

Socialist Alliance policy

<http://www.socialist-alliance.org>



Youth

Young people occupy a unique position in society. They face both formal and informal discrimination, as well as disproportionate social and political exclusion. They are often the first to be hit by, and are more affected by, homelessness and the housing crisis, violence, poverty, social exclusion, attacks on workers and students and other social problems.

But young people have the power to play a radicalising and explosive role in the struggle for a better world and it is from them that the socialist movement and the Socialist Alliance will be strengthened and renewed.

As such, the Socialist Alliance seeks to involve young people in the struggle for socialism.

To this end, the Socialist Alliance recognises the importance of the socialist youth organisation and affiliate Resistance. As an independent youth organisation, Resistance plays a specific and complimentary role in the struggle for socialism. It enables young people to work together and lead struggles around their own demands wherever these struggles take place, to acquire political and organisational responsibility and experience and learn their own lessons.

As such, the Socialist Alliance is committed to working with and building Resistance among young people by:

- Discussing youth work on the Socialist Alliance leadership bodies;
- Collaborating with Resistance to work out initiatives, priorities and how we use our combined resources;
- Supporting and working closely with Resistance members to assist in their political development; and
- Encouraging Resistance members to join and get active in the Socialist Alliance

Young people should have access to the decisions that affect their lives. They should have opportunities to reach their full potential, free from exploitation, oppression and discrimination.

To this end, the Socialist Alliance also stands for:

1) A political voice for young people

No political process can be truly democratic without the direct input of young people.

The Socialist Alliance calls for the lowering of the voting age to 16, to give greater formal equality to young people. At 16, young people are considered old enough to pay taxes. However, they are currently excluded from having any say in how that money is spent.

To fully combat the formal and informal discrimination faced by young people however, the self-organisation and mobilisation of young people themselves is needed. To this end, the Socialist Alliance stands for the provision of resources to democratically-controlled organisations of young people for young people. These resources should be provided directly to young people and organisations they control, and used to whatever ends these organisations see fit.

2) Affordable and accessible housing

Housing is a basic human right. Yet, the housing crisis affects thousands of people across Australia, and young people are among the worst affected. Indeed, youth homelessness is a major

problem in Australia, with 44,500 young people going homeless every night, according to a 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics report.

But all people should have access to affordable and accessible housing. And addressing the problem of youth homelessness and the housing crisis among the young will have to be part of a broader solution to housing. The Socialist Alliance housing policy can be found at <http://www.socialist-alliance.org/page.php?page=208>.

3) Mental wellbeing for young people

About 75% of diagnosed mental health problems occur before the age of 25. These mental health problems, including depression, are a major factor in a decision to commit suicide.

The Socialist Alliance calls for adequate funding for mental health services. This should include establishing specific multi-disciplinary youth mental health teams that cover the 16-24 year age range, to work across community youth and adult mental health services and across inpatient and community services. This already exists in some areas, for example EPPIC and Orygen youth health services in Melbourne. They are very effective at providing early intervention, assisting young people with mental health issues and preventing the development of chronic mental illness.

Without dedicated teams like this, early intervention does not happen in a generalised way. Mental health services are busy dealing with people who are very unwell, and turn young people away if they don't present as too serious. Young people who do end up being admitted into hospital are often discharged with no follow-up care. A dedicated team could intervene before or during their hospital admission, and provide education and support during and after their discharge. Young people would be able to manage better and have a better chance of avoiding further admissions and episodes and of avoiding suicide and self-harm. Peer support workers and group programs also need to be funded and supported to this end.

The Socialist Alliance also stands for well-funded social awareness campaigns to raise understanding of the common mental illnesses, to break down stigma, improve understanding of what to watch out for and where to seek help, and assist with integrating people with mental illnesses into workplaces and communities.

4) A universal, free, quality secular education system

The vast majority of people engaged in formal education are young people. Thus, it is young people who will largely be affected by the dismantling of the public education system. And it is young people who will be the main actor in struggle for change in education, for a universal, free, quality secular education system, open to all those who need and want it.

The Socialist Alliance education policy can be found at <http://www.socialist-alliance.org/page.php?page=195>.

5) Public space for young people

Inadequate public space infrastructure and activities exist to support the needs of young people. They are largely limited to activities and use of spaces that they must pay for or where they are the targets of aggressive corporate marketing. Even cultural events are used by corporations to positively project their brands at young people. The limited communal spaces that can be used by young people are, in large part, commercial spaces that encourage consumerism and commodity art or co-opt youth culture for commercial gain.

In order to create and participate in their own independent youth culture, public spaces, infrastructure and activities must be created, funded and made available to young people. This must happen independently to corporate sponsorship, be initiated and controlled democratically by young people and their organisations.

6) A safe climate future

Climate change will have a huge impact on the lives of all young people. They will face the consequences from decisions not of their making. However, young people are playing a leading role in the struggle for a safe climate future, helping to build a mass environment movement strong enough to win.

The full list of the Socialist Alliance's environment and climate change policies can be found at <http://www.socialist-alliance.org/page.php?page=190>

7) An end to violence and discrimination

Young people experience greater alienation as a result of discrimination and social and political exclusion. This discrimination does not only affect young people as young people, but among them. Discrimination that already exists in society is more intense among the young who are under increased pressure to "fit in". Overt racism, sexism and homophobia, for example, are heightened among young people. Violence – that takes many different forms - is a direct product of this and it is the vulnerable who suffer most, such as young women, LGBTI people, and non-Anglo people.

The social pressures experienced by LGBTI youth hold particular significance reflected in the terrible statistic that LGTBI youth are 14 times more likely to commit suicide than non-LGBTI youth. One third of homeless youth are queer, and face life on the streets due to family prejudices and structures promoted by capitalism.

The Socialist Alliance recognises the heightened suffering and distress experienced by youth coming to terms with not being heterosexual in a capitalist system, that holds heterosexuality as the only natural and normal sexual preference.

We reject "law and order" solutions to youth violence. Jailing or punishing young people won't stop or reduce violence because it doesn't deal with the reasons it exists. We support educational campaigns but recognise that they aren't, by themselves, enough. So too, must governments stop applying discriminatory policies that lay the social basis for violence and discrimination to occur. So all discriminatory laws must be repealed whether they apply to women, migrants, Aborigines, queers, international students etc.

Ultimately, however, the broader problem of alienation under capitalism, caused by the separation of people from the decisions that affect their lives and the socially owned products of their work, must be addressed, to put an end to violence and discrimination.

8) Newstart and Youth Allowance

Newstart and Youth Allowance benefits should be raised to a living wage, well above the poverty line. Age should not affect payments and the age of independence test should be lowered to 16 years, the age at which a young person can move away from home. No young person in Australia should have to live in poverty while they are looking for work or while they are studying.

This policy must be combined with government creation of satisfying jobs at a living wage, available for all.

9) Satisfying jobs at a living wage

Youth unemployment and underemployment is a structural problem of the capitalist economy. The percentage of unemployed young people sits at about double the rate of the rest of the population at any given time. Those young people who can find work are largely employed in casual, insecure and low-paid jobs. These factors ensure that young people are less likely to look for work and have a major impact on young people's standard of living and ability to afford basic necessities.

That young workers are currently disadvantaged comes, in part, from the lack of organisation in their workplaces. The Socialist Alliance believes that unions should pay special attention to

involving young people in their unions and also play a role in ensuring that wage justice is achieved for young people.

If the market is unable to provide young people with work and a living wage, the government should step in and provide socially useful jobs for young people on full pay. For example, the biggest problem we face is the climate crisis. The government should implement a sustainability plan that creates jobs to meet the needs of communities and makes an inhabitable planet possible.

The Socialist Alliance also stands for an end to youth pay rates. Youth wages mean that young people get paid less for doing the same of work.

The employment situation of youth is amongst the worst of any social group in capitalist society. Coupled with discriminatory and unliveable youth wages is the systematic violation of the employment rights of young people. This includes abuse and intimidation, provision of false information about work rights, unpaid training and overtime, illegal pay rates and docking of pay, and unsafe working environments. Working life of young people should be a national scandal.

Young people need stronger union representation, particularly in the retail and services sectors. The Socialist Alliance fights for the rights of youth at work, active and strong support for young workers by unions, the independent organisation of youth to defend and extend their rights, and strong sanctions on employers who violate young people's rights at work.

10) Scrap 'Earn or Learn'

In May 2009, PM Kevin Rudd announced "earn or learn", a policy that all Australian youth under the age of 21 would be denied Youth Allowance and unemployment benefits unless they are in school or in full-time vocational training.

The Socialist Alliance rejects this as discriminatory and recognises that this threat of poverty will not benefit young people. Rather, it is a strategy that blames young people for the failings of the capitalist economy, and trains them for a role in the system that is not of their choosing. "Earn or learn" restricts the freedom of young people to make decisions for themselves. It places thousands of disadvantaged youth in an untenable position.

It also fails to tackle the fundamental causes of youth unemployment: homelessness and domestic problems, alienation, discrimination, mental illness, lack of rights at work and lack of jobs.