

Australian Pabloites prepare NPA-style dissolution

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The Democratic Socialist Perspective will dissolve itself into the ailing Socialist Alliance (SA) electoral front at its national congress in January 2010, a development that the DSP's national secretary Peter Boyle says will be modelled closely on France's New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA), launched in February 2009. Like the NPA, the DSP is jettisoning any association with revolutionary Marxism, making a pitch for allies in official bourgeois politics, above all the Greens.

According to Boyle, his organisation's merger will not constitute a simple "rebadging" of the DSP. Rather, the Australian Pabloite organisation, founded in 1970, is to be formally liquidated.

"We've been held back for far too long already," declared Boyle at the start of a report to the DSP's national committee in June. The DSP's regroupment efforts, he explained, had been constrained by the "hesitations" of former Socialist Alliance affiliates, and by "a destructive factional split in the DSP", "that is behind us now". "[I]t is time we moved forward to build the Socialist Alliance as a bigger, more influential and more working class based socialist organisation, than any currently in existence in Australia."

It is highly significant that Boyle's report cited the NPA as his organisation's regroupment model. The NPA was founded February 6th 2009 by leaders of the Revolutionary Communist League in France after they dissolved their own party at a congress just one day before.

Boyle quoted extensively from the LCR's Francois Sabado, who argued last November for his own party's dissolution in openly liquidationist terms: "We do not want a second LCR or an enlarged or broader LCR. To make a success of the gamble we are taking, this party [the NPA] must represent a new political reality... It must be a party that is broader than the LCR. A party which does not incorporate the entire history of Trotskyism and which has the ambition of making possible a new revolutionary synthesis... A pluralist party which brings together a whole series of anti-capitalist currents."

Sabado's attack on Trotskyism—the political tendency synonymous with uncompromising internationalism and the struggle for the political independence of the working class from reformism, Stalinism and centrism—revealed the essential class character of the NPA as a petty-bourgeois tendency firmly oriented to the parties and institutions of the bourgeoisie. Similarly, Socialist Alliance, declared Boyle, would no longer be "chronically plagued" by "'Marxist' identity politics". He attacked "various little sects" for "assert[ing] their Marxist identity", saying the DSP's merger would mean the end of a "ridiculous I'm-more-Marxist-than-you pissing competition".

According to Boyle, old debates about whether Socialist Alliance should have a "reformist" or "revolutionary" program would be resolved—à la the

NPA—by jettisoning even nominal adherence to Marxism. "Is it necessary to organise a separate revolutionary current in the Socialist Alliance today?" he asked rhetorically. "Speaking of the LCR in the NPA, comrade Sabado says the answer is 'No'".

The purpose of these proscriptions is clear. Within months of its founding, the NPA has formed a "unitary" coalition with the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF) and the Left Party (led by Socialist Party MP Jean Luc Melançon) with plans to jointly contest forthcoming regional elections. The PCF, a pillar of French capitalism for more than seven decades, has joined successive bourgeois coalition governments with the Socialist Party.

Bourgeois politics

Last May the DSP suffered a major split, removing around one third of its membership and most of the party's longstanding leaders. The split was provoked by the demise of Socialist Alliance, an electoral coalition established in 2001 by several petty-bourgeois tendencies including the DSP and International Socialist Organisation. Socialist Alliance made a virtue of its appeal to a large and disparate coterie of alliance members based on the suppression of political and ideological differences. As Boyle recounted in his June report, "We agreed not to make the historical and theoretical differences between the groups a barrier to working together around what we agreed on."

Held together solely on the basis of an anti-Howard government platform, Socialist Alliance formed the "left" flank of efforts to re-elect a Labor government. After this outcome was secured in November 2007, the DSP—SA's last remaining "affiliate"—duly imploded.

The DSP's expelled "Leninist Party Faction" led by John Percy and Allen Myers warned that Socialist Alliance was functioning too openly as a "left social democratic, bourgeois reformist" organisation and that consequently the DSP was being discredited: "If we continue on the majority's course, we will be useless for any future expansion and regroupment efforts." The LPF, now called the Revolutionary Socialist Party (RSP), had no principled differences with the DSP, it merely regarded the SA as a squeezed lemon. Pointing to the collapse of SA's membership—"down from 2000 at its peak in 2002-03 to a bit over 400 now" and to the loss of "prominent trade union activists [i.e., trade union bureaucrats] such as Chris Cain and Craig Johnston"—the RSP continues to argue that SA cannot serve as an effective vehicle for the type of opportunist regroupment that will be required in the months and years

ahead.

However, the DSP majority has drawn its own conclusions from SA's protracted crisis. Boyle's national committee report foreshadowed a "broader" and more "inclusive" Socialist Alliance that reaches beyond the traditional "left". Foremost among the "broad range of collaborators" envisaged by the DSP is the Greens, which the DSP has been attempting to woo for the best part of two decades.

The Greens have a capitalist program, operate as political defenders of the Rudd Labor government and of Australian imperialist operations from East Timor to Afghanistan. Yet the DSP has signalled its willingness to provide them with the required "left-wing" and even "socialist" credentials. In this, they serve a critical political function for the bourgeoisie.

Last year Socialist Alliance hailed the election of Greens candidate Adele Carles in the seat of Fremantle as "a breakthrough for the entire progressive movement and a testament to the Greens' consistent efforts to raise a progressive alternative to Labor." Last October, after the ACT Greens formed a coalition government with the ALP, pledging fiscal responsibility and the delivery of a balanced budget, Socialist Alliance sent a letter to the Greens ACT branch, pledging its organisational and political backing.

The purpose of the DSP's attack on revolutionary program is to clear the way for its entry into official bourgeois politics. "We know real revolutionary vanguard status cannot be proclaimed simply by dint of adherence to a revolutionary program," Boyle declared in his national committee report. In fact, it is precisely adherence to a revolutionary program that has determined the political character of every genuinely Marxist organisation since the publication of the Communist Manifesto in 1848.

According to Boyle, "real 'Leninist' party building includes a permanent search for ways to unite with real emerging political vanguards in the working class, including (but more than) the regroupment with left groups and individuals". On the contrary, the Leninist conception of party building consists of the permanent struggle by the revolutionary party to demarcate the independent standpoint of the working class politically, theoretically and organisationally from the bourgeoisie and its petty-bourgeois defenders.

"Everything we have done in our tendency over the last four decades has been done to make small initial steps in this process". This was one of the few factually correct statements contained in Boyle's report.

Established in 1970 as the Socialist Workers League (later renamed the Socialist Workers Party), the DSP was for 14 years the Australian affiliate of the Pabloite United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USEC) and claimed adherence to Trotskyism. In reality, the Australian Pabloites supported the revisionist theories of USEC's leaders Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel. Those who founded the SWL opposed the construction of independent revolutionary leadership in the working class, denouncing this as "sectarian". They were attracted to the Pabloites' glorification of Castroism and petty-bourgeois guerrillaism, and by their theories that mass pressure from below could force the existing bureaucratic leaderships of the working class—including the Australian Labor Party and the Stalinist communist parties—to "project a revolutionary orientation".

In 1985 the SWP denounced Trotskyism, split from USEC, and openly embraced the Stalinist two-stage theory of revolution, which holds that in countries oppressed by imperialism the national bourgeoisie can play a revolutionary role. Trotsky had insisted that only the working class could wage a consistent struggle against imperialism. The task of overthrowing

imperialist domination and carrying through the unresolved bourgeois democratic reforms fell to the working class and its struggle for political power, as an integral part of the fight for world socialist revolution. Percy's attack on permanent revolution provided the necessary calling card for a series of unsavoury political alliances with bourgeois nationalist movements in Latin America and Asia and with sections of the Stalinist Communist Party of Australia.

Political context

The DSP's merger is part of an international regroupment among the parties of the petty-bourgeois ex-left under conditions of the most far-reaching breakdown of global capitalism since the 1930s.

In an article that appeared last November in the Pabloite United Secretariat's *International Viewpoint* magazine, Sabado pointed to what he described as "changes that have taken place in the radical left in recent months." "[T]he deepening of the crisis of the capitalist system and the social-liberal evolution of social democracy, confirm there is a space 'to the left of the reformist left'".

The Pabloite organisations are acutely conscious of the political vacuum that has opened up. A new period of class struggle is emerging under conditions in which the old social-democratic, trade union and Stalinist organisations stand exposed. Having enforced more than two decades of pro-market attacks, the French Communist Party and Socialist Party have lost their base of support. The NPA seeks to fill the resulting vacuum in defence of the existing official establishment.

The bourgeoisie intervened directly in the NPA's formation. The French media has accorded NPA frontman and former LCR presidential candidate Olivier Besancenot celebrity status. They have carefully crafted the NPA's image, presenting it as a force for popular change in the face of growing struggles by the French working class. The French bourgeoisie calculates it can use the NPA to divert and block these struggles and prevent the growth of a genuine socialist movement.

It cannot be said that the DSP—or its discredited Socialist Alliance project—has met with such "success" in Australia. Both organisations have suffered a precipitous collapse of membership and repeated factional bloodletting in recent years. Yet Boyle and the DSP leadership are conscious that political winds are shifting. They hope that from their ranks a Besancenot may be plucked, and that with the emergence of mass opposition to the Rudd Labor government, a similar opening may be found in official political circles.

In his own report to the DSP national committee, Boyle spoke of a severe "triple crisis of capitalism". "First the climate change crisis, which threatens human survival on a global level; second, the worst global economic crisis since the Great Depression (though it is hitting Australia later than other countries); and third the widespread crisis of legitimacy of capitalist neo-liberalism". Boyle made no analysis as to the source of this "triple crisis" but he hastened to reject any struggle for socialism: "Any left group that is content to just shout from the sidelines 'capitalism has failed, embrace socialism!' is doomed to become ever more isolated and sectarian." Boyle's pathetic caricature of Marxism makes clear the DSP's position: notwithstanding the most serious "triple crisis of capitalism" in history, the fight for socialist revolution is "doomed".

“We are moving into a period of significant political upheaval,” explained Boyle “and we need to have the strongest political vehicle that we can assemble.” The “political vehicle” that the DSP is assembling is an unstable petty-bourgeois coalition with sections of the Labor Party, trade union bureaucracy and the Greens. The DSP’s impending dissolution, its open renunciation of Marxism and its embrace of bourgeois politics is a vindication of the decades-long struggle waged by the International Committee of the Fourth International and its Australian section, the Socialist Equality Party, against Pabloite opportunism.



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