

# TIME TO ACT

# For a new left party

**F**or some time, many socialists and left activists have been discussing the pressing need for a new party to help renew the purpose, vision and effectiveness of the left and socialist movements. Although different views have been expressed about the policies and organisation of a new party, there is also widespread recognition that the left must overcome such problems if it is to become a major force in Australian politics. This recognition provides a rare historical opportunity.

The sponsors of this statement believe that now is the time to seize the opportunity by establishing a definite process which can bring together and build on earlier initiatives, leading, through a series of agreed steps, to the formation of a new party in 1989.

The first step is to determine whether those who want a new party can find sufficient common agreement on its basic aims, policies, theoretical approach and organisation to ensure that it is viable and effective.

This statement outlines a set of basic points which provide a starting point for all those who agree with them to come together to:

- **DRAFT** more developed statements of the party's aims, policies, strategies and organisation;
- **PUBLICISE** the proposal for a new party in an attractive form;
- **LAUNCH** the new party in 1989; and
- **PARTICIPATE** in campaigns and take their own initiatives around urgent economic and social issues.

We believe that this statement represents a principled basis on which to develop a program, policies and constitution for a new party. We are seeking broad and representative support and sponsorship from individuals, organisations and constituencies who support the project and the statement.

# DO YOU AGREE WITH THESE POINTS FOR A

## 1. A changing world

**Tremendous changes are currently transforming** Australia and the world in social, economic, political, cultural and personal life.

New forms of technology and production have changed the face of all industries, the nature of work and the lives and organisation of workers in them. Participation in the workforce has dramatically changed. In particular, most women now have two roles — paid work and domestic work. Changes in wage determination and in the welfare state have altered the ways of distributing — and struggling around — living standards. Social life has become more diverse. Many people are at last recognising that the environment can no longer stand the stresses that our productive and other social activities have placed on it. The growing internationalisation of capital, of information, of production and of markets has created new international institutions of power, undermining the independence of nation states.

The changes taking place can lead in various directions. For example, technology can serve narrow self-interests of profit and wealth while misusing resources and polluting the environment. Or it can be shaped to serve human and social needs, while preserving resources and the ecology for future generations. Technological change can result in increased democracy in the workplace, the economy and social life, and the development of people as people. Alternatively, if private corporations and entrenched bureaucracies control the agenda, then rule by division of people, and by fear and fostered prejudice, will be further entrenched. The outcome will be determined by social and political action.

**The Australian left must respond creatively** to the challenge of a changed and changing world. This requires constructive practical initiatives, as well as a renewal of strategies, policies and visions for the future.

The need for change has been widely recognised on the left. This has been expressed through discussions about policy, strategy and organisation and through activities involving a wide range of left activists, notably the Broad Left Conference in 1986. While supporting these broad-left initiatives, supporters of this statement also believe that a new party of Australian socialism is an essential part of this process.

## 2. A new response

**Australia remains a society of inequalities and exploitation** based on class, gender, race and other divisions. This is despite our great natural wealth, developed economy and human resources, and despite important gains and reforms achieved by decades of people's movements and political activity. These inequalities of wealth and power result from social structures, ideas and practices, including the private ownership of the major natural, financial and industrial resources. These must be transformed by popular democratic action if the aims of a fair and just society are to be realised.

**Until the sovereignty of the Aboriginal people** is realised, and self-determination and land rights become accepted in the law and culture of all Australians, the legacy of white colonisation will remain to prevent true nationhood and equality for all Australians.

**In Australia as in many other countries**, the present period of restructuring of global capitalism has seen a significant rightward shift of the main political parties and a general resurgence of conservative and reactionary ideas. This has been expressed in the emergence of the New Right and of hardline conservatism in the Liberal and National parties.

The New Right campaigns on a program of labour-market deregulation, small government, privatisation, traditional 'family' values, destruction of trade union organisation and rolling back the social gains of progressive movements. It propagates individual freedoms and rights in a manner designed to destroy collective freedoms and rights of an industrial, legal and community character.

**The Hawke/Keating Labor Government** has also shifted markedly to the right. There have been some important reforms carried out by Labor in government and these must be built on by mass campaigns while building support for more far-reaching policies.

## 3. An unequal society

## 4. A land stolen by force

## 5. The shift to the right

## 6. The role of the ALP

**T I M E T O A C T**

# NEW PARTY OF AUSTRALIAN SOCIALISM?

## 7. Why a new party?

At the same time, the Government has abandoned many of Labor's stated policies, breached some of its own policies and agreements, and pushed through changes to the ALP Platform to suit its own agenda. This is seen especially in its blind faith in the free market, in financial deregulation and in the uncontrolled opening up of Australia's economy to the pressures of international capital. It is also seen in a concerted push for privatisation and a progressive weakening of public responsibility. These shifts have significantly eroded Labor's support base.

**Neither the ALP left nor the left outside the ALP** has been able to prevent or reverse these trends so far. The ALP left is an important part of the broad progressive movement and has won some significant achievements and concessions. However, the dominant Labor Right's control over the direction of ALP policy will remain for the foreseeable future, given the prevailing social consciousness. This control would in fact be strengthened by the absence of strong progressive movements and left political organisations outside the ALP. Socialist, left and progressive movements therefore should not rely on the ALP to represent their interests. Nor should they be mere pressure groups on the ALP. They need their own political expressions active outside parliament as well as in the electoral process.

Movements, coalitions and alliances all play a vital role. However, a new party is essential to help link all the concerns and demands of various movements into a coherent strategy for social change towards socialism and, by so doing, to revitalise the theory and practice of socialism. A party is also essential to help change prevailing ideas and to promote alternative policies and a strategy for social change among the Australian people.

## 8. What we stand for

**A new party of the left** should stand for social justice, human rights and liberation, the expansion of democracy, a diverse, multicultural Australia, a non-violent and nuclear-free world, and the goal of a democratic socialist society which would implement these aims to the fullest extent possible. The party would act to end all systems of exploitation between people and the destructive exploitation of nature.

The party's work would be guided by these basic aims, and it would give them specific content through its policies and actions. As a step towards such policies and actions, the party would base itself on the following fundamental commitments:

**Social justice:** Equality of rights and opportunities, and equitable distribution of income and wealth, for all Australians. Among other things, this would require removing inequalities based on class, gender, sexual preference, age, race or nationality, together with the recognition of different needs and different circumstances.

**Democracy:** The expansion and transformation of Australian democracy, not only in politics and civil rights, but in all areas of economic, social and cultural life. For example, the concentrated ownership and control of Australia's wealth and resources by relatively few large corporations is one fundamental obstacle to achieving social justice and democracy.

**An environmentally sustainable society:** As 'the earth strikes back' after decades of environmental abuse, we must work to correct the dangerous imbalance between human society and the natural environment. This will mean, among other things, preserving the planet's diverse ecology and species, developing an environmentally sustainable society, and building livable urban environments.

**Aboriginal self-determination:** Recognition of the pre-existing sovereign rights of Aboriginal Australians, the legitimacy of their claims to self-determination and land rights, and a firm commitment to the economic and social changes required to implement them.

**A foreign policy for independence and peace:** An independent, nuclear-free and non-aligned foreign and defence policy embodying commitment to international economic and political relations based on mutual respect, equity and the settling of disputes non-violently. The party would support complete nuclear

disarmament, a massive global reduction in conventional arms and solidarity with the struggles of all people for economic and social justice and for national independence.

**Women's rights:** Ending the social and economic oppression and inequalities of women and the sexual division of labour in the private and public spheres by changing social structures and attitudes which foster male domination, violence and sexual exploitation. Society should ensure the economic independence of women and that they are not disadvantaged through child bearing.

**Economic and industry development:** Economic policy should serve social and ecological objectives, rather than the profits and power of a few or the pursuit of economic growth for its own sake. Economic and industry-development policies should give priority to achieving national economic and cultural independence within an interdependent world economy; jobs for all; environmentally responsible and socially useful investment policies; and the growth and development of self-management in industry and the workplace, closely associated with increased levels of skills and education.

**The new party would work in broad alliances** with all those who agree with these aims and would support all movements and demands consistent with them. The party would also promote and work for more far-reaching changes towards the goal of a democratic socialism based on the above aims and on self-management within the framework of democratically-determined social goals and plans.

However, fundamental social change cannot be expected to occur easily or soon in Australia and will certainly not occur simply by proclaiming our principles. The new party would therefore seek to play an active and effective role in day-to-day politics, not by downplaying its principles, but by linking them to everyday issues and realities.

It would also assist the further development of a dynamic and progressive culture which challenges many prevailing values and practices.

The party will value all gains and reforms which are in accord with its basic aims. It will develop and act for realistic reform programs which address immediate needs and significantly redress inequalities of wealth, power and opportunity. The party will see such reforms as also laying the basis for the more far-reaching changes which the party would promote.

**Fundamental social change can only occur** through the democratic will and action of the Australian people, acting through movements and organisations in all spheres of life, and through representative institutions including local councils and parliaments.

Consistent with its basic aims, the party's strategy would focus on promoting intervention by workers and other popular forces in all the issues of the day,

## 9. A realistic strategy for radical social change

## 10. Broad alliances and popular intervention to extend democracy towards socialism

# 'TIME TO ACT' -- WE NEED YOUR HELP

**This statement has been sponsored by 130 left activists from around Australia. All are active in radical and progressive causes in some way or other. Many are well known, locally or nationally, through their work and positions in progressive movements. They reflect a range of different concerns and views, but all agree on the need for a new party based on this statement.**

**The support and encouragement we've had makes it clear that the time is right to launch a new party of the left.**

**The building of the type of party called for here needs your involvement and the support of hundreds more. Your help is needed to form groups all over the country and to ensure that the policies and structures of the party reflect the needs and aspirations of left and progressive movements.**

**We want to get on with it.**

**We'd like you to join us.**

**PLEASE FILL IN AND RETURN THE FORM (OVER) IF YOU'D LIKE TO TAKE PART IN THIS VITAL PROJECT.**

# 11.

## 'One world' and international solidarity

with the aim of expanding working people's control over their own lives in the workplace, community and home, and in national political affairs. Democratic control of production, services and the economy is crucial and will depend on the extent to which workers' and people's organisations develop the confidence and experience to challenge the undemocratic control and prerogatives of capital, management and bureaucratic elites. The longer-term goal of a democratic socialist society will require a fundamental and democratic transformation of the State, of economic and social institutions, and of relations between people. It will also require ongoing struggle to overcome oppression and division based on gender, race and age.

**We live in an increasingly interdependent world.** Many of the contradictions, threats and challenges of our time are now expressed globally as well as in nation states and regions. The problems of nuclear holocaust, ecological catastrophe and unequal trade can only be tackled by concerted international action.

The growth of an interdependent world economy has allowed multinational corporations to wield enormous power over nation states and to manipulate events to suit themselves. Global communications and media networks are also playing their part to create a 'global village' of human civilization.

These changes reinforce the international perspectives of socialism and the need for international solidarity and joint action by all left and progressive forces. The new party will maintain links with parties, organisations and movements around the world who share aims in common with us, on the basis of mutual respect and non-interference in each other's internal affairs.

**The new party would be firmly committed** to the renewal of socialist theory, culture and practice currently taking place worldwide.

This renewal is essential if the socialist movement is to overcome its present difficulties and resume the momentum and growth of earlier periods. Socialist renewal has several major aspects, including:

- analysis of the actual developments of capitalism which, despite continuing contradictions and injustices, has proved a resilient and adaptable system, partly in response to the pressures of workers' and progressive movements;
- the need for a broad vision of the tasks of socialism, in line with the goals outlined above and the aspirations of progressive movements; and to develop workable strategies towards socialist goals;
- the need to develop a more feasible and acceptable socialist economic and social system than the centralised and bureaucratic model currently being critically reassessed and changed as, for example, in the *perestroika* process;

# 12.

## A renewal of socialism



### **If you agree "It's time to act" for a new party, SEND THIS FORM TO THE CONTACT ADDRESS NEAREST YOU**

Name .....

Address .....

..... Post Code.....

Phone ..... (H) ..... (W)

**If you wish, fill in any of the following details:**

Occupation .....

Current industry/work .....

Involvement in progressive movements/campaigns, etc. ....

.....

.....

.....

Areas of policy interest .....

**I agree with the general aims and principles of the *Time to act* statement as the basis for forming a new party. I wish to participate in and/or be kept informed about the process of developing and launching the new party.**

Signed ..... Date .....

I enclose a donation of \$..... towards the costs of publicising and organising the process.

Member of political party/group:  YES  NO

I can assist or would like to be involved in the following ways.....

Which one?.....

Skills that might assist the process:.....

## 13. Theory and practice

## 14. A democratic, active and effective party

- analysing the experiences, successes and failures of socialist movements here and elsewhere.

**A new party would draw** from the long tradition of socialist, radical, and progressive thought and be based on an open marxist theory and analysis. The contributions of feminist, anti-racist, environmental and other left perspectives are also essential for developing a comprehensive socialist theory and practice.

**As far as possible, the party will be involved** in all matters of concern to its members and supporters, consistent with its principles and policies. It will encourage activity by its members and organisations according to their interests and possibilities.

The party will assist members to improve their political involvement and effectiveness through a range of educational, discussion and skills-development activities.

The party will also develop strategies to maximise the involvement of women, migrants and other groups who have often been inadequately represented in traditional political activity. The experiences of party members in their political work will inform party policy-making and will be an important practical test of the party's direction.

Party structures and democratic processes would encourage participation by all members in policy development and decision making. At the same time, the party must be able to act effectively and respond to changing circumstances. This means that members should respect majority decisions and, where possible, work actively to carry them out. It also means that clear responsibilities and processes should be established for making decisions about the party's ongoing work in various arenas.

However, the need for unity of purpose should not be at the expense of stifling party members' rights to criticise party decisions, promote alternative proposals within the party, and take part in open debate over theoretical and policy issues within the framework of the party's general perspectives.

### This statement has been sponsored by:

**PERTH:** Martha Ansara, Keith Bostock, Florence Edwards, Sylvia Edwards, Bill Ethell, John Gandini, Claire Howell, Jan Jermalinski, Keith Peckham. **ADELAIDE:** Jocelyn Auer, Deborah Baldassi, Bentley Carslake, Stephen Darley, Jim Douglas, Leonie Ebert, Marco Fedi, Anthea Howard, Ian Hunt, Lee Marling, Jim Mitchell, Paul Noack, Barbara Pocock, Peter Robin, Jane Tassie, John Wishart. **MELBOURNE:** Marian Aveling, Susan Barclay, Lynda Blundell, Laurie Carmichael, Frank Cherry, Ruth Crow, Mick Doleman, Rob Durbridge, Kiri Evans, Ralph Gibson, Angela Sdrinas, Carmel Shute, Theo Sidiropoulos, Mike Sutherland, Jil Toovey, Rob Watts. **LA TROBE VALLEY:** Rose Read, John Ryan. **TASMANIA:** Max Bound, Ros Harvey, Dennis Wild. **CANBERRA:** Peter Berry, Eric Fry, Kate Lundy, Helen Topliss. **NSW ILLAWARRA:** Malcolm Bailey, John Bourne, Monica Chalmers, Lynette Dwyer, Mike Dwyer, Claire Heaton, Frank Jackson, Dave Martin, Paul Matters, Rod Patterson, Steve Quinn, Beverley Symons, Patrick Vasquez, Marie Wallace, Reg Wilding. **BATHURST:** Jenny Barry, Jane Dixon, Steve Ross, Colin Sindall, Charlie Squibb. **KATOOMBA/LITHGOW:** Vern Moffitt, Reg Taylor. **NSW COUNTRY:** Geoff Lawler, Elizabeth O'Hara. **SYDNEY:** Brian Aarons, Allan Ashbolt, Charles Bowers, Christine Brunt, Jack Cambourn, Peter Cantrill, Denis Fitzgerald, Larry Hand, Beverley Hewett, Robin Hopwood, Betty Hounslow, Sonia Laverty, Carol Matthews, Peter McClelland, Audrey McDonald, Daren McDonald, Tom McDonald, Brian McGahen, Stacey Miers, Jack Munday, Warwick Neilley, Cristina Pastore, Wally Pritchard, Patricia Randal, Tanya Ritchie, Noeline Rudland, Stan Sharkey, David Simpson, Joyce Stevens, Frank Stilwell, Jenepher Surbey, Don Syme, Margaret Thornton, Ted Wheelwright, Juana Zepeda, Jorge Zepeda, Tom Zubrycki. **NEWCASTLE:** Peter Barrack, Bill Bodenham, Jeff Bradford, Barbara Curthoys, Nola Fenech, Greg Giles, Barry Johnson, Steve Kelly, Susan McDonald, Terry Mawdsley, Hilary Purves. **BRISBANE:** Lorraine Brazel, Linda Carroli, Louise Comino, Pat Hovey, Bob Leach, Linda Martin, Peter Meggitt, Judith Stevens, Geoffrey Wills. **IPSWICH:** Andrew Vickers.

### Regional Contacts:

You can contact new party organising groups through the following:

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