

To Socialist Alternative

Dear Comrades,

We write to express our concern about the very many examples of Socialist Alternative members' abusive behaviour towards the rest of the Left in 2014 SRC elections at the University of Sydney. This ugly conduct, detailed below, has no place on the Left, and is completely counter-posed to building the broad, healthy, and fighting Left that is desperately needed.

Unfortunately, the backroom election deal of Socialist Alternative (SA), the thuggish behaviour in campaigns and the subsequent coverage of 2014 student elections in the Red flag article, "Right on the offensive on campus" (6 Oct 2014), indicate that the abusive behaviour that has characterised Socialist Alternative at Sydney University may not be an aberration, but symptomatic of a broader destructive political methodology.

### **Opportunist Deals**

The immediate background to the abusive behaviour is SA's desire to prioritise the securing of SRC positions over a principled stance to student union elections. This year, SA chose to support ALP member Amy Knox (variously endorsed by Labor left, Labor right, and the Australian Union for Jewish Students) for SRC President over Grassroots left candidate Kyol Blakeney, in exchange for the SRC Education Officer positions in 2015.

This echoes similar moves (and failures) around the country, including SA working with Labor right for an activities focused ticket at the University of Melbourne in exchange for Education Officer.

The politics of back room deals and building unprincipled electoral alliances are shameful enough for a group that considers itself to be on the Left. But to resort to physically attacking and intimidating fellow activists during the Sydney University election period demonstrated a particularly worrying trend arising amongst SA members.

### **Resorting to Intimidation**

SA members' shameful assaults on Left activists involved elbowing, stomping and shouldering them during the election campaign. In some cases, people were even pushed down stairs.

This was just the most extreme end of a concerted, widely witnessed and well documented campaign to demoralise and intimidate other Left activists. The abuse was such that SA members were officially banned from campaigning near the City Rd footbridge stairs by the Electoral Officer Paulene Graham.

One student reports, "Socialist Alternative members running and physically barging into you...". Another reports an altercation in which "...she [SA member] repeatedly shoved me down the stairs... [when challenged] she replied, "Who the fuck even are you? You're not a real activist".

Subsequent instances include SA member Omar Hassan telling a Left activist to "Get a job" followed by proud proclamations that SA's job was "destroying your faction" (i.e. the Grassroots left).

The fact that Omar, the President of the USyd club and leading member of the national organisation, in many cases led the bullying, would indicate that the physical assaults are a deliberate tactic, sanctioned by the SA leadership.

## **Making a Virtue of a Betrayal**

After the failure of the unprincipled and abusive political approach detailed above, it is perhaps more concerning that the Red Flag article, “Right on the offensive on campus” (6 Oct 2014), could present such a deluded account that attempts to justify your disgraceful behaviour by smearing Grassroots.

The article grossly misrepresents Grassroots (GR) as a right-wing, anti-activist, force of conservatism on campus, apparently in league with the likes of Christopher Pyne.

The article claims that one of Grassroots’ main election promises was to “revert the role of the SRC to a service provider and to do away with “alienating” activism and protests”. GR supposedly ran a “Cold War style”, “anti-socialist” election campaign that “dovetailed with a national campaign by right wing forces, both on and off the campuses, to hinder our [SA’s] activity.” It is complete fiction.

GR President Kyol is a well-known Aboriginal rights activist, who campaigned explicitly as “Left Wing” and scores of Grassroots members are dedicated and well known activists who can be found at every blockade, march and picket in Sydney. The Grassroots SRC campaign platform also openly declared its opposition to the federal budget, to homophobia, to environmental devastation and to racism, amongst other issues. Even Jen Light, the current Labor SRC President argued that Labor’s election loss was due a shift to the *left* under Abbott, and told the SMH, "At a university like Sydney University, people want to be radical.”

Kyol is also a public supporter of the Boycott Divestment Sanctions (BDS) campaign, while the Labor presidential candidate Amy K received endorsement from a Zionist organisation for her critical stance on BDS. That SA members would slander Grassroots as “right wing” while supporting the Labor candidate is shameful.

We implore your organisation to abandon such unprincipled behaviour. The joint Labor/SA ticket at the University of Sydney lost, like at many other campuses, because you consciously chose to align yourselves with the more right-wing elements in the election in the vain hope you could secure office bearer positions.

## **Destructive Impact on Campaigns**

The previously mentioned Red Flag article claims that what made big student demonstrations possible early in 2014 was that “30 members of Socialist Alternative held positions” in student unions and that SA members played a “disproportionate role” in the education campaign at the University of Sydney because they held officer bearer positions in the SRC.

The sneering dismissiveness of the rest of the Left demonstrated in the article is tragically symptomatic of your thuggish behaviour in the election and in the EAG itself and betrays an overly bureaucratic understanding of activism.

Rather than “leading” the fight against Abbott and Pyne, SA members’ obsession with bureaucratic control and the prioritisation of their organisation over the education campaign has resulted in the EAG organisational spaces being bereft of any productive, democratic activism.

A clear example of this sectarian and anti-democratic approach can be seen in statements from Omar Hassan, "lol, fuck them, we're doing a rally at usyd either way" in the event that SA were to lose a vote in the Education Action Network meeting. This sectarianism has ultimately caused the latest NDA hosted at Sydney University to dwindle down to a left gathering of no more than 50 people.

We hope you will reconsider your actions and your divisive political approach as it has had a negative effect on the Left at Sydney University and done much to discredit your organization. We need a vibrant, inclusive left to respond to the political challenges of budget cuts, Islamophobia and war.

We hope that with some honest assessment, our comrades in SA will be able to correct the destructive path you have embraced. The proof of that will be whether or not you are able constructively contribute to the campaigns, and to building the Left, in the months ahead.

Signed,

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