

The Left in Australia - The origins of Socialist Alternative: summing up the debate

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The working class movement in Australia and most of the Western world has been on the defensive for over three decades in the face of a sustained assault by global capital. The current economic crisis has led to a further intensification of the ruling class offensive and although Australian capitalism has not been as seriously impacted as Europe or the US, the ruling class here is just as determined as their international rivals to ensure that workers are forced to shoulder the burden of the crisis in their system.

The parties that workers traditionally looked to to defend their interests - the Labor and Social Democratic parties - have been at the forefront of the neoliberal offensive. The response of union leaders has been little better. They have refused to mount determined resistance. Worse, when workers have fought back the ACTU has sabotaged those struggles. Under the Hawke/Keating Labor government, the ACTU acted as an industrial police force - holding down wages and actively collaborating in the smashing of unions such as the Builders Labourers Federation (BLF) and the pilots' union (Australia Federation of Air Pilots) that stepped out of line. Then under Howard the ACTU sold out the 1998 Maritime Union struggle which had the potential to turn the tide against the bosses. Subsequently the ACTU wound up the industrial campaign against Howard's WorkChoices and fell into line behind Rudd and Gillard's WorkChoices-lite. Is it any wonder that union membership has collapsed to its lowest level in almost 100 years and that working class confidence and combativity have been severely undermined?

The need for a socialist workers' party that could rebuild rank and file union organisation and mount sustained resistance to every ruling class attack could not be more sharply posed. This is a task that Socialist Alternative has dedicated itself to over the last fifteen years. While we are still far from being the mass party we need to be - a party that could intervene in and attempt to lead every struggle by workers and the oppressed - we have, despite the generally difficult political climate, made modest steps forward and are now the largest organisation on the revolutionary left in Australia. This article is an attempt to sum up the lessons of the debates in the International Socialist Tendency (IST) about the assessment of the political situation and perspectives for building

revolutionary organisations that led to the formation of Socialist Alternative in 1995. Being clear on the issues raised by these debates is of relevance to all those seeking to build a Leninist organisation to challenge this oppressive system.

The background to the formation of Socialist Alternative

Socialist Alternative's heritage lies in the Trotskyist movement – the revolutionary socialist movement that strove to keep alive the genuine emancipatory tradition of Marxism in the face of Stalinist totalitarianism. More specifically Socialist Alternative's origins lie in the International Socialist tradition of socialism from below associated with the Palestinian-born Marxist Tony Cliff who was a central leader of the British Socialist Workers Party (SWP) – the leading organisation in the IST. The older leaders of Socialist Alternative had been leading members of the International Socialist Organisation (ISO) – the Australian IST affiliate. Socialist Alternative was founded in July 1995 after a handful of comrades were expelled from the ISO. The split was a product of the disastrous perspective for building the organisation that the ISO adopted in the early 1990s. The ISO leadership totally misassessed the political situation, arguing in December 1993:

“Weak, discredited and divided governments, with no answers to the crisis, imposing the most sustained attack on living standards in two generations – that combination is fuelling a major radicalisation amongst workers... the world we live in today seems headed towards the 1930s. There are enormous opportunities for us to build.”[1]

This overblown analysis of the political situation was combined with a super-inflated estimation of the capacity of an organisation of at best 300 members to break out and win over masses of workers. It is one thing to misassess the political period in which you are operating; any revolutionary organisation is capable of such an error. However in the face of all the evidence to the contrary, the ISO, under the influence of the British SWP, persisted with a super-heated perspective for well over a decade. It led to a series of bizarre organisational practices and political errors which produced not growth or a break through into the working class but a sorry story of numerical decline, fragmentation, political degeneration and the eventual demise of the ISO.

The radicalisation of the late 1960s and early 1970s ruptured the post-war stability of capitalism and led to the emergence of new revolutionary organisations that began to challenge the domination of the left by the Stalinist Communist Parties. Prior to the sixties upsurge, the Australian Trotskyist movement consisted of tiny handfuls which were totally overshadowed by the Communist Party of Australia – proportionately the largest Communist Party in the English-speaking world – and its Maoist and pro-Moscow breakaways.

The early seventies saw the emergence of a variety of Trotskyist groups, a couple of which attained a membership of a few hundred. The precursor of the ISO – the Socialist Workers Action Group – cohered later than most of the other Trotskyist currents and at the beginning of 1975 had a mere 25 members, which meant it was in no position to take full advantage of the most favourable situation for revolutionary socialists since the 1920s. From the mid-1970s the wave of working class militancy and political radicalisation was pushed back. The 1980s were a difficult period for socialists – a period of downturn in industrial and political struggle, a marked shift to the right and a restabilisation of capitalism after a decade of upheaval. The downturn of the 1980s meant that the business of building revolutionary organisations would be slow and painstaking.

This period of conservative stabilisation was ruptured by the revolutions that swept Eastern Europe in 1989, the collapse of Stalinism in Russia, the first Gulf War against Iraq and the recession of the early 1990s. The 1990s were to be a more unstable period than the 1980s. But this new political

period was not one of a straightforward upturn in struggle or a significant shift to the left. Instead, socialists faced a contradictory political environment. The collapse of the Stalinist regimes opened up a space for the regeneration of a genuine Marxism, but it also demoralised many on the left who had illusions in the supposedly Communist societies, and led to a barrage of propaganda from the right arguing that there was no alternative to capitalism.

In the 1990s workers in a series of countries showed they were willing to fight when their traditional leaders gave a clear call. However despite the undoubted discontent, workers, with rare exceptions, were not confident to take the offensive or defy their union leaders. And there was no sizeable left with serious roots in the working class to provide an alternative lead. At the beginning of the 1990s the ISO was far from clear what the new period meant for socialists, but nevertheless it was able to mount impressive interventions in the campaigns against the first Gulf War, the Aidex arms exhibition, the visit of George Bush Snr. and Labor's attack on Austudy. While the harsh downturn years and the collapse of the Stalinist bloc had led to the demise or stagnation of nearly all the organised left, the ISO had grown modestly. By the early 1990s it had established a small base amongst students and carried out serious union work in the federal public service. The start of the 1990s was a period of real growth in the number of active and committed members. Impressive activists were recruited, some of whom began to develop into a new layer of cadre. By the time of the 1992 conference the ISO had 245 members, most of whom were highly active. It seemed well placed to establish a serious socialist organisation.

From mid-1992 these gains were progressively thrown away as the ISO, following the lead of the British SWP, developed a wildly exaggerated assessment of the political situation. The political climate did indeed briefly change in a favourable direction, but the ISO enormously overstated the intensity of the relatively short-lived radicalisation. The ISO argued that the upheaval against Jeff Kennett's newly elected Victorian Liberal government, which included a mass strike and a march of 150,000 in November 1992, was the precursor of a wave of struggle that would lead to a sharp polarisation from which the ISO would grow rapidly. The leadership declared that the dynamic was "towards deeper anger and class confrontation". This new situation meant that "the terrain is more favourable to us than at any time in the past 20 years...our own self-confidence and aggression are now the key factors in our ability to grow".[2] A number of the events the ISO leadership pointed to were real enough. However, the momentum was not maintained. It was increasingly obvious that the SWP, and the ISO following in its wake, had exaggerated the pace of developments. Moreover, the ISO's overblown analysis of the political situation underpinned a prognosis for growth that was never going to be met by a small organisation - which will always face obstacles that mere "self-confidence and aggression" cannot overcome.

During 1993 and 1994, precisely when the ISO's rhetoric was becoming increasingly overblown, the pace of events moved in the opposite direction. By mid-1993 the unions had wound down the campaign against Kennett. The level of politicisation was on the downswing and the economy began to recover. The economic recovery gave the ruling class more room to manoeuvre. For a period the ISO leadership denied there was a recovery, then downplayed its significance (condemning as "corrosive" the idea "that the recovery means the ruling class has room to manoeuvre") [3] and when finally forced to concede that there was a recovery, implied that it would rapidly lead to an upsurge of strikes. In January 1994 the leadership argued that "the past year has seen a string of mass national strikes... Hundreds of thousands of workers were involved." [4] This was a straightforward denial of reality, as the number of strike days had declined to a record low. The overstatement of workers' willingness to fight led to an overly agitational style which pervaded the ISO paper Socialist Worker and most aspects of the ISO's work, and to a downplaying of the need for political argument to win people to socialist ideas. This was most clearly seen with the leadership's dismissal of the importance of branch meetings. "You do not have to come to a socialist meeting to hate the

system, to want a revolution, to argue the ideas in our paper”, they proclaimed.[5]

The overblown perspective led the ISO to substitute organisational measures – instant recruitment, tiny suburban branches, networks of paper sellers, doorknocking houses to sell papers, a ban on reading groups and a downgrading of student work – for political discussion in an attempt to force the pace. When these measures predictably failed to produce sustained growth, the leadership blamed members for being “stuck in the eighties”. All members had to do, according to the leadership, was to turn outwards, break with their sectarian attitudes, embrace the latest get-rich-quick scheme from Britain and mass recruitment would follow. This emphasis on organisational solutions, when combined with a phoney agitational style, led to depoliticisation. By the mid-1990s the ISO no longer put an emphasis on intervening in campaigns and debates in society with political arguments; nor on winning people to a socialist world view. This made it difficult to take advantage of the opportunities that did exist. A few hyperactive comrades came to substitute for an increasingly passive membership. Heaps of people signed membership cards, but the number of active members declined. The inevitable consequence was demoralisation and cynicism. There was a high turnover of new members and many experienced members dropped out or reduced their level of activity.

The 1930s in slow motion

“The nineties resemble the 1930s in slow motion” was the schema developed by the SWP to describe the political climate. As Alex Callinicos, one of the SWP’s central leaders, put it in 1994:

“The same ingredients are present today [as were operative in the 1930s] – deep seated economic crisis which puts increasing pressure on the social structures which built up during the boom, crisis also of the political system, class polarisation involving both the growth of the fascist right and greater working class militancy. The pace of development of the crisis along these different dimensions, however, is – as yet – slower than it was in the 1930s.”[6]

This disorienting analysis was maintained for well over a decade. In 2000 SWP leader Tony Cliff declared: “Since the landslide victory of Labour in 1997 the shift to the left has continued. Now the anger is directed against Blair, not the Tories, and the sense of bitterness and betrayal is deepening all the time. This has led to a significant widening of the audience for our ideas.”[7] By 2002 the SWP had gone further arguing that the crisis “resembles the 1930s in slow motion (but speeding up)”. [8] The ISO National Executive parroted this “analysis”: “As the French presidential election shows, the ‘1930s in slow motion’ movie is speeding up.”[9]

To see what is wrong with this analysis it is necessary to very briefly sketch what happened in the Great Depression. The 1930s saw a catastrophic economic collapse in the main centres of capitalism. Many countries (Australia for example) suffered up to 30 per cent unemployment. The crisis was so severe that it was only the enormous military build-up associated with World War II and the destruction of huge amounts of capital that restored the rate of profit and ended mass unemployment. The economic collapse provoked a profound social and political polarisation. On the left, tens of millions of workers looked to Stalinist Russia as a beacon of hope. On the right, large sections of the middle class turned to fascism. In 1933 Hitler came to power in Germany. The scale of the defeat stunned workers. Some succumbed to despair. Millions more saw the need to make a stand. In Austria workers fought a heroic armed revolt. In France the threat of fascism inspired an uprising of revolutionary proportions. In Spain in 1936 a fascist military coup provoked a revolution.

Even this cursory sketch of the 1930s demonstrates that the economic, political and social climate in the 1990s was in no way comparable. The recession of the early 1990s, though severe by post-war

standards, did not lead to a collapse in production or mass unemployment on the scale of the Depression. If the economic crisis in the 1990s was nowhere near as severe as the 1930s, neither was the social crisis. Fascist movements re-emerged in parts of Europe but they were incomparably weaker than the Nazis. On our side, the level of strike action generally remained low and there were no upheavals in the West at all comparable to the thirties.

The overblown assessment encapsulated in the formula “the 1930s in slow motion” led the ISO to lose its bearings. The leadership set tasks which would have been impossible to achieve even if the political climate had been as positive as they made out. Even in a favourable climate it would not have been possible for the ISO, given its small size, to develop a grandiose network of paper sellers, nor to develop a swathe of suburban branches, establish Global Action clubs with thousands of student members, build an electorally successful Socialist Alliance or play a leading role in the anti-war movement. A socialist group will never be built by grandiose proposals that take no account of its real capabilities or by downgrading the need for political argument to convince people of socialist ideas. In fact, in a period of intense politicisation, with all sorts of confused ideas competing for a hearing, an emphasis on political clarity is even more important.

For revolutionary groups to go forward, they have to understand the basics of Marxism and apply them to events in the world. But having a grasp of Marxist politics is not sufficient. Socialists must be able to answer the central question in politics – what to do next. To do that you need a coherent analysis of the political situation and a realistic assessment of your own capabilities. Socialist groups have frequently come to grief because they overstated their ability to lead struggles. They spurned a hard-headed assessment of their importance in the world and tried to act as “activist groups” or pretended to be parties. They put out papers that seemed agitational with heaps of reports about strikes. Usually this comes across as phoney. The workers they aim to influence easily detect that the group has no influence in the unions. The only people fooled are the socialists themselves, who mistrain their members to believe they are genuinely engaged in agitation.

By the mid-1990s, overwhelmed by the impatient approach associated with the “thirties in slow motion” analysis, the ISO junked as “sectarian” virtually every hard-earned lesson from the previous 20 years of building the group. Even the basic Leninist conception of the need to develop cadre – a layer of experienced members, well-versed in the politics, who are capable of assessing the tactics needed to build the group and of taking initiatives to lead the work on the ground – was treated in the ISO as a swear word and a sure sign of sectarianism. The leadership wrote off the ISO’s past as hopelessly “sectish” and promised new vistas of growth as the group “turned outwards”. However, the supposedly outward approach simply sent the ISO spiralling backwards. Rather than breaking with sectarianism, the ISO became cut off from developments in the world. Consequently the ISO became more and more incapable of answering the questions of new people and more and more trapped within its own narrow agenda – sectarian in the classic meaning of the term. By 1996 the ISO had lost most of its roots on campus and in the public sector union and became more and more isolated.

The ISO maintained this overheated analysis well into the 2000s, leading them to adopt a truly bizarre approach to the movement against the 2003 war on Iraq. They called for actions that were totally unachievable – daily mass demonstrations, repeated calls for mass civil disobedience and mass strikes to stop the war even after a poor turnout to a union stop-work in Melbourne. These calls for action went way beyond the level of political consciousness of the workers and students who were mobilising against the war and totally disregarded the sorry state of union and student organisation. It meant that the ISO was incapable of relating to the massive demonstrations that did occur against the war, whereas Socialist Alternative was able to grow significantly out of the anti-war movement, in part because we had a more realistic assessment of both the great strengths and limitations of the movement.

Internal turmoil

The overblown analysis and its failure to deliver results led to a series of distortions in the ISO's internal life. As early as mid-1993 it was apparent that the new perspective was not producing growth. Instead of re-examining the perspective to bring it into line with the actual development of the class struggle, the leadership looked for scapegoats. Sandra Bloodworth and Mick Armstrong were summarily purged from the leadership without any discussion with the membership – let alone a vote. This was to become a pattern as the leadership became frustrated and impatient because of their failure to take the ISO forward and the consequent criticism from members. The leadership began to argue that the reason the ISO was not growing was because of opposition to the perspective by Melbourne members. The ISO's democratic traditions were jettisoned. Prior to the 1995 conference the leadership used threats of expulsion to inhibit debate. Given their failure to motivate members by political argument, the leadership resorted to a command mentality. They did not seriously evaluate the ISO's work and discuss what political arguments members should address. Instead the emphasis was on organisational tasks and issuing orders. This was justified on the spurious grounds of "democratic centralism". As interpreted by the ISO leadership, "democratic centralism" became a caricature, with the emphasis overwhelmingly on centralism over the democratic component. The leadership was incapable of resolving the growing crisis in the ISO by debating the issues, and instead was preparing organisational measures to silence its opponents.

The events surrounding the 1995 split highlighted the ISO's internal degeneration. Initially five comrades were expelled on specific charges. Then two days later the leadership stated they had expelled the five to "begin the process of a split". Yet at no stage did the leadership openly prepare the ISO for a split. If the differences over perspectives were sufficient to justify a split, the leadership should have argued this at the conference just a few months previously. Instead at the conference the leadership argued that members who complained about threats of expulsion were "scaremongering". This was because the leadership knew they were unlikely to win a clear majority for the expulsions. So they waited until after conference to act behind the back of the membership.

Socialists are bound to commit errors in their reading of the political situation. This is no tragedy. The problem is when they persist in these errors in the face of contrary evidence. How are we to explain why the ISO persisted in their perspective for over a decade when events proved them so wrong and when the rapid growth they predicted did not occur? There is always a resonance in revolutionary organisations for an "optimistic" perspective. People join socialist groups to change the world, so a perspective that offers rapid growth is bound to appeal. Those who argue for a realistic assessment can be painted as "pessimists" in the eyes of enthusiastic new members. The ISO leadership demagogically used this accusation against its opponents. It is not just new members who can be attracted to an unrealistic perspective that offers rapid gains. After the difficult years of the downturn, a section of older members and of the leadership wanted to believe that things were on the up and up.

Once adopted, the perspective reinforced itself. It depoliticised the ISO and there was little theoretical education of members. The lowering of the political level meant that fewer members were in a position to develop a serious assessment of the political situation. This pattern was reinforced by a high turnover of members. Experienced members lowered their sights and became cynical. New members had no knowledge of ISO history and of the previous failures of the perspective. These factors, combined with the expulsion in 1995 of comrades critical of the perspective, meant that for a number of years the leadership went unchallenged. Those who did become critical were hesitant to raise criticisms as they knew they were likely to be clamped down on. As to the leadership, even if they had doubts, they were reluctant to make an open retreat, as they had put their credibility on the line. To acknowledge that they had been mistaken would be an

admission that Socialist Alternative was right. In any case to defeat the opposition and maintain their leading positions, the ISO leadership had become dependent on the SWP. To move to a realistic orientation would have meant a sharp break with the SWP and that was something the leadership was not willing to contemplate.

The role of the British SWP

The driving force behind the ISO's degeneration was the SWP. The analysis of the period and the organisational methods adopted by the ISO leadership were largely not their own creation. They were mechanically transposed from Britain. The SWP developed the theory of the "1930s in slow motion" and generalised it to the IST. The SWP did not simply "convince" IS groups but orchestrated splits in country after country. In 2001 the SWP expelled one of the largest IST groups - the ISO (US) - for daring to criticise the perspective.

But why didn't the SWP pull back from the perspective when it produced crisis after crisis in IS groups and a significant decline in their own membership? Just as in Australia after the long years of the downturn, a section of the SWP leadership and membership wanted to believe they could break out of their isolation on the margins of political life. They felt that at last they could go from a few thousand into the big league. Once they had settled on the perspective, to admit they were wrong would have meant a major loss of face. This was especially so after they expelled the ISO (US). The leadership had great authority in the SWP and imposed the perspective with little opposition. They could hold the line as long as the leadership itself did not split. The late 1970s had seen a bitter fight amongst the leadership over perspectives that threatened to wreck the SWP. The leadership seems to have determined after this not to risk major open disagreements. This undermined democracy in the SWP. The leadership trained a cadre that was not prepared to rock the boat. The cadre might have thought that a lot of what the leadership said was rubbish, but they were not prepared to stick their heads up. The leadership became unchallengeable and this left little space for internal correction.

So until well into the 2000s the SWP held onto "the 1930s in slow motion" line. It was only with the Respect debacle in 2007 that differences amongst the SWP leadership began to come out into the open.[10] A minority around John Rees and Lindsey German continued to defend the essentials of the old approach, but the majority of the SWP Central Committee (CC) began to re-evaluate their analysis. In 2009 the SWP CC admitted: "While it was absolutely right for the party to turn towards the movements after Seattle and 9/11, it is now clear that the way in which the turn was carried led to a near-collapse of basic party organisation that has had damaging long-term effects." [11] The SWP leadership was now writing of the 1990s as though they had been a hell on earth for socialists rather than the time of "enormous opportunities" that they had for so long proclaimed. Leading SWP CC member Chris Harman wrote:

"To this must be added the impact on the wider left internationally of the collapse of the USSR. It did not affect our membership and we were left as the only substantial left force intact as the rest of the left declined in one way or another. But it did affect the wider milieu in which we operated, adding to the common sense argument that "socialism cannot work". The result was that revolutionary socialists found themselves swimming against the tide...

For about four or five months at the time of the pit closure revolt [in late 1992] there was a real feel of revival of the workers movement and we picked up enormously. But we did not have the weight in the working class to counter the do-nothing approach of the union leadership...and the feeling soon dissipated.

And then the visceral anger within the working class against Thatcherism transmuted into a belief that New Labour was the answer...

All of us older members knew people who dropped out in that period. They felt that transitory successes for the party could not overcome a more general feeling that we were banging our heads against a brick wall and would never break through."

Another leading SWP CC member, Alex Callinicos, wrote that the years from 1975 to 2000 "encompassed the most decisive defeats that the British workers' movement suffered during the twentieth century" and that the 1990s "after a series of big, though unconnected mobilisations in 1990-4, was remarkably lacking in serious struggles." [13] In an editorial in the Spring 2010 issue of the SWP's journal *International Socialism* they write:

"...the present economic crisis struck at a time when bourgeois democracy in the advanced capitalist states had enjoyed several decades of relative stability after the upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, the geographical scope of liberal democracy has been hugely extended - to Southern Europe in the late 1970s and 1980s, to Central and Eastern Europe, South Africa and Latin America in the 1990s, and to South Korea and Taiwan in the 2000s. Moreover, the terrain of bourgeois politics has narrowed with the rise of social liberalism - the acceptance of neoliberalism by the leading parties of social democracy. Of course, all is very far from well with bourgeois democracy - political convergence at the top, the erosion of living standards and the welfare state, and the corrosive influence of money on official politics have encouraged widespread popular disenchantment. Nevertheless, the crisis hit relatively robust structures of capitalist rule that allowed little space for the articulation of alternatives to neoliberalism, let alone to capitalism altogether." [14]

At last the SWP seemed to be facing up to reality. A series of organisational measures began to be implemented that re-established some of the basic routines and structures of the party and by all accounts membership morale has improved, a number of new student members have been recruited and some older members seem to have been drawn back into activity. With the departure of the grouping around John Rees and Lindsey German the SWP shed some of its most movementist and liquidationist elements. While all of this is undoubtedly a step forward, there has been as yet no serious attempt by the SWP CC to evaluate why for such a prolonged period they made a serious misassessment of the political situation or to come to grips with the opportunist errors the false perspective laid the basis for. Without a thorough accounting and a drawing of the lessons from these mistakes little is clarified for the future. There can be no confidence that similar mistakes won't be made. And such pragmatic shifting does nothing to re-establish a tradition of open, honest, democratic debate in the SWP, which is vital for clarifying perspectives.

After the 1995 split

In Australia the ISO leadership claimed after the 1995 split that with the expulsion of the "sectarians" and "pessimists" the ISO would go forward rapidly. It didn't happen. Over the next few years plenty of people signed membership cards but the ISO did not grow. Indeed Socialist Alternative, with at best 70 members at the time of the split - less than a third of the size of the ISO - had within seven years overtaken the ISO. At every conference the ISO leadership seized on anecdotal evidence of a few strikes to show that industrial activity was on the rise. There was constant talk of crisis. In December 1998 they wrote: "The economic collapse that began in Asia in 1997 has become a crisis of world capitalism." [15] But as with their other predictions of imminent crisis, it never happened. Every little campaign was "an opportunity to transform the group". [16] The slogan for the 1999 conference was: "Politics for the crisis - Moving Off The Margins" - as

though it was conceivable that a tiny group like the ISO could move off the margins in the space of a few short years. [17]

It was difficult to work out the ISO's membership because the criteria for what it meant to be a member – level of activity, meeting attendance, paper sales and so on – were downgraded significantly compared to the early 1990s. Nevertheless the overall pattern was one of slow decline. This was reflected in a decline in the number of active members, a fall in meeting attendance, a further erosion of the ISO campus presence and a decline in paper sales. By late 1998 the leadership acknowledged that membership had fallen to 208 from 234 a year earlier.[18] The leadership responded to this situation by denying for some years that any decline had occurred, blaming the members for failing to seize the opportunities, promising massive gains if only members would break with “sectarianism” and importing round after round of get-rich-quick schemes from London. The fads from London included the Action Program which supposedly would win the ISO mass influence by the use of transitional demands, suburban branches[19] for “sinking roots in the working class”, [20] paper drops to members and supporters using detailed area maps, branch plans to turn each branch into a “combat unit”, [21] and doorknocking suburban streets. Most of these schemes were soon unceremoniously abandoned to be replaced with the next fad from London without any honest accounting of why they failed.

A consistent theme was blaming the members for the problems. The members, according to the leadership, had not broken with sectarianism and would still not accept that there were all these opportunities. The leadership repeatedly called “to not stop half-way”: “we have to extend the measures taken over the last 12 months to turn the group more thoroughly outwards”. [22] “At times the group had appeared on the verge of breaking out...only to have fallen back again. In truth we have changed the practice of the group over the past year, but only half-way.” [23] It never seemed to cross the leadership's mind that their inability to convince members “not to stop half-way” reflected the fact that the approach they were arguing for was out of kilter with reality, both in terms of the capabilities of the ISO and of the overall political environment.

Because the ISO never re-evaluated what was wrong with their approach during all these years, they were poorly placed to take advantage of the major opportunity that did open up with the emergence of the anti-capitalist movement at the beginning of the new millennium. Indeed, the ISO's inability to take advantage of the improved political climate brought on a severe internal crisis.

Seattle, S11 - responding to the anti-capitalist movement

The Seattle protest of late 1999 had a dramatic impact. A layer of new people were inspired and began to identify as “anti-capitalists”. The S11 protest in Melbourne in 2000 consolidated this trend. A number of student activists moved sharply left away from identity politics. There was an important radicalisation of Queer activists. The anti-capitalist movement was a decisive test. The ISO had been proclaiming what fantastic opportunities there were to grow for years. Now a radicalising milieu had emerged, but the ISO's overblown perspective meant they were unable to relate to it successfully. Their failure to orient correctly to the anti-capitalist movement provoked a serious crisis in their ranks. S11 raised the hopes of ISO members but they were soon shattered. S11 was the last throw of the dice for many members. When the ISO failed to make the hoped-for gains, they drifted into inactivity or adopted an oppositional stance. In the aftermath of S11 most socialist groups grew. During 2000 and early 2001 the ISO national student caucus expanded from about 30 to about 70.[24] However the ISO's exaggeration of the scale of radicalisation and the hyped-up, depoliticised atmosphere in the group made it hard to hold new people. The “Just Do It!” [25] approach was not conducive to winning recruits to socialist politics. The ISO National Committee imposed grand

demands on a fragile group:

"The biggest shift for the ISO is to become a group that leads within the movement. We must lead in campaigns inside and connected with the anti-capitalist movement and also lead and cohere the movement in its own right... Our aim is to link together all the various anti-capitalist milieus and unite them with the wider mood for change amongst workers."[26]

This vastly exaggerated the political climate in the wake of Seattle. A new radical audience had opened up, but it was not underpinned by a revival of working-class struggle, which meant that the radicalisation was confined to a limited section of society and was likely to be short-lived. But as well, even a revolutionary party with thousands of members would be flat-out playing the leading role in the movement proposed by the ISO leadership, let alone a group of at best a couple of hundred. No wonder new members were soon disoriented and drifted away. The ISO massively overhyped their gains from S11, claiming they recruited 308 members in Melbourne. In October 2000 the ISO claimed 11 branches in Melbourne, six in Sydney, four in Brisbane, two in Canberra plus Adelaide and Perth.[27] Yet in the next breath the leadership conceded that Socialist Worker sales had declined to 422 an issue. Despite the supposed influx of members, "the number of members sales averages 93".[28] Unsurprisingly by mid-2001 all the suburban and student branches had disappeared. By the time of the July 2002 National Union of Students (NUS) Education Conference, according to ISO organiser Jess Whyte, only three students were prepared to identify as ISO members.[29]

Part of the reason for the failure to integrate recruits and hold existing members was the constant organisational changes: suburban branches, then student branches, then fractions, then Marxist Forums – none of which were successful. On campus they developed grand plans for setting up Global Action clubs with thousands of members. It was a predictable and demoralising failure. An even more important reason for the ISO's inability to integrate recruits was their accommodation to movementist ideas and to reformist and autonomist currents within the student and anti-capitalist movements. The accommodation to autonomist ideas took various forms. One element of it was the downplaying of politics. An exaggerated stress on activity, rather than arguing Marxist ideas, meant that the ISO was poorly placed to win to Marxism students influenced by autonomism. These students were not empty vessels with no political ideas in their heads. They were not about to spontaneously adopt Marxist ideas – they had to be argued for. The ISO's failure to politically educate their new recruits meant that they were not won away from the ideas that dominated the student left – a softness on the student bureaucracy combined with ultra-left posturing, movementism and anarchism.

What made the situation worse was the overstatement of the level of socialist consciousness within the anti-capitalist and student movements. This was summed up in the formula of "90 per cent agreement, 10 per cent disagreement" with other activists. As though Marxists had anything approaching 90 per cent agreement with currents such as the anarchist Autonomous Web of Liberation, Friends of the Earth, the Christian anti-debt group Jubilee, pacifist groups or prominent figures such as Naomi Klein. The "90 per cent agreement" formula became a pressure on the ISO to downplay socialist politics and adapt to the predominant reformist/autonomist politics of those they were working alongside. Given that the other forces in the movement were a considerable distance from socialist politics, the only way that socialists could create the illusion of 90 per cent agreement with them was by fudging their socialist ideas. The accommodation to autonomism was not just an Australian problem. As the SWP admitted, many groups in the IST "threw themselves so deep into the anti-capitalist movement that they came close to liquidating themselves".[30] The German group Linksruck aped the Black Bloc anarchists. On their way to the Prague anti-capitalist protest, Linksruck members were involved in anarchist-style attacks on McDonald's stores. Unsurprisingly, an autonomist current emerged within Linksruck and eventually split away.

The ISO's accommodation to autonomism stored up problems. Because they did not win new members to a Leninist approach for building a revolutionary organisation, the ISO laid the basis for a semi-anarchist internal opposition. By mid-2001 many student members were disillusioned by the direction of the ISO. However, rather than just rejecting the ISO's incorrect perspective, some members influenced by autonomism and alienated by the ISO's bureaucratic, undemocratic internal life, came to view the project of building a socialist organisation as sectarian and to reject the idea of revolutionary leadership. With the emergence of this semi-anarchist liquidationist current, the chickens had come home to roost for the ISO leadership.

It wasn't just the accommodation to anarchism that became a problem. There were also examples of accommodation to reformist forces. The ISO recruited student union officials and NUS bureaucrats on an opportunist basis. These student officials were influenced by a bureaucratic, top-down approach to politics and by autonomism. There is no contradiction here, as anarchist ideas are commonly associated with elitist and bureaucratic politics. Some of these student bureaucrats did little to identify publicly as ISO members and were allowed to simply function as bureaucrats. Indeed, some of them seem to have been recruited on an explicit understanding that they did not have to sell Socialist Worker. Socialist Alternative is not opposed to recruiting student officials (and we have recruited some) or standing for positions in NUS, but it needs to be on a principled basis. Student union officers have to be won to revolutionary politics, be subject to the discipline of the organisation and publicly identify as socialists – selling Socialist Alternative magazine and so on.

The huge gap between rhetoric and reality was bound to influence the ISO's practice. The leadership promised radical, mass movements again and again plus rapid growth. This increasingly led to the practice of declaring small, even tiny demos and events as exciting and important. So a protest of fewer than a dozen people was said to have "put the Liberals on the run" at the beginning of the campaign around refugees in 2001. And to prove they could recruit, they were under enormous pressure to sign people up on any basis (as with the student bureaucrats) or pretend that lists of hundreds from events like S11, that were only really lists of potential sympathisers, were membership lists. The same logic underpinned the 90 per cent/10 per cent formula – to prove there were all these radicalising people you had to downplay Marxist politics to minimise your differences with other activists. This then fed into the scare talk about "sectarianism" that had been the stock and trade of the ISO since the early 1990s and fuelled the idea that selling a socialist paper, arguing for socialist ways to build a campaign, and recruiting activists were sectarian "raiding" – the classic red-baiting phrase of reformists.

The United Front

To make a revolution, socialists have to win the leadership of the majority of workers. The united front strategy was elaborated by Lenin and Trotsky as a method by which revolutionary parties could achieve this objective by winning workers away from the leaders of reformist parties and unions. The basic conception was that a revolutionary party should propose to both the leaders and members of reformist organisations joint struggle around concrete demands in defence of living standards and democratic rights. If the reformist leaders agreed to participate in such united activity there was a greater chance of these struggles being successful and in the course of struggle revolutionaries would have an opportunity to demonstrate to the supporters of the reformist organisations the superiority of revolutionary politics in practice.

The united front is not a trick. Revolutionaries are committed to winning the demands they campaign around. But neither is the united front about unity for the sake of unity. It is a key means of undermining the hold of reformism. In the course of struggle around the demands of the united

front, the reformist leaders, flowing from their approach of compromising with capitalism, are bound to be half-hearted and undermine the campaign if it starts to challenge the powers-that-be. This opens up space for revolutionaries to split the base of the reformist parties and unions from their pro-capitalist leaders. However, for revolutionaries to have a chance of pulling the mass of workers behind them, it is vital that while participating in the united front, they should not dissolve into it. The revolutionary party has to maintain its separate propaganda and profile within the united front so that it is a pole of attraction to leftward-moving workers. This approach is summed up by Trotsky's slogan: "March separately! Strike together!" If the revolutionaries do not maintain an independent presence within the united front, they will end up accommodating to the reformists. Then rather than the united front drawing workers to revolutionary ideas, the reformists will benefit.

Lenin and Trotsky were clear that a united front would only be meaningful when revolutionaries had sizeable forces of their own. When socialist organisations are small they are incapable of playing a serious role in mass struggle and the reformists would have little interest in reaching agreements with them. If the reformists did reach such an agreement, it would not benefit the revolutionaries. They would be in no position to offer an alternative leadership when the reformists betrayed the struggle. All "united fronts" between small socialist groups and mass reformist organisations would achieve is to give a left cover to the reformists. Trotsky was clear that it was when "the Communist Party already constitutes a big, organised, political force...wherever the party embraces organizationally, let us say, one-fourth, one-third, or even a larger proportion of the organised proletarian vanguard, it is confronted with the question of the united front in all its acuteness." [31]

The ISO moved away from this understanding of the united front. Inflating their own importance, the ISO believed they could establish united fronts when they have no following in the working class. They equated campaigns such as Refugee Action Collective (RAC) with united fronts. At one level this was just hype. But the hype led to a misunderstanding of how socialists should operate in campaigns. Ironically it led to both sectarian and opportunist errors. Campaign collectives, like RAC, are organising bodies of activists; they are not united fronts of reformists who can mobilise tens of thousands of workers and a revolutionary party that can organise sizeable worker support. The reformists in campaign groups usually don't have the ability to mobilise significant numbers of workers. They are often not even reformists but small-l liberals, environmentalists, Christians, anarchists or whatever. There is no way campaign groups can be used by revolutionaries to demonstrate the superiority of their politics to sizeable bodies of workers and win them away from the reformists.

Instead, socialists need a modest approach to campaign groups. We need to work in a comradely fashion to build the campaign, arguing a way forward for the campaign. In this limited sense elements of a united front approach do apply to socialists' work in campaign groups. However the ISO's grandiose approach of considering every campaign a "united front" led them to posture in a sectarian fashion. They came to campaign meetings (such as S11 in Melbourne) with lists of overblown proposals that the campaign had no hope of being able to mobilise enough people to carry out and then denounced people who sensibly argued for the campaign to prioritise one or two things as "pessimists" who didn't understand "the anger" out there amongst the mass of workers.

The ISO's misunderstanding of the united front pushed its members away from revolutionary politics in a movementist direction. The ISO made building "united fronts" the centre of politics. Instead of operating in campaigns as socialists, the ISO often came across simply as campaign activists, indistinguishable from activists that didn't have socialist politics. The ISO's overestimation of the degree of radicalisation (e.g. that people in campaigns were already 90 per cent in agreement with socialist ideas) led to a downplaying of the need to make political arguments to win people to socialism. The ISO argued they would recruit by being the most dynamic builders of the united front. Indeed, in the absence of reformist forces with real social weight, the ISO tended to adopt an

approach of substituting for the reformists. At the start of 2001 the ISO leadership argued not to do ISO stalls on campus and instead do Global Action stalls. On some campuses the open selling of Socialist Worker effectively ceased. Some members took this further, arguing, according to ISO organiser Tom Barnes, that ISO stalls were “sectarian”: “To sum up, this is the comrades’ approach to the united front: don’t argue the way forward because this is ‘sectarian’. Instead, we must act only if the left agrees.”[32] This tailing behind other forces on the left became the hallmark of ISO student work.

Socialist Alliance

Hot on the heels of their disastrous intervention in the anti-capitalist movement the ISO linked up with the Castroite Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) in 2001 to initiate Socialist Alliance. The ISO’s confusion over the united front was reflected in their description of Socialist Alliance as a united front – as though an electoral alliance of various socialist groups had anything in common with the traditional Marxist understanding of a united front.[33] The ISO argued that a mass radicalisation around the anti-capitalist movement, combined with the growing disillusionment of traditional Labor voters, was opening up a sizeable space for a socialist electoral alternative. But Socialist Alliance proved abortive. It did not attract a significant layer of activists outside the existing socialist groups and its votes in elections were minuscule. The ISO’s analysis was faulty on a series of counts. Firstly, they massively overstated the number of activists thrown up by the anti-capitalist movement. Secondly, they falsely assumed that a socialist electoral project would appeal to the small layer of activists (usually influenced by autonomism) that had emerged. Thirdly, they overstated the extent to which disillusioned working-class Labor voters would be attracted to a socialist electoral alternative that had no base in the unions or working-class communities. Fourthly, the rise of the Greens soaked up the protest vote against Labor, not Socialist Alliance.

Having failed to pull in significant new forces, Socialist Alliance degenerated into a sectarian battle ground between the DSP, the ISO and other tiny socialist groups. The ISO lost out badly. By the time they officially withdrew from Socialist Alliance in early 2007 they had suffered another split and been reduced to a tiny rump.

The final demise of the ISO

In the course of 2001 confused but bitter divisions opened up within the ISO National Executive (NE). ISO National News of 10 August 2001 announced another wild lurch – the launching of a weekly Socialist Worker despite reporting derisory sales of the then fortnightly paper (sales for issue 462 were a mere 129 copies). In the lead-up to their February 2002 conference a debate broke out on a scale not seen since the expulsion of Socialist Alternative. The NE majority’s perspectives document was largely a reiteration of themes it had argued for years, but it set the scene for a showdown with the opposition. A “turn to the working class” was enthusiastically argued for by Socialist Worker editor Tad Tietze and more half-heartedly by the NE majority as the latest panacea.[34] Opposition documents made many valid criticisms. However, hardly any of the critics (except Tom O’Lincoln) challenged the leadership’s analysis of the political period or had any understanding that the key to the ISO’s problems was its unwillingness to face up to the fact that as a small group it was dependent on its ideas for recruitment. Because most of the critics did not get to the root of the problems – indeed they often accepted the leadership’s super-optimistic analysis or were influenced by workerist and movementist ideas – they were unable to provide a coherent alternative.

Just prior to the conference, the SWP intervened with a letter calling on the leadership to calm the “intense and highly polarised debate”.[35] The SWP intervention ensured that the leadership did not expel the oppositionists but it also ensured that the conference clarified nothing. No perspective was adopted. A split had merely been delayed. The leadership seemed to have run out of ideas and the SWP, on whom they had been dependent for so long, offered no decisive direction. Some oppositionists drifted further towards movementist and autonomist ideas. Few ISO members did the work vital to build a socialist organisation – ISO stalls, trying to recruit contacts, attending ISO meetings, selling papers and so on. Yet despite all this the leadership continued to set a series of grandiose tasks for the group:

“Establish social forums that unite activists from the anti-capitalist movement with people disaffected with Labor... Establish campus activist hubs that unite activists on campuses... Rebuild the anti-war movement... Build the refugee rights movement... Building Socialist Alliance fits the task of relating to the crisis in social democracy... Build Marxism 2002...a major opportunity to pull the threads of the campaigns together...”[36]

Maybe, if the ISO had 5,000 members and the political climate had been a lot more favourable, they could have pulled off one or two of these initiatives. But given the state of the ISO, these grandiose proposals only added to the disorientation and prepared the ground for a further split in May 2003, when a group of members resigned to form Solidarity. In the six months after the ISO’s December 2002 conference almost 50 members resigned either individually or in groups, leaving the ISO on a generous estimate with an active membership of less than 100. This sharp decline occurred, as the 21 former members pointed out in their resignation letter, during a period that “saw the emergence of a massive international anti-war movement and the largest anti-war demonstrations in Australia’s history. That the ISO failed to grow out of this movement, has no greater political coherence, no larger established periphery and if anything smaller meetings is a serious indictment of the current practice of the group.”[37] But as Socialist Alternative wrote at the time, the group that split from the ISO to form Solidarity “offers next to nothing in the way of explanation for the degeneration of the ISO and provides no clear alternative road forward for building a revolutionary organisation in Australia.”[38] The remnants of the ISO languished for a few more years and then in February 2008 effectively dissolved themselves into Solidarity.

An alternative perspective

Socialist Alternative takes no satisfaction from the degeneration and eventual demise of the ISO. The loss from political activity of literally hundreds of socialists was a setback for all of us who want to overthrow capitalism. Socialist Alternative started out much smaller than the ISO when we were expelled in 1995 and many of our comrades were demoralised by the bitter split that had taken place. By a combination of tenacity and a level-headed assessment of political realities we were able to survive the 1990s. Far from being “conservative sectarians”, when the political climate shifted with the emergence of first the anti-capitalist movement and then the anti-war movement, we responded enthusiastically. We were able to make gains by a combination of arguing principled socialist politics and involving ourselves wholeheartedly in the campaigns that emerged.

A credible perspective for building a revolutionary organisation today needs to be based on two key elements – a realistic analysis of the political environment and a hard-headed assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of our own forces. After a long period of setbacks for the left and the working-class movement internationally, the early 2000s saw some elements of a revival. This trend was most marked in Latin America and parts of Europe, with the waves of strikes in Italy, France and Greece and the emergence of the anti-capitalist movement. This was followed up in 2003 by the

largest international protests against imperialist war in history. These developments were reflected in Australia in the S11 demonstration in 2000 and the massive anti-war demonstrations in 2003. These events briefly opened up a new audience for socialists. However, the last decade has been far from onwards and upwards. No ongoing anti-war movement was maintained. The trade union leadership refused to mount concerted resistance during the Howard years and then fell into line behind Rudd. The level of strike action remains at the lowest level for over a century. Student unions and the student left have declined sharply. There is no sizeable socialist alternative to the ALP, and the Greens, to whom many on the left looked as a radical alternative, have moved significantly to the right over the last couple of years. Furthermore the global financial crisis which has shaken up the political situation in the US and much of Europe has so far only had a limited impact in Australia. The combination of all these factors means that while for much of the last 20 years there has been widespread disillusionment and bitterness amongst workers about the relentless attacks by the capitalist class, there is also a deep cynicism about politics and a lack of confidence in the ability of the mass of workers and students to effectively resist these attacks.

This means that socialist groups can't recruit and hold new members on the basis of hyped-up agitational rhetoric. New recruits, if they are to remain actively involved and be confident to recruit other people, have to be politically convinced through serious discussion, political branch meetings and reading groups, combined with well thought-out interventions into whatever struggles and debates that arise. To cope during this challenging political period, socialists need to maintain a regular pattern of activity which takes up all the issues of the day and at the same time remain alert to intervene whenever a new radicalising struggle blows up. To achieve this they need to develop an understanding amongst their members that when important opportunities for growth open up they have to move decisively to seize them. Socialists have to always be looking for new struggles and new people. But socialists also have to raise their theoretical level so that they are capable of both responding to whatever political debates arise and of adapting to the ups and downs and quiet patches of political life without becoming demoralised.

Finally, for a socialist group of a few hundred to operate successfully it needs to understand that it is nowhere near to being a mass party that can lead any significant layer of workers in struggle. Instead it has to be clear that it is reliant on its ideas to influence relatively small numbers of people. That does not mean that it should be passive or inward-looking or content to have a comfortable, closed circle of supporters. Far from it. But it is only on the basis of a realistic assessment of our current forces that we can hope to break out to wider layers and build on firm foundations.

It is precisely this approach that has enabled Socialist Alternative to grow, both quantitatively and qualitatively, over the last decade. With over 100 student activists we have by far the largest base of any left group on the university campuses and at the same time we have gradually built up a layer of members who are activists in a range of trade unions including the Australian Education Union, the Australian Services Union, the Public Sector Union, the Construction Union, the National Union of Workers, the Electricians Union and the National Tertiary Education Union. Socialist Alternative is now the dominant force to the left of the Labor factions in NUS and for a number of years we have been elected to the position of either NUS National Education or Queer Officer and have won elections to student union office bearer positions on numerous campuses, including Queensland University of Technology, Queensland University, Swinburne, La Trobe, Monash, Melbourne University, RMIT, University of Western Sydney, Sydney University and Charles Sturt. Socialist Alternative was the only socialist group that was able to relate effectively to the movements against the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and build significantly out of them. We were easily the biggest left presence at the protests against Israel's wars on Lebanon and Gaza and are currently playing a leading role in the campaign for same sex-marriage rights, Students For Palestine and the campaign for refugee rights. At the same time we have managed to build up our annual Marxism conference to

be the largest forum for discussion, debate and political education on the Australian left.

So after 17 years of debate with the IST and the ISO it has been clearly shown in practice that those of us who went on to form and build Socialist Alternative were right to resist the IST's overblown assessment of the Australian (and international) political situation and instead develop an analysis based on a concrete and hard-headed assessment of political realities – no matter how unpalatable. We were even more right to resist the fantasy that in the space of a few short years a couple of hundred socialists could by an act of will and organisational quick fixes decisively break out and achieve a mass working-class following. With the ISO defunct, the challenge facing us in Socialist Alternative is to take the next step forward and begin to lay the basis for a serious current in the working class based on the politics of international socialism.

Mick Armstrong

Notes

[1] ISO Conference Bulletin No 1, December 1993.

[2] "The return of the working class", ISO Internal Bulletin No 1, March 1993.

[3] ISO Conference Bulletin No 3, 24 January 1994.

[4] ISO Conference Bulletin No 2, January 1994.

[5] ISO Conference Bulletin No 3, 24 January 1994.

[6] Alex Callinicos, "Crisis and Class Struggle in Europe Today", International Socialism Journal [hereafter ISJ] 63, London, 1994, p.39.

[7] Tony Cliff, A World to win. Life of a revolutionary, Bookmarks, London, 2000, p.198.

[8] Socialist Review, London, June 2002, p.12.

[9] ISO National Executive, "Towards a perspective for building the ISO Today", 27 June 2002.

[10] For an analysis of the Respect debacle see "The Respect fiasco in Britain", Socialist Alternative, December 2007 available at www.sa.org.au/in-depth/169-documents/1529-the-respect-fiasco-in-britain.

[11] SWP pre-conference Bulletin No 1, October 2009, p.7.

[12] Chris Harman, "Some Comments on Neil Davidson's document" available at <http://www.socialistunity.com/?p=3180>.

[13] Alex Callinicos, "What's going on? A reply to John Rees", Special pre-conference Bulletin, December 2008.

[14] "The radical left and the crisis", ISJ 126, Spring 2010, London, p.6.

[15] 1999 ISO Conference Bulletin No 1, 9 December 1998.

[16] ISO Conference Bulletin No 3, 31 January 1996.

[17] 1999 ISO Conference Bulletin No 1, 9 December 1998.

- [18] 1999 ISO Conference Bulletin No 1, 9 December 1998.
- [19] The ISO set up 21 branches in NSW alone after the demonstrations against the French nuclear tests in the Pacific in 1995, most of which soon collapsed. At another stage there were 11 suburban branches in Melbourne.
- [20] ISO Conference Bulletin No 3, 31 January 1996.
- [21] ISO Conference Bulletin, 23 November 1999, p.17.
- [22] 1999 ISO Conference Bulletin No 1, December 1998.
- [23] ISO Conference 2001 Discussion Bulletin No 1, p.3.
- [24] ISO Conference 2002 Discussion Bulletin No 1.
- [25] University of Queensland Branch Report, ISO Conference Bulletin No 2, p.22.
- [26] "Taking a lead on Anti-Capitalism", ISO National Committee, 3 August 2001.
- [27] Socialist Worker, 6 October 2000.
- [28] ISO Conference 2001, Bulletin No 2, p.9.
- [29] Jess Whyte, Letter of resignation from ISO. Undated.
- [30] Chris Bambery and Alex Callinicos for the Central Committee of the Socialist Workers Party (Britain), 15 January 2002.
- [31] International Socialist Review No 17, April-May 2001, Chicago, p.59.
- [32] Tom Barnes, "War, Anti-capitalism and the working class: tasks for the ISO and problems we face", ISO Conference 2002, Bulletin No 3, p.44.
- [33] An analysis the ISO took from the SWP which refers to every electoral formation it involves itself in - the latest being The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition - as a united front. "The radical left and the crisis", ISJ 126, London 2010, p.17.
- [34] "For a turn to the working class", Tad Tietze, ISO Conference 2002 Discussion Bulletin, No 1, p.22.
- [35] Chris Bambery and Alex Callinicos, 2002.
- [36] ISO National Executive, "Towards A Perspective for Building the ISO Today", 27 June 2002.
- [37] Letter of resignation from the International Socialist Organisation (Australia), 25 May 2003.
- [38] Socialist Alternative National Executive, "The further fragmentation of the ISO", June 2003

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<http://marxistleftreview.org/index.php/spring-2010/77-the-origins-of-socialist-alternative-summing-up-the-debate5>