

Platform preamble — incorporating Workers' Liberty amendments

Theme

For a workers' plan to rebuild Australia — tax the rich, seize control from the profiteers, rebuild jobs, expand public services, create a democratic republic.

Introduction

The Socialist Alliance stands on a platform of total opposition to the profit-driven economic rationalist agenda of social austerity, privatisation and deregulation. While tremendous wealth is concentrated in the hands of a tiny minority, millions of us face transport chaos, low pay, job insecurity, homelessness, racism, and environmental destruction. Only by ending the concentration of power in the hands of that minority can the wealth that exists be used for the benefit of working people. Working-class communities who campaign for their needs and rights can develop their own sense of power as a collective alternative to private ownership, and could then redistribute the wealth of society, create jobs, expand public services, and improve welfare and services.

By socialism, we mean nothing like the old Stalinist Soviet Union with its bureaucracy and repression, but instead solidarity raised from a principle of resistance to the guiding principle of society. We mean the working class organising to liberate itself from the rule of profit and create its own democracy, abolishing the privileges of managers and officials. Every major industry should be reorganised on the lines of social provision for need, publicly-owned, and democratically controlled by workers and the community. No rich and no poor, no profits and no wage-slavery, no mansions and no homeless, no jobless and no overworked!

The Socialist Alliance will stand candidates in the next federal election to give a voice to working-class struggle, to the need for working-class political representation. We will stand to offer an alternative that Labor is not. We recognise that on issues such as the GST, health and education, Labor is offering far less than what traditional Labor voters want. The Socialist Alliance stands in complete opposition to the racist and right-wing Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party.

If elected, a Socialist Alliance candidate would reject the perks and personal pay-outs of parliamentary office and take only an average worker's wage. In parliament, Socialist Alliance candidates would use their position to give a voice to workers' struggles and social movements, fight reactionary policies and promote the mass campaigns that can defeat the attacks on jobs and living standards.

A movement for change requires above all that the working-class movement renovate itself by developing

policies, campaigns, industrial struggles, internal democracy and co-operation with all workers, environmentalists, anti-racists, and other social movements, to put forward an alternative to corporate control of society. A sustained mass campaign of total opposition to the ruling class offensive can bring together the forces to replace capitalism with a socialist society, based on co-operation, democracy, liberty and ecological sustainability.

For a workers' government — one that acts in the interests of workers, not bosses, and one that supports, encourages and is rooted in the organisations and struggles of working-class people.

Public need not corporate greed

Privatisation and public ownership

The issue of privatisation has not been addressed in the platform. Workers' Liberty proposes that it should be, as follows, in the section of the platform entitled "public need not corporate greed". This also seems the best place to assert that public services should be provided on a secular, and not religious, basis. Dot points 3-6 are as in the draft platform. Everything before them is new, and the final point is also new:

The Socialist Alliance believes that public services should be publicly owned, publicly funded and democratically controlled by those who work in and use them.

- For public ownership of key sections of the economy — major transport, communications, utilities, construction and manufacturing industries, as well as banking and financial institutions;
- Reverse the privatisation of Telstra, Qantas, the Commonwealth Bank, airports, electricity and Centrelink;
- End government funding of private schools, hospitals and health insurance;
- No subsidies to wealthy schools;
- Fund Medicare, not private health funds;
- Expand public services;
- End government funding to welfare and education services run by Church and other religious organisations.

Fight corporate globalisation

Workers' Liberty suggests a new first dot point that makes clear that we are for international working-class solidarity.

It replaces the words after "Cancel Third World debt" in the current platform, words we propose to delete.

- Fight globalised capital with global working-class solidarity, to gain union rights, basic public services, and a living wage for workers worldwide, and for a global plan of economic reconstruction at the expense of the rich as our alternative to the poverty-and-privatisation drives of the WTO, IMF, World Bank, and international banks.
- Cancel Third World debt.

The point that says

- "Stop Howard's military expansion; no military ties with repressive regimes"

(which is proposed by Dick Nicholls to go in a new section on foreign policy) we propose to re-word as:

- Stop Australia's export of military hardware and personnel.

Rationale

We can't think of any non-repressive regimes that the government has ties with that we would want to keep!

It is a bit of a stretch to suggest that Australia is expanding its own territory by military conquest. What Australia does is to train and arm neighbouring regimes. So Workers' Liberty proposes this phrase as a more relevant policy for the SA.

For ecologically sustainable development

Two amendments proposed by Workers' Liberty

"Extend and socialise public transport" to replace "money for public transport", and

"Worker-community-green alliances to take control of production for human need and sustainability, not profit" to replace "worker-community-green alliances to counter profiteering developers"

Jobs not profits

Everyone should be guaranteed the right to a secure job at a living wage.

We support workers organising to stop sackings, and to claim and guarantee their entitlements when companies go bust. Our answer to the problem is:

- Legislation to cut work hours to a maximum of 35 per week, without loss of pay, and to require employers to recruit new permanent staff in proportion to the cut in hours;
- End casualisation — flexible working conditions should come with no loss in entitlements or job security;
- New jobs in hospitals, schools and public services, created by expanding those services and financed by taxing the rich and big business;
- Corporate collapse should not be allowed to threaten the livelihood or entitlements of workers. Companies threatening layoffs, whether profitable or insolvent, should be taken under public control and managed by committees elected by the workers. Minimum compensation should be made only to small shareholders;
- Build union and community support for workers who occupy their places of employment when they are threatened with closure;

- A minimum wage for all workers. Restore the ability of unions to negotiate award rates and conditions comparable to the best levels achieved in each industry;
- No individual contracts — for maximum solidarity in bargaining on wages and conditions. Raise wages and conditions to the level of the best enterprise conditions through workers solidarity across all enterprises, as our answer to competition policy and enterprise bargaining;
- Training or retraining for all who require it, publicly provided, on a living wage, and leading to recognised qualifications.

Replace the rule of the free market by workers' control and democratic planning for social need and ecological sustainability.

Rationale

We are expanding this section to allow for some more complex answers to issues which are so simplistically presented in the draft that they could in some cases be counter-productive.

We agree with Chris Spindler's point in Discussion Bulletin 3 about enterprise bargaining — sometimes enterprise bargaining is actually an advance over having no union agreement at all. Hence the point beginning, "No individual contracts". To this we add a political demand against enterprise bargaining, casualisation, and so on as the parameters for re-creation of the legal conditions for trade unions to "level up" wages and conditions through industry-wide bargaining. Deregulation, tariff reduction, free trade, competition policy, contracting out, casualisation, enterprise bargaining and individual contracts are all elements of economic policy followed by Australian governments for the last 2-3 decades.

We are for setting regulations on companies in order to protect health, safety, security and working conditions. General calls for re-regulation, protection and other reversals of the overall policy approach are not automatically in our best interests. We should judge specific measures on their merits, and do not find any general demands about re-regulation to be helpful.

On the shorter working week, the part about hiring new staff is based on the French experience (where there is a shorter work week by law, but bosses often manage to get round it by "annualising" hours, demanding "flexibility" etc., and actually not hiring anyone new at all).

The call for expropriation of job-cutters should not be limited to companies which are actually going bust (Lutte Ouvriere in France actually prioritises a call for expropriation of *profitable* firms which cut jobs). The call for protection of workers' entitlements surely only arises when the company goes down, so is subsumed in the call for expropriation. Therefore, we mention support for such struggles in our introduction, but our actual policy is more comprehensive.

The ACTU's "living wage" case is inadequate — we need a more ambitious target for a minimum wage that could make the basic case for the abolition of the "working poor". We should say that we are for higher wages — especially with Australia's long tradition of public intervention in wage-setting in response to union claims via industrial courts.

Priority Pledge

The Socialist Alliance is standing to allow workers to use their vote to express their rejection of the pro-profiteer policies of the mainstream parties and support for a workers' plan to rebuild Australia.

Tax the rich and slash the defence budget to establish free, universal provision for health and education; quality care for children, the aged and people with disabilities; cheap and expanded public transport; and other public services. End government funding of private schools, hospitals and health insurance. Fund Medicare, not private health funds. Axe the GST.

Every worker should have the right to join a union and oblige their employer to recognise and negotiate with the union. Unions should have the right to gain access to workplaces, to inspect company plans and books, to strike, to picket effectively, and to act in solidarity with other unions or social causes.

For a democratic Republic with representatives receiving no more than a skilled worker's wage. Negotiate a Treaty recognising prior ownership and Indigenous land rights. Full rights for refugees and asylum seekers.

Cut work hours without loss of pay, and nationalise companies threatening mass job cuts; guarantee everyone the right to a secure job at a living wage. Production should be organised for human need and ecological sustainability. Replace the rule of the free market by workers' control and democratic planning for social need.

Workers' Liberty Proposal on Campaigning

The Socialist Alliance will campaign to be the voice of working class struggle in the elections by focussing on:

- working in support of existing organising and campaigning bodies, such as unions and community groups;
- establishing ongoing dialogue with potential supporters to win both their votes and their membership in the SA.

Accordingly, branches are encouraged to give priority to ensuring that they:

- Seek to speak at meetings of rank and file unionists and community groups about the SA platform, finding out about and offering solidarity to their campaigns;
- Produce targeted leaflets for local campaigns, actions and workplaces wherever possible in consultation with local activists who have yet to join the SA;
- Door-knock for SA election candidates, treating the questions asked on doorsteps as valuable feedback for developing SA election material, and following up on people who are interested in talking further.

General campaign leaflets, street stalls, speak outs and letterboxing — whilst important — should not eclipse these other methods which will enable us to make deeper connections with potential supporters.

Workers' Liberty Proposal on Preferences

Vote 1 Socialist Alliance.

Second preferences to the ALP with exceptions as follows.

In preferencing non-ALP candidates or in negotiating non-aggression pacts or holding back from running candidates in elections, the criteria are essentially the same — for the election of a Labor government, support for workers in struggle, and the right of workers to organise. For each candidate or party we must take into account the main pressures on that party or candidate against supporting workers' struggles.

In preferencing the Greens in either the House of Representatives or the Senate we need to establish 4 points with the candidate or party:

- That the candidate or the ticket endorses the repeal of the WRA and sections 45D & E of the Trade Practices Act;
- That they will support workers defending their jobs — even in environmentally damaging industries such as car manufacturing and logging — and seek solutions that simultaneously protect both the environment *and* employment, rather than subordinate workers to environmental priorities;
- That they will not do trade-offs for environmental gains that give away or silence them on supporting workers' rights;
- That they will preference Labor, not the Coalition. Split preferences are also unacceptable.

In preferencing any other left party or independent candidates in either the House of Representatives or the Senate, we need to establish 3 points with the candidate or party:

1. That the candidate or party subscribes to conditions 1 and 4 outlined above, i.e. advocates repeal of anti-union laws and will give direct preferences to Labor;
2. That the policies of the candidate or party do not contradict SA policies in the main;
3. That the candidate or party is not campaigning against the SA (e.g. Communist Party of Australia).

We should offer to *not* run against Labor candidates who undertake publicly to be committed to:

1. Repeal the Workplace Relations Act and sections 45D&E of the Trade Practices Act;
2. Support union campaigns, even if they come into conflict with a Labor government;
3. Oppose any de-registration proceedings against any trade union or any other anti-union action taken by a Labor government.

Last preferences go to One Nation, or any other far-right or fascist candidates. Second (or subsequent) last preferences go to the Coalition

Socialist Alliance, the ALP and the trade unions

Resolution

We are for political representation of the collective interests of the working class. We are for discussion and debate within the unions about the platform and policies

of parties seeking to represent working-class interests, and for union endorsement of the SA platform wherever it can be achieved. Whilst the ALP betrays workers in their unions whenever there is industrial struggle, there is no evidence to suggest that under current conditions militant unions will win any greater advance for working-class interests by splitting away from the more conservative and apathetic unions than by using leverage in ALP structures to try to rally them. Unions that disaffiliate cut themselves off from the struggle for political representation in the absence of a broad struggle for an alternative socialist platform to that of the ALP. We oppose disaffiliation of affiliated unions from the ALP. We urge unaffiliated unions to affiliate to the ALP and fight within it.

Rationale

Since the ALP provides the only direct and structured political representation for the unions, the SA should actively promote union affiliation to the ALP on the basis of key union demands such as: repeal of anti-union laws, repeal of the GST, re-introduction of a heavily progressive taxation system that taxes the rich to finance free health and education, a shorter working week with no loss in pay, and maintaining workers' compensation rights.

Unions resolutely committed to their own demands and continuing to campaign for them both industrially and within the ALP can have a much deeper political effect on the rest of the labour movement, than by campaigning *without* affiliation. This is the best basis at the moment for developing a class struggle left-wing set of political demands within the union movement, and challenging the reformist politics that dominate the ALP.

It is a fantasy to think that any significant union bodies are likely to affiliate to the Socialist Alliance in the near future. When unions endorse the SA platform, then it is likely to have far bigger political impact if they take it into the ALP than if they simply disaffiliate without a battle.

Disaffiliations from the ALP have taken place periodically. While they may reflect healthy disgust with ALP policies, and they are of no political merit in and of themselves. They may be an expression of anger, or even a convenient decoy by ineffective union leaders, posturing to make it look as though they are taking action. The danger of disaffiliation without any accompanying adoption of political demands or campaign to win other unions to such demands, is that unions end up being *less* rather than more open to the necessity of seeking political representation.

Union support for SA challenges to the ALP in elections should be sought on the grounds that the ALP has been unresponsive to union demands and that, therefore, while continuing to challenge the ALP leaders and to use the ALP structures to try to rally other unions, the union has a right and a duty also to use the public electoral arena to promote working-class interests and demands.

Housing Policy for the Socialist Alliance

By Melissa White

It seems to me that the housing policy for the Socialist Alliance proposed by Brigitte Ellery and Alison Thorne in Discussion Bulletin 3 has three problems.

First, it omits what should be the most immediate and revolutionary demand on this question — the confiscation of the luxury dwellings and offices of the rich, and their conversion to social use. To build new public housing — presumably mostly in the remote outer suburbs, if the private property of the well-off in the inner suburbs is not to be touched — is not adequate (however good the public transport), and slow.

Second, it is too long and detailed by the standards of the other sections of the platform. Some of the details are ideas which can really go without saying, given the rest of the platform. Brevity is better, where it is possible.

Third, some of the details are unnecessarily bureaucratic and unworkable. For example, Brigitte and Alison assume private landlords will remain. I think that's right. A workers' government would neither want, nor need, nor even be able to abolish small-scale private renting. But then Brigitte and Alison propose an impossibly bureaucratic system for regulating rents — "a maximum of 20% of income". Fill in a tax form every time you pay your rent? All it could do is make small-scale private renting impossible, or drive it into a black market. The better way to guard against high private rents is to ensure that everyone has the option of publicly-provided housing at an affordable rent (say, no higher than 20% of minimum income). I would suggest instead:

State governments should be mandated to guarantee decent, affordable housing to all by:

1. Confiscating luxury properties owned by the rich and big business, and converting them to social use;
2. Building new public housing. We support tenants' struggles to stop the privatisation of existing public housing, and to win improved tenants' rights.

It would be dogmatic to take our cue too directly from what Engels wrote in "The Housing Question" over 100 years ago, but recent experience in France — where there is much more homelessness than in Australia, and a big homeless movement — is instructive. The sharp point of the struggle has been the "requisitioning" of luxury properties by the homeless and their supporters. What Engels wrote was: "It is not our task to create utopian systems for the arrangement of the future society... but one thing is certain: there are already in existence sufficient buildings for dwellings in the big towns to remedy immediately any real 'housing shortage,' given rational utilization of them. This can naturally only take place by the expropriation of the present owners and by quartering in their houses the homeless or those workers excessively overcrowded in their former houses. Immediately the proletariat has conquered political power such a measure dictated in the public interests will be just as easy to carry out as other expropriations and billetings are by the existing state.... In the beginning, however, each social revolution will have to take things as it finds them and do its best to get rid of the most crying evils with the means at its disposal. And we have already seen that the housing shortage can be remedied immediately by expropriating a part of the luxury dwellings belonging to the propertied classes and by quartering workers in the remaining part".