the capitalist elite and replacing this system with the democratic self-management of working people — socialism.

This document sets out the current views of the Socialist Alliance on the crises of capitalism and the way to overcome them by struggling for a socialist society. While it is intended as a summary of our perspectives that can guide our work, rather than an introduction to socialist ideas, those interested in socialism and our views should also find it of interest. It incorporates a number of policy positions and documents previously developed by the Socialist Alliance, and will be revised and updated to reflect new developments, experiences and struggles.

A socialist organisation does not need detailed agreement on theory and history. But a general understanding of capitalism, both internationally and in Australia, of the nature of the socialist alternative and of the aims, demands and methods of anti-capitalist struggle, can be very useful in guiding our work. The experiences of the socialist movement and revolutions since the mid-19th century and the massive anti-

capitalist struggles across Latin America today provide rich lessons for 21st century socialists.

This document begins with a general outline of the nature of capitalism, continues with an outline of the development of capitalism in Australia, puts forward our perspectives on current struggles and concludes with our view of what the transition to socialism might look like. ■

BRW Rich 200				
Top 10, 2015 wealth (name, rank, wealth)				
	Gina Rinehart	1		\$14.02b
	Anthony Pratt & family	2		\$10.76b
	Harry Triguboff	3		\$10.23b
	Frank Lowy	4		\$7.84b
	Hui Wing Mau	5		\$6.89b
	Ivan Glasenberg	6		\$6.14b
	James Packer	7		\$6.08b
	John Gandel	8		\$4.40b
	Andrew Forrest	9		\$2.83b
	Stan Perron	10		\$2.65b

Some are more equal than others. The capitalist class rules Australia.

Global Capitalism

Nature of capitalism

Capitalism is a form of class society. Unlike older forms of class society based on slavery or traditional hierarchies tied to control of the land (feudalism), capitalism is based on private ownership of the means of production and the organisation of social and economic life through the market. Under capitalism long-standing forms of exploitation and oppression are taken up and new forms developed.

Class structure

Economic and social life in capitalist societies is largely based on the relationships between three classes, or groups of people with a similar position in the socio-economic structure:

- **The capitalist class.** A very small minority of people own and control the bulk of the productive resources of society — the factories, mines, office blocks and shopping centres. Capitalists, without contributing anything necessary to society, are able to take the bulk of surplus value from production in the form of profits. This economic dominance gives the capitalists control of political and cultural life and the capitalists thus constitute a ruling class.
- **The working class.** The great majority of people in a developed capitalist society are workers or their dependents. Workers are those who do not own enough property to make a living and need to sell their labour power — their ability to work productively — to an employer, whether in ‘blue-collar’ or ‘white-collar’ work. While economically exploited under capitalism, workers are potentially the most powerful force in society, due to the social nature of production.
- **Middle classes.** These are social groupings that play an intermediate role between capitalists and workers. They include more ‘traditional’ forms of small capitalists, such as farmers and shop-owners, who may be self-employed or employ a small number of workers. Middle class layers also include those in salaried positions

with considerable power and autonomy at work and/or whose income allow them to accumulate significant income-generating property, for example managers and some highly-skilled and well-paid professionals. Middle class layers are often a social base for capitalism but can be won to the cause of the working class and socialism.

There is some overlap between class positions. For example there is a grey area between working class and middle class positions in some highly-skilled and well-paid salaried professionals' work, and some are obliged to work under formal contractor-type arrangements where their lack of autonomy and power at work mean they are in reality workers.

Development of imperialism

Private ownership and competitive market relations inevitably lead to further concentration of wealth and power. By the late-19th century these processes had led to capitalism as a global system entering an imperialist or monopoly capitalist phase. The most developed economies of Europe and North America had become dominated by a few large corporations, which, because of capitalism's need to constantly expand, had to find new places to invest their capital, and needed new markets for their goods and new sources of raw materials. Nearly all of Africa and much of Asia was quickly taken over by these states.

After World War II, mass movements for decolonisation won independence for most of the former colonies.

But they remained economically and politically dominated by the rich countries through huge debt burdens, unequal trade and lack of access to more productive technologies.

In some countries such as Vietnam, China and Cuba there were revolutions that challenged imperialist domination. These revolutions made some gains, but faced great difficulties in building a new society in a world dominated by the rich countries, while being subjected to a range of attacks, including economic blockades and military aggression.

More recently transnational corporations based in the rich countries have transferred some of their production to poor countries, especially China. This has resulted in the ruthless exploitation of the workers of these countries.

Contradictions of capitalism

Capitalism gives rise to a number of contradictions that produce exploitation, oppression and environmental destruction. These include the contradictions between:

- Labour as a social activity and the private expropriation of the surplus produced by labour;
- The need for capitalists to both expand production and to minimise wages;
- The mechanisation of production and the rate of profit, which is generated by human labour;
- The international production and the continued existence of competitive national states;
- Formal 'equality' in the market, and the interests of capitalists in fostering divisions based on sex, ethnicity and sexuality in order to better exploit and rule working people;
- Production for profit at all costs and the continued existence of a liveable environment.

The contradictory nature of capitalism leads to regular economic crises of overproduction, continuing specific oppressions based on sex, ethnicity and sexuality, conflict and exploitation between states, and ecological crises.

Nature of the capitalist state

The exploitative and oppressive nature of capitalism, and the competition between capitalists, gives rise to the need for a state to provide a secure environment for the interests of capitalists to be met. Armed forces, the police and the justice system provide physical security and public sector bureaucracies provide market regulation and some measure of education and health care to help reproduce new generations of productive workers. The capitalists' economic power gives them decisive control over these institutions of the state and also formally elected parliamentary institutions. ■



Capitalist Ideological Control

The capitalists' economic power also means that institutions with ideological and cultural functions, such as the news and entertainment media and educational institutions, are dominated by pro-capitalist ideas.

Capitalism & systems of oppression

Capitalism relies upon and is intimately tied to various forms of structural oppression that arise from the structures of class society and the economic formations it produces.

Oppression of women

While the oppression of women and LGBTI people existed in previous class societies, this form of oppression has become intimately linked with the capitalist system and capitalism relies on it heavily.

In order to reproduce itself, and in particular to reproduce the world labour markets and reserves, capitalism requires a huge amount of domestic labour to be performed. However, this labour is not acknowledged as work and it is not paid for by the capitalist class that ultimately benefits.

The entire division of labour under capitalism is organised along gendered lines, allowing for the super-exploitation of women.

The patriarchal family system is the basis of this oppression.

Racism

In order for capitalism to be functional and profitable on a world scale, it is necessary for entire populations of people to be systematically subjugated. Whether it is to clear people from lands which are rich with natural resources or to excuse bad work conditions for a certain section of the population, capitalism uses racism to justify policies that

ultimately undermine solidarity between all workers.

Racism emerged as an intimate aspect of capitalist ideology and as such cannot be separated from it.

Oppression of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender & intersex people

In an economic system that relies on the maintenance of the family as a basic economic unit, people who are seen as defying the way this unit is organised are inevitably persecuted. People with diverse sexual or gender identities do not fit the model of social life and the division of labour needed for the world economy to function, and as such are routinely persecuted and discriminated against in capitalist societies.

Oppression of disabled people

Capitalism, as an economic system, demands efficient and productive workers, as measured in the amount of commodities and profits someone is able to produce. Such an economic logic will inevitably victimise people with physical or mental health reasons for not being 'productive' in the sense that capitalists demand. Capitalism does not value people as human beings, but as tools for production. ■



The Development of Capitalism in Australia

Capitalism developed in Australia in the form of a colonial settler state, based on the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations; stolen Aboriginal land and the valuable resources which lie therein; and the unpaid or underpaid Aboriginal labour used to establish the pastoral industry.

Prior to the coming of Europeans in 1788, this vast continent and surrounding islands was populated by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations. More than 300 languages were spoken. Over tens of thousands of years these nations established social, political and economic structures with varying degrees of complexity. They engaged in trade — for example, the clans in the continent's north traded pearls and trepang with the Macassans — and sustainably managed the fragile ecosystems across their estates.

The process of colonisation, which started in 1788, required the destruction of these structures and the imposition of a class society brought from Britain by the colonisers.

Across the continent the First Nations peoples resisted. But treaties were never negotiated over the use or settlement of the land and the colonisers invented a legal fiction — *terra nullius* — to justify their illegal and violent annexation. Under successive governments, whole populations were forced onto missions, denied their language and culture, and given tea, flour, and tobacco to live on. In many areas, they were given diseased blankets or poisoned flour and hunting parties were paid a bounty to chase down and kill those who refused to accept the new order.

Throughout the last century, Aboriginal children were removed from their families and communities. These children were lied to about their heritage, and were used as slave labour — as housemaids or on cattle stations — and were frequently abused.

A White/European capitalist class developed in Australia. For a long time it viewed

Australia as an outpost of the British Empire and eagerly participated in Britain's imperialist wars —Boer war, World War I, etc. But over time it became more independent of Britain, becoming after World War II a junior partner of the United States.

Meanwhile relatively democratic forms of rule had developed in Australia through the 19th century, without the revolutions for independence and/or bourgeois democracy that were necessary in other countries. There were however, popular struggles such as the 1854 Eureka Stockade miners' struggle, which raised a number of political and democratic demands including for universal manhood suffrage, the right of the non-propertied classes to run for parliament, for parliamentary reform and issued a challenge to British imperial rule.

Overall, the Australian working class developed in relatively favourable conditions. While there have been important working class struggles and the development of radical working class currents since the mid-19th century, the ideas of nationalism, class collaboration and even chauvinism and racism also became more prevalent among the working class and middle class layers.

Economic development in Australia has been bound up with racism: from the dispossession of and super exploitation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; to the kidnapping of and enslavement of Melanesian people — a practice known as 'blackbirding' — in the late-19th and early-20th centuries; to the inhumane and exploitative policies towards successive waves of migrants, refugees and overseas workers in the 20th and 21st centuries; to Australian capital's continuing exploitation and theft of mineral and energy resources from sovereign nations in the South Pacific today.

Today Australia is a small imperialist power, independent, although a close junior partner of the imperialist system dominated by the United States. ■

Socialist Strategy & Tactics

A revolutionary perspective

To win a truly democratic, peaceful, just and ecologically sustainable future, working people must take the ownership and control of society's productive resources out of the hands of the capitalist minority and transfer it to society as a whole.

Humanity's collective wealth and technological capacities need 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.

To do this we need to struggle to defeat the power of the capitalist class and transfer political and economic power to the working class and all exploited and oppressed groups. Then we can begin the transition to a socialist society.

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

A revolutionary transfer of power will require new democratic institutions of popular power based on the independent self-organisation of the working class and all other oppressed groups.

The road to building the consciousness and self-organisation powerful enough to form a new political power lies through campaigning against all instances of capitalist exploitation and oppression, and through independent mass action. The remainder of this section discusses how our revolutionary perspective and our tactical orientation of independent mass action informs our view of the role of a socialist party, of the trade unions, of popular self-organisation, of the Labor Party and the Greens and of how we orient to elections within the current system. The following section discusses our general approach in terms of analysis, slogans and demands around immediate aspects of capitalist exploitation and oppression.

Role of a socialist party

The fundamental aim of the Socialist Alliance is to contribute to the construction of a mass socialist party that can educate, organise and mobilise the Australian working class and other oppressed groups to replace the power of the capitalists with popular power.

To advance this aim we need to build a socialist organisation now and deepen its connection to and authority among working people. We are open to uniting with all those prepared to join us in this aim, and to be part of any political formation than can advance towards this aim.

We recognise that any form socialist organisation takes today is just one step in a much bigger and still unfolding process of building 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 the class struggle.

The kinds of mass movements and mass consciousness that would allow a mass revolutionary party to develop have yet to crystallise in Australia. The responsibility of any serious socialist group is to help create the preconditions for the emergence of such an organised force among radicalising sectors of the working class and the oppressed.

A small revolutionary socialist group should help to build and initiate struggles or join 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 work towards building the mass revolutionary socialist party needed.

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 will seek to win real leadership and political authority in the working class and to unite around the struggle for socialism with the real working class leaderships that emerge.

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

A socialist organisation needs to have a 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 Socialist Alliance strives to be an organisation where all members are active consistent with their circumstances (work or study, age, health, family responsibilities, location) in the building of the organisation, its political campaigns and projects.

The Socialist Alliance seeks 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 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.

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.

To develop the experience and confidence of younger activists, the Socialist Alliance encourages leadership structures that allow young people to develop through taking leadership responsibility.

Independent mass action & the struggle for reforms

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 interests. The revolutionary overthrow of capitalism is the final outcome of a process of increasing working class consciousness, self-confidence and unity in action.

Propaganda and agitation alone cannot bring about the necessary transformation of mass consciousness. Direct experience of success in mass struggles is essential. Such mass struggles are most often struggles for reforms to improve the masses' immediate conditions of life.

A socialist organisation needs to avoid both reformism — the view that struggles should be limited to demands that are compatible with the capitalist system — and ultra-leftism — the rejection of reforms or the use of superficially 'militant' methods of struggle which sideline mass participation.

Trade unions

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

They also remain the key institution through which the Australian Labor Party maintains its dominant political influence over the working class. This is despite the fact that trade union density has shrunk from 46% in the early 1980s to 18% in 2015. The battle for political leadership in the trade unions remains a important priority for socialists.

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.

Socialists strengthen the union movement by promoting 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.

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 especially 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.

Socialists in the trade unions, especially any holding leadership or organiser positions, should work under the political direction of the organisation. While being accountable to the union membership through the democratic structures of the union, they should try to win union members to socialist politics.

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.

Independent struggles of the oppressed

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

In addition, socialists should seek to provide political leadership in the struggles of all other groups oppressed by capitalism. Such leadership can be provided through

reporting and exposing these oppressions through our publications and through direct participation in the actions and/or organising bodies of such struggles.

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 the immediate struggles of the working class and other oppressed groups, and 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 with socialism and emancipate itself.

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 from the subject of capitalist oppression to the self-conscious power that can end minority class rule and organise the transition to a new classless society. Beginning with the organisation of the politically advanced elements of the working class, this process can eventually involve the broadest layers of the class.

Socialist participation in 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.

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.

Socialists & electoral tactics

The main form of the struggle of the working people and oppressed for political power is mass mobilisation: strikes, demonstrations, pickets, etc. This necessarily involves the development of new forms of organisation independent of the capitalist state.

Socialists however should not abstain from using the electoral area to present their criticisms of capitalism and present an anti-capitalist alternative. Socialists need to put forward socialist ideas in this arena, which is still regarded by the most working people as the main political forum and vehicle for satisfying their social and economic needs.

Socialists need to use the opening provided by parliamentary elections to build up our profile and membership, win a hearing among broader sections of working people and thereby advance the social movements. Where feasible, socialists seek to win

office to advance these aims. In the process of electoral work, we seek to expose the limitations and essentially anti-democratic nature of the system of capitalist parliamentary institutions and to explain how these can be replaced by a genuine system of popular self-government. Such an alternative would be based on social ownership of the means of production and would immensely increase the real participation of the masses and their control over decisions that affect their lives.

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.

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.

Socialists elected as representatives at any level of government should act as 'tribunes of the people'. They should 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 should also use these platforms to present socialist positions, including the need to build new institutions of popular power.

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

The ALP & the Greens

The Australian Labor Party (ALP), 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 interests of the capitalist system and worked to contain trade union and other social movement struggles within the framework of capitalist parliamentary politics.

The ALP has fostered parliamentarism, class-collaboration, racism, xenophobia and protectionism as ways to divert the working class from seriously confronting the capitalists and their governments. It has promoted the false idea that workers in Australia have more in common with their ‘Australian’ bosses than with the working masses in other countries — particularly in the colonial and semicolonial countries.

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.

While it still retains a significant base in the working class, all ALP governments since the 1980s have played a leading role in the capitalist neoliberal offensive. With the collaboration of the trade union bureaucracy the Labor leadership has 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.

As the neoliberal ALP has effectively abandoned much of its historical social-democratic program of reforms to ameliorate the worst effects of capitalism, the Greens party has emerged from 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 and developed a platform clearly to the left of the ALP.

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 adopted the false ‘market solutions’ such as their support for a carbon price and emissions trading scheme.

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 instances of exploitation and oppression. ■



Left: Labour Party leader Bill Shorten; *Right:* Greens leader Richard Di Natale.

Socialist Solutions to Exploitation & Oppression

Socialists need to provide clear answers to the problems facing working people in order to mobilise the forces necessary to overturn capitalism. The demands and tactics relevant in any campaign will depend on the stage of the struggle and the forces involved. The more specific demands and policy points that the Socialist Alliance currently campaigns for are set out in the Socialist Alliance Action Platform. Here we set out the main themes and approaches.

For real democracy

We need a radically different political system: a system of participatory democracy that empowers the big majority of people who are currently excluded.

To achieve genuine democracy it is necessary to regain the social ownership of the economy on which we all depend and which has been privatised by the capitalist class. Real democracy is impossible if one part of society — the capitalists — own the economy and the other part — the workers — are compelled to work them.

A new system would be based on organisations of popular democracy in local neighbourhoods, workplaces, schools, universities and colleges, which could directly make decisions affecting their respective communities. Elections to such local self-government bodies and to a national assembly of these bodies should be based on proportional representation. Representatives should receive a worker's average wage. They should be subject to recall through a simple process if their electors are dissatisfied. The voting age should be lowered to 16 years.

All public officials should be subject to election and recall.

Workers should be able to elect their managers and collectively direct their workplaces.

The main goals and targets of economic activity should be popularly decided.

The mass media should be placed under the control of the community to reflect

the interests and concerns of ordinary people.

For social & economic rights for all

The capitalist solution to economic crises is to radically increase the rate of profit by cutting working class living standards and conditions of work. This is combined with austerity measures to restrict public spending on measures that do not directly assist the capitalists, and to force more people into work. Socialists by sharp contrast defend the interests of working people and campaign to place the burden of the crisis on those who have caused it, the capitalists.

The socialist response to capitalist economic crises include massive programs of public works; the nationalisation of the finance sector; the right of workers to freely organise and take action; guaranteed security of work and a living wage for all; campaigns for healthy and safe workplaces; campaigns for equality and against discrimination at work.

For women's liberation

Sexism and misogyny are deeply entrenched in all class societies, although some important gains have been made through struggle. Women are systematically oppressed in class society through the patriarchal family system. This institution 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.

The patriarchal 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.

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.

Socialists support the construction of a mass women's liberation movement organised and led by women, 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.

For the free expression of gender & sexuality

We live in a society that attempts to dictate sexual preference and gender identity through promoting the gender stereotypes and homophobic attitudes that underpin the heterosexual nuclear family, and by promoting marriage and the nuclear family as the only legitimate model for relationships. Lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, trans people and intersex people suffer oppression because their lives challenge the nuclear family, which is an economic cornerstone of capitalism.

The Socialist Alliance opposes all attempts to shoehorn people into sexual and gender conformity. We believe it is a basic democratic right that a person's' self-definition of sexual preference and gender identity should be recognised. Heterosexism exists at almost every level in this society, and discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity is entrenched in all of the key institutions of society — education, health, the law, the media, family, church and state.

The Socialist Alliance supports politically independent and self-organising social movements that fight the oppression of women, lesbians and gay men, trans and intersex people, people with HIV and sex workers through independent mass action.

We oppose sexism, racism, ageism and discrimination against people with disabilities within the lesbian and gay communities, as we do in the broader community.

For the rights of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples

In 1788 Australia was invaded and colonised, but the sovereignty of the original inhabitants of this country was never ceded.

For Aboriginal people, this process of colonisation and dispossession has included inter-generational trauma, enslavement, genocide, assimilation, and a loss of language, culture and identity. This legacy, along with continuing institutionalised racism, has resulted in a massive health burden, skyrocketing imprisonment rates and shorter life expectancy.

Aboriginal communities, particularly in remote areas, have been given the false choice of ‘welfare dependency’ on one hand or ‘development’ through allowing mining companies access to their land, on the other.

Socialist Alliance’s approach is to provide solidarity and support to all struggles for justice by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for recognition as original and ongoing inhabitants, full compensation for colonisation, social and economic equality, sovereignty, a binding treaty and land rights.

Against racism, for the rights of migrants & refugees

The dispossession of First Nations people in Australia and other colonised lands, and the institution of slavery in the Americas, gave rise to the ideology of racism: the view that those with white skins are superior to those with non-white skins. In recent decades racism based on ethnic, linguistic, cultural and/or religious background, which may also relate to physical differences, has come to play a similar ideological role to racism based on ‘white’ superiority — ‘whiteness’ itself being a historically constructed and constantly changing category. For example, Islamophobia is a key form of racism in many rich countries today.

These ideologies have been used to divide Australia’s ‘white’ working class, from successive waves of immigration: from Chinese and Pacific Island people in the 19th century, to people from southern Europe in the mid-20th century and more recently, people from south-east Asia, the Middle East and Africa.

Socialists campaign for measures to aid the involvement of migrants from all backgrounds to participate fully in social life and to help break down prejudice. Such measures include free English language courses with paid leave; recognition of all overseas qualifications; school programs on the language, history and culture of any nationality of students’ choosing.

Socialist Alliance campaigns for full citizenship rights for all overseas workers living in Australia. This is to end the exploitative migration and employment arrangements they are currently subjected to, which create mega profits for the capitalist class, and to ensure that all workers in Australia, whether born here or not, enjoy the wages and conditions historically fought for by the labour movement.

Since the early 1990s, successive Australian governments have particularly vilified those seeking asylum in Australia from war, oppression, poverty or climate change. Socialists support the right of all to enter and live in Australia. As immediate steps toward this aim, Socialist Alliance campaigns for an end to the policy of mandatory detention, and for equal access for asylum seekers to the full range of social security, health, housing, transport, education and employment services as other Australians.

For ecologically sustainable development

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, contamination of our rivers and soil by salt, which threatens not only agriculture but many rural towns (and, in time, cities); polluting, open-cut coal mines and unconventional gas wells; acid leaching uranium mines; the huge volume of asbestos released from decaying cement sheeting and insulation are all disasters that 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. The 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 agricultural workers, rural unemployed, Aboriginal communities and small farmers. Where possible and appropriate, such restoration programs should be established in consultation with traditional owners and/or local Aboriginal communities.

Against corporate globalisation & war & for international solidarity

The drive of competing capitalist elites for higher profits is closely related to ongoing wars across the globe and the constant threat of war. The armed forces of the Australian state have the function of defending the interests of the Australian capitalist class and are closely integrated into the military infrastructure of the global imperialist system led by the United States, including its nuclear arsenals which threaten the continued existence of life on Earth. The security of Australian working people is therefore not enhanced but threatened by the current structure and functions of the Australian military forces.

Socialists advocate a radical change in foreign policy from support for imperialist domination to support for global justice and equality, a radical democratisation of the

armed forces to make them an instrument of working people and solidarity with and political and material support for all struggles against imperialism, particularly Australian imperialism. ■



Photo: GreenLeft.org.au

The Transition to Socialism

There is no precise map or blueprint for how socialism can come about, but the long experience of the socialist movement and of a series of revolutions and near-revolutionary struggles gives us a guide to how things might unfold.

The kind of revolutionary change that begins a transition to an entirely new social system will likely come about as a result of sharpening struggles against particular aspects of the capitalist crisis. If such campaigns develop to include the conscious and active involvement of the majority of people, they can lead to struggles for far more democratic forms of political power and new social and economic relations.

At a decisive point a new governmental power, based on mass movements of working people and popular self-organisation, can come into being and lead a process of social and economic change.

An important step in the struggle for such change in this country might involve anti-capitalist forces being elected to parliament and using the resources of that bourgeois institution to mobilise extra-parliamentary support for anti-capitalist measures.

History has shown that in this case, the corporate rich and their parliamentary allies would try to destabilise and even overthrow such a progressive government.

History has also shown, that we would have to mobilise in the streets, workplaces, schools, campuses and neighbourhoods to defend any progressive moves made by such a government.

But most importantly, to truly consolidate any meaningful socialist change — whether a popular government elected within the present system needs to be defended from reactionary attacks or other events spark a political crisis — we would be faced with the need to create new institutions of grassroots democracy without which the building of genuine socialism is impossible.

The problem of bureaucracy

Apologists for capitalism argue that socialism will never work or that it will always lead to bureaucratic dictatorship.

It is true that some revolutionary governments have degenerated into bureaucratic regimes, leading eventually to the restoration of capitalism. This highlights the centrality of the struggle for democracy as a part of the struggle to build a new society.

But it is also necessary to understand the objective conditions that contributed to such degenerations. Most revolutions in the twentieth century took place in poor countries devastated by war. They faced constant attacks from the imperialist powers that used war, terrorism and economic sabotage to undermine them. This created shortages and desperation that eventually drove many working people out of public life and allowed an increasingly unaccountable bureaucracy to usurp power and accumulate private wealth and privilege.

If these countries had not suffered blockades, war and intervention at the hands of richer countries, things may have turned out completely differently. Thus, socialist revolutions in rich countries are important, not only for their own people but also for those of the poorer countries.

Social & economic transition

The nature of the complex transition from one social system to another will vary from country to country, depending on the level of economic development, and the course of national and international struggles against capitalism.

In a rich country like Australia, the formation of a new governmental power, the taking of large private enterprises into public ownership, and the extension of economic planning may take place relatively quickly. Important measures to begin to address the material inequality and discrimination faced by oppressed groups might also be implemented fairly quickly.

A truly classless socialist society will be characterised by the distribution of goods and services by need. But it is likely that a considerable period of development, on a world scale, will be needed, during which the distribution of goods and services will still need to be determined by work performed. Unlike capitalism however, there will be a decent minimum standard of living for all and work will be available for all with a minimum of inequality of reward. It is also likely to take some time before the individualistic and discriminatory ideas encouraged by capitalism can be overcome.

We can expect that central part of the transition from private to collective ownership and control over economic life will be the nationalisation of decisive sectors of the economy by a working people's government. The pace of such nationalisation may

depend on the need for workers to gain experience of self-management and the nature of class struggles in the transition period. For example, some nationalisations and other anti-capitalist measures may be the result of defensive moves against reactionary attacks.

Even following extensive nationalisation, it may be optimum for economic development for many small and even medium enterprises to remain in private ownership for some time, although cooperative forms and the gradual extension of social ownership in all sectors should be encouraged. Market mechanisms may be used for some time but increasingly in a way subsidiary to and constrained by democratic planning of the economy.

The goal of democratic economic planning and popular political power in a period of transition to socialism should be to increasingly make all people's needs freely available, to decrease the time spent in work, and to provide the conditions for the free development of all in a classless, truly humane and ecologically sustainable society. ■



New Planet by Konstantin Yuon, 1921.

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Join the Socialist Alliance

The Socialist Alliance stands for socialism — a democratic society run by and for working people, not the greedy, destructive capitalist elite that now rules. We put people and the planet before profit, the millions before the billionaires. We believe that a society based on this principle is entirely realistic, and necessary if humanity and the planet are to survive.

We believe that in order to bring about such a society, we have to replace the institutions that protect and defend this ruling elite (such as parliament, government administration, police and the military) with institutions under the democratic control of ordinary people. In other words we need revolutionary change, brought about with the active participation of the majority of people.

www.socialist-alliance.org

Reading for the Struggle

- The Aboriginal Struggle and the Left** by Terry Townsend. 2009, 104pp, \$15
- Australia's First Socialists** by Jim McIlroy. 2003, 56pp, \$5.95
- Bludgers in Grass Castles Native Title and the Unpaid Debts of the Pastoral Industry** by Martin Taylor. 1997, 40pp, \$5
- Building the Revolutionary Party** *Jim Percy Selected Writings 1980-87* by Jim Percy. 2008, 212pp, \$20
- Capitalism & Workers' Struggle in China** by Chris Slee. 2010, 36pp, \$5
- Charter of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Rights** Socialist Alliance Policy. 2009, 28pp, \$3
- Change the System, Not the Climate! A Socialist View of Global Warming** by Dave Holmes, Terry Townsend & John Bellamy Foster. 2007, 52pp, \$5.50
- Christianity, Islam and Atheism Reflections on Religion, Society and Politics** by Michael Cooke. 2014, 124pp, \$15
- The Collapse of 'Communism' in the USSR Its Causes and Significance** by Doug Lorimer. 1997, 48pp, \$5.50
- Comrades in Arms Bolshevik Women in the Russian Revolution** by Kathy Fairfax. 2017, 40pp, \$5
- The Communist International in Lenin's Time** by John Riddell. 2008, 44pp, \$5
- Conflict in the Unions The Communist Party of Australia, Politics & the Trade Union Movement 1945-60** by Douglas Jordan. 2013, 312pp, \$30
- The Cuban Revolution and Its Leadership A Criticism of Peter Taaffe's Pamphlet "Cuba: Analysis of the Revolution"** by Doug Lorimer. 2000, 64pp, \$6.75
- Cuba How the Workers and Peasants Made the Revolution** by Chris Slee et al. 2008, 56pp, \$6
- Debating Population Articles and Arguments on Population, Immigration and Climate Change** by Ian Angus et al. 2012, 48pp, \$6
- The Dispossession of Women A Marxist Examination of New Evidence on the Origins of Women's Oppression** by Pat Brewer. 2017, 44pp, \$6
- Dollars for Death Say No to Uranium Mining & nuclear Power** by Jim Green et al. 2012, 44pp, \$6
- Fascism What It Is and How to Fight It** by Leon Trotsky. 2002, 52pp, \$5.95
- How to Make an Ecosocialist Revolution** by Ian Angus. 2011, 20pp, \$4
- How to Make a Revolution Liberalism, Ultraleftism & Mass Action** by Peter Camejo. 2017, 40pp, \$5
- Ideas for the Struggle** by Marta Harnecker. 2016, 40pp, \$5
- If the Climate Were a Bank, It Would Have Already Been Saved** by Fidel Castro, Hugo Chavez, et al. 2010, 44pp, \$5
- Imperialism, War and Terrorism** by Doug Lorimer & Dave Holmes. 2007,

40pp, \$4.50

- Introduction to Marxist Economic Theory** by Ernest Mandel. 2002, 64pp, \$5.95
- The Kurdish Freedom Struggle today** by Dave Holmes & Tony Iltis. 2015, 44pp, \$6
- The Origins of the ALP A Marxist Analysis** by Jim McIlroy. 2004, 60pp, \$5.95
- The Palestinian Struggle, Zionism and Anti-Semitism** by Doug Lorimer et al. 2002, 56pp, \$5.95
- Racism What It Is and How to Fight It** by John Tully et al. 2016, 40pp, \$5
- Rainbow Cuba The Sexual Revolution Within the Revolution** by Rachel Evans. 2012, 48pp, \$6
- The Red North The Popular Front in North Queensland** by Diane Menghetti. 2018, 164pp, \$25
- A Short History of Social Democracy From Socialist Origins to Neoliberal Theocracy** by John Rainford. 2015, 184pp, \$20
- Socialism, Revolution & the Working Class** by Graham Matthews & Dave Holmes. 2007, 40pp, \$4.50
- Stop Uranium Mining Australia's Decade of Protest 1975-85** by Greg Adamson. 1999, 48pp, \$5.50
- Sustainable Agriculture Versus Corporate Greed Small Farmers, Food Security & Big Business** by Alan Broughton & Elena Garcia.. 2017, 104pp, \$15
- The Road to Rainbow Liberation Marriage, Sex and Gender Rights Today** by Farida Iqbal et al. 2012, 44pp, \$6
- The Tamil Freedom Struggle in Sri Lanka** by Chris Slee et al. 2012 (updated edition), 44pp, \$6
- Terrorism A Marxist Perspective** by Dave Holmes. 2002, 36pp, \$3.95
- Women of Steel Gender, Jobs & Justice at BHP** by Carla Gorton & Pat Brewer. 2015, 76pp, \$10

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Contemporary editions of the Marxist classics with special introductions, appendices and notes.

- The Communist Manifesto And Its Relevance Today** by Karl Marx & Frederick Engels. 2017, 104pp, \$15
- Democracy and Revolution** by V.I. Lenin. 2001, 224pp, \$18.95
- The Fight Against Fascism in the USA** by James P. Cannon et al. 2003, 240pp, \$19.95
- Marxism, Socialism & Religion** by Karl Marx et al. 2001, 160pp, \$14.95
- Marxism Versus Anarchism** by Karl Marx et al. 2001, 240pp, \$19.95
- The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State** by Frederick Engels. 2004, 184pp, \$15.95
- Their Morals and Ours The Marxist View of Morality** by Leon Trotsky et al. 2000, 104pp, \$9.95

This document sets out the current views of the Socialist Alliance on the crises of capitalism and the way to overcome them by struggling for a socialist society.

While it is intended as a summary of our perspectives that can guide our work, rather than an introduction to socialist ideas, those interested in socialism and our views should also find it of interest. It incorporates a number of policy positions and documents previously developed by the Socialist Alliance, and will be revised and updated to reflect new developments, experiences and struggles.

A socialist organisation does not need detailed agreement on theory and history. But a general understanding of capitalism, both internationally and in Australia, of the nature of the socialist alternative and of the aims, demands and methods of anti-capitalist struggle, can be very useful in guiding our work. The experiences of the socialist movement and revolutions since the mid-19th century provide rich lessons for 21st century socialists.

This document begins with a general outline of the nature of capitalism, continues with an outline of the development of capitalism in Australia, puts forward our perspectives on current struggles and concludes with our view of what the transition to socialism might look like.

Resistance books

