

# **DRAFT CONSTITUTION (WORKING DOCUMENT 4)**

## **1) NAME.**

The name of the party shall be (TO BE DECIDED BUT THIS DRAFT WILL PROVISIONALLY CALL IT LEFT UNITY LU)

## **2) AIMS**

The aims of Left Unity are:

- a) to unite the diverse strands of radical and socialist politics in the UK including worker's organisations and trade unions; ordinary people, grass root organisations and co-operatives rooted in our neighbourhoods and communities; individuals and communities facing poverty, discrimination and social oppression because of gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality, unemployment or under-employment; environmental and green campaigners; campaigners for freedom and democracy; all those who seek to authentically voice and represent the interests of working people
- b) to win a mandate to govern and introduce radical and fundamental changes in British society based on our belief in the benefits of cooperation and community ownership instead of the chaotic competition of capitalism; universal human rights, internationalism and peace; social, political and economic equality for all in the fullest sense, without which true democracy and mutual respect cannot flourish; a democratically planned economy that is environmentally sustainable, within which all enterprises, whether privately owned, cooperatives or under public ownership operate in ways that promote the needs of the people and wider society; an inclusive welfare state which meets the needs of all and within which each contributes according to their ability
- c) to above all promote grass roots democracy in the understanding that fundamental and radical change can only come with the support and active involvement of the majority of people and that the way we organise today is a pointer to the kind of society we want to see in the future

## **3) MEMBERSHIP**

- a) Membership of Left Unity shall be open to any individual who:
  - i. commits to further the aims of Left Unity
  - ii. abides by the democratically decided rules and constitution of Left Unity
  - iii. pay any subscription agreed by the Annual Conference
  - iv. support Left Unity candidates in elections

b) There shall be two types of membership of LU

- i. Full membership as set out in 3 (a)
- ii. Associate membership for 'Friends of LU' open to individuals and trade union members who in return for a one-off donation, the minimum amount to be set by Annual Conference, shall receive national and local mailings, are invited to attend meetings, have the right to speak at meetings, but shall enjoy no voting rights or be eligible to stand for any elected position.

#### **4. STRUCTURE AND GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

a) The structure of Left Unity is based on the following principles:

- i. Decision making flows from the grass-roots upwards according to easily understood and democratic processes
- ii. National committees and individuals holders of responsible positions exist to carry out the wishes of the membership
- iii. Transparency - all minutes and reports of meetings and decisions of regional and national committees or structures will be published and made available to members, unless there are confidentiality issues relating to individual complaints regarding conduct of members
- iv. Safeguards are put in place to ensure that individual post-holders and national committees are regularly elected, representative, accountable and are not able to concentrate power in a few hands. Left Unity will therefore operate a system of rotation of internal positions, with terms of office for any national elected position limited to a maximum of 3 years, with a minimum 2 year break from office, with the right to again seek office thereafter. Ideally this principle will apply to all local and regional elected positions but regions and branches will have the right to alter these arrangements according to their circumstances
- v. A right of recall will apply to all positions at all levels
- vi. Meetings to be chaired in rotation
- vii. At least 50% of those elected to national committees will be women
- viii. If groups of members wish to organise sections or caucuses based on identity or as a political platform to better develop policies, ideas and campaigns that reflect their needs or ideas they have the right to do so. They can then put this in the form of proposals and motions. But the members of sections and platforms will have no other special privileges in decision making. The principle of One Member One Vote will consistently apply
- ix. Care will be taken in when deciding the venue of all national meetings that they are geographically convenient and not London-centric
- x. Members are expected to adhere to the principles and guidelines set out in Appendix 1 - Safer Spaces Policy

b) The basic tiers of the decision making and management structure of Left Unity seeks to enact these principles and is set out below:



## **5) INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS**

Individual members will have the following opportunities to participate in decision making in Left Unity:

- a) as a member of a branch that can propose resolutions to regional bodies, National Conference and national committees
- b) through attending, participating in National Conferences
- c) through electing representatives from the branch to regional bodies, elected regional members of National Committees, national individual post-holders and the principal speakers for the party
- d) through standing for election for the above
- e) through participation in on-line forums and consultative exercises in e-democracy organised to involve those who cannot attend National Conferences in person
- f) individuals can join together with like-minded individual members to propose motions to regional and national bodies and nominate individuals for elected individual positions at a national level in Sections and Caucuses

## **6) BRANCHES**

- a) Branches bring together members and supporters of Left Unity, ideally along constituency and ward lines. Decisions to split or merge branches will be made by the groups themselves, subject to approval by the National Council
- b) Individual members will normally be part of the branch based on the geographical area in which they live. In some cases however, an individual member may find it more appropriate to be part of a branch based on where s/he works or studies – but this should be agreed with the branch covering the area where the member lives and that which s/he wishes to join

- c) A branch must contain at least 10 members
- d) Branches will manage their affairs as they see fit, excepting that the conduct of the groups will be democratic and in accordance with the national rules of Left Unity. Basic democratic standards will be expected to apply: meetings to be accessible, all members informed of meetings and agendas circulated in good time, discussions conducted respectfully, group officers to be annually elected and subject to recall
- e) Branches should meet monthly
- f) Branches may elect representatives to regional bodies and nominate candidates for any of the elected national committees
- g) Branches will operate their own accounts and can raise money to fund local activities as they see fit

## **7. SECTIONS AND CAUCUSES**

Members of LU have the right to form and organise in Sections and caucuses if agreed by the National Council (subject to confirmation at the next convenient Annual Conference). Caucuses and sections will reapply for confirmation after 5 years.

### **a) Sections**

- i. Sections can be set up to encourage the self-organisation of party members who suffer from specific discrimination or have distinct interests and to enable them to organise collectively in campaigns against oppression and to take a lead in the party on these issues.
- ii. Sections can also be set up to bring together party members interested in campaigning on a specific issue. Such sections can help to bring together members who are active in campaigns in order to intervene more effectively, co-ordinate activity, promote the party's policies and feed- back experience into the party

### **b) Caucuses**

- i. Members have the right to organise in political caucuses. As a pluralist party, we recognise that a range of political points of view is a healthy source of debate and new ideas.
- ii. All caucuses should be open – their meetings, aims and objectives should be should be available to all other party members. The guiding assumption and principle for the activities and existence of caucuses in LU is that they will not be permanent factions and exist to promote certain specific concepts, ideas or policies
- iii. Caucuses have a right to be heard, to organise meetings, to produce literature, to distribute materials at LU meetings and, in general, to try to influence and/or change party policy, but must not do so in the name of LU or any of its constituent bodies
- iv. Caucuses are not expected, however, to organise public campaigns against the overall aims or policy of the party.

- v. If a member of a caucus stands for any elected position they will declare their membership in the interests of transparency and to promote informed choices

## **8) ENGLISH, REGIONAL, SCOTTISH AND WELSH STRUCTURES**

- a) National committees will be created for Scotland and Wales, comprised of elected representatives of the branches in those nations
- b) In recognition of the different political contexts and to better deal with issues specific to these countries, members in Scotland and Wales have the right to draw up their own constitutional rules and organisational structures that adhere to the principles set out in 4 (a) of the constitution and the Code of Conduct for elected representatives set out in Clause 15, subject to approval by National Conference/National Council
- c) In England, regional committees of representatives from branches will be organised for the following English regions London, South East, North East, North West, Yorkshire and Humber, East Midlands, West Midlands, Eastern , South West. Each local group will be entitled to send two delegates with speaking and voting rights ( one male and one female) and as many observers as wish to come. Expenses of delegates to be met from regional funds, local observers from branch funds.
- d) The role of English regional, Welsh and Scottish committees will be co-ordinating and prioritising campaigning and organisational activities, assisting in the creation and building of branches and encouraging political education.
- e) If 50 individuals from Northern Ireland apply to join LU the NC will bring appropriate proposals for organisational and constitutional changes to Annual Conference
- f) Regional committees of branches will not necessarily be coterminous with the electoral regions for Regional Representatives on the National Council

## **9) NATIONAL CONFERENCES**

- a) The national conferences of Left Unity are the supreme policy making body. No conference is bound by the decisions of a previous conference
- b) There will be at least one National Conference each year. The National Council may call special national conferences if 2/3rds of those present desire
- c) More than one national conference may be called each year in extraordinary circumstances and if 25 % of branches pass a resolution or 25 % of members sign a petition calling for a special conference. In this event the NC will organise it as quickly as practically possible but with a minimum of one months notice
- d) All members can attend and vote at National Conferences on the basis of One Member One Vote (OMOV). However, when Left Unity reaches 2,000 paid members the National Council will draw up proposals to move towards a delegate structure of decision making to be considered by the next scheduled

## Annual Conference

- e) The NC, branches and Regional/Scottish/Welsh committees have the right to propose motions that if passed by the National Conference will become policy.
- f) Individual members of LU will have the right to submit motions, so long as 20 full members have signed their support. NOTE: the figure of a minimum of 20 members will be reviewed and if necessary increased as the national membership increases
- g) National conferences will be organised by the Standing Orders Committee Committee directly elected by the national membership
- h) As OMOV consistently applies, the location of conferences will effect attendance and the Conference Arrangement Committee will seek a venue that is most easily geographically accessible and pooled fairs will apply

## **10) DIRECT DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION, THE INTERNET AND E-CONFERENCES**

- a) Left Unity is committed to using social media and internet forums and voting in order to encourage free debate, respectful discussion and direct decision making within the party. The nationally elected Secretary, Communications and Returning Officers, along with specialist sub-committees of the NC, shall therefore regularly review this area and present a report to Annual Conference, with proposals, on developing the use of IT
- b) As a first step the NC shall organise **E-conferences** on specific single issues or questions when requested by 25% of branches. These shall take place of a forum to be organised by the NC with online debate and binding voting, restricted via password protection to subs-paying LU members
- c) Provision will be made for voting in all elections to be conducted by internet voting, but members may choose to receive postal votes instead
- d) However, LU recognises that many members and supporters may not have the financial resources or wish to participate in this way. All publicity material and membership application forms will ask what is the preferred method of contact – while encouraging people to give us their email addresses if at all possible.

## **11) NATIONAL COMMITTEES WITH SPECIALIST ROLES**

- a) All members of specialist national committees will be nominated by branches and directly elected by the members in national elections
- b) The following national committees of Left Unity with specialist roles will exist:

Complaints Committee, Finance and Audit Committee, Standing Orders Committee. The National Council will form *ad hoc* sub-committees and working groups as it sees fit to deal with specialist areas of work. These will be advertised and members encouraged to get involved and contribute as far as possible and open to participation by the wider membership. All agendas and minutes to be published

- c) The quorum for all national committees will be 55% of the elected member

## 12) **NATIONAL COUNCIL**

- a) Left Unity will be led and organisational/financial issues managed in between national conferences by the National Council (NC)

- b) The composition of the NC will comprise of a mixture of a total of 37 individual representatives elected as representatives on a regional/Scottish/Welsh basis and nationally elected individual post-holders with responsibility for developing policy and representing LU on specific political issues/areas of interest. All members of the NC, irrespective of position and howsoever elected will have equal voting and speaking rights

- c) The term of office for all members of the NC and national spokespeople will be 1 year

- d) Nominations for regional representatives on the NC to be made by branches within that region. Nominations for individual post-holders to be made by branches, regional bodies or by 20 full members, who have signed a nomination form. (NOTE: the figure of a minimum of 20 members will be reviewed and if necessary increased as the national membership increases)

- e) There will 20 regional representatives, elected by full LU members within that electoral region. Regional representation will be broadly proportional to the membership of each electoral region. There will be at least one female representative from each electoral region.

- a.i. London and Eastern (4)
- a.ii. North East and Yorkshire (3)
- a.iii. North West (2)
- a.iv. East Midlands and Humber (2)
- a.v. West Midlands and Cheshire (2)
- a.vi. South England (3)
- a.vii. Wales (2)
- a.viii. Scotland (2)

(NOTE - FIGURE IN BRACKETS APPROXIMATELY REFLECTS PAID SUPPORTERS AT TIME OF DRAFTING)

- f) The following 17 annually elected post-holders with national responsibility will be full members of the NC:
1. Female National Principal speaker
  2. Male national Principal speaker
  3. National secretary (with responsibility for party organisation and minutes)
  4. National Communications (with responsibility for membership and internal communications)
  5. Elections Agent (with responsibility for external elections and with the power of nominating officer)
  6. Returning Officer (with responsibility for internal elections and liaison with the Standing Orders Committee)
  7. National treasurer
- g) Annually elected male and female Policy Principal Speakers with shared responsibility for the following policy remits will be full members of the NC:
- i. Economy
  - ii. Environment and transport
  - iii. Equality
  - iv. Health, education and welfare
  - v. Peace and international affairs
- h) The National Council shall meet at least 8 times a year and 55% of members must be present to form a quorum. Chairing to be rotational.

### **13) NATIONAL ELECTIONS FOR INTERNAL POSITIONS WITHIN LU**

- a. Voting in elections for regional representatives on the NC, individual post-holders and spokes-people on the NC and members of national committees with specialist roles will be conducted using electronic voting systems via the internet, except that all members will have the right to opt out of this system and will instead receive a postal ballot
- b. Only members residing in the relevant region/Scotland/Wales will have the right to vote for regional representatives on the NC. All other positions will be elected in national elections
- c. All candidates must be either nominated by a branch, regional body or 20 members signing a nomination form
- d. Every candidate will write a statement of no more than 500 words saying their branch, which positions in LU they do or have held, their experience and the political principles they would seek to apply if elected. If members of a caucus



they are obliged to say so. These statements will accompany printed ballot papers and in the event of online voting be prominently available. All candidates will be expected to also provide contact details so that members may ask them questions prior to voting. The National Returning Officer (or regional as appropriate) will organise a hustings opportunity, whether on-line or in person.

- e. On the ballot papers for principal speakers there will be a 'Re-Open Nominations option'
- f. There is equal representation of both men and women for all regional representatives and post-holders/spokes people. If no women candidates are nominated, renominations will be opened. If this occurs a second time two male candidates will be elected for that year.

#### **14) ACCOUNTABILITY FOR INTERNAL REPRESENTATIVES**

The following safeguards to ensure transparency and accountability will apply to all members of the NC (and other national bodies):

- a) Any member of Left Unity has the right to observe meetings of any national committee or sub-committee/working group the NC but not speaking or voting rights. The dates and agendas of all meetings will therefore be made available in good time prior to any meetings
- b) All minutes of national committees and working groups will be published within a week
- c) If 25 % of branches or members in a region request the recall any regional representative on the NC or 25% of local groups request the recall a national officer, they will step down and the NC will organise a re-election. The previous incumbent can stand again if he/she so wishes

#### **15) ACCOUNTABILITY AND CONDUCT OF MEMBERS ELECTED TO EXTERNAL POSITIONS**

- a) All Left Unity members elected to external positions on any form of public body (eg, local councillor, Member of Parliament, Member of the European Parliament, holder of an elected trades union position etc) will adhere to the nationally agreed policies, priorities and principles of LU. Failure to abide by these principles and rules , or to engage in any behaviour which brings the Party into disrepute ,will incur suspension pending the deliberations of the Party disciplinary procedure.
- b) Candidates for LU will agree to abide by the following Code of Conduct:
  - i. In cases where an elected position require the post is carried out on a full time basis, Left Unity members will only draw a maximum of the median national wage (plus legitimate expenses) – donating 20% of the surplus to Left Unity and 80% returned to public funds. Where an elected position is a full time job Left Unity members will take on no other paid employment.
  - ii. No Left Unity member will be allowed to continue in any single externally elected position for limited terms as follows:

- MPs and MEPs - 2 terms/maximum of 10 years
- Local councillor, MWA, MSP - 3 terms/maximum 12 years
- iii. After a gap of 1 terms of office members may again seek nomination to stand as a candidate.
- iv. No Left Unity member can stand as an official "Left Unity Candidate" without undergoing the Left Unity selection process at local, regional, or national levels , appropriate to that candidature under Left Unity rules
- v. All Left Unity members serving in elected positions must provide regular report backs at the agreed appropriate, local, regional, or national level, to Left Unity.
- vi. All Left Unity members holding elected positions won as Left Unity candidates are expected to resign their elected position immediately that they either resign from Left Unity or are expelled from left Unity.
- vii. People already in place in elected positions when they apply to join Left Unity will only be allowed to join the Party on the understanding that they will abide by the nationally agreed policies, priorities , tactics and principles, and Code Of Conduct, of Left Unity

## **16) FINANCE**

a) The following general principles regarding finance will apply:

- i. All monies received by or on behalf of Left Unity shall be applied to further the aim of Left Unity and for no other purpose.
- ii. Any bank accounts opened for Left Unity shall be in the name of the Left Unity
- iii. Any cheques issued shall be signed by the Treasurer and other nominated members of the NCC
- iv. Accounts to be independently audited every year and overseen by the Finance and Audit Committee
- v. Left Unity may pay reasonable out of pocket expenses including travel, childcare and meal costs to members or members of national committees. The payments must be recorded and paid on presentation of receipts that justify the expense
- vi. The National Treasurer, NCC and Finance and Audit Committee have responsibility for overseeing finance and will present accounts to the Annual Conference

b) The following principles regarding **subscriptions** will apply:

- i. No-one will be excluded through lack of money.
- ii. Subscriptions will be fair and equitable.
- iii. Subscriptions will be set at a level that will enable all members to participate in activities.

c) The level of subscription set will enable the national organisation to carry out its functions efficiently, as determined by the National Conference.

The initial rate of subscriptions will be as follows:

UNWAGED: £X per month

LOW WAGED: £X per month

STANDARD RATE: £X per month

HIGH WAGED: £X per month

d) Income will be divided between the national organisation and local/regional activities according to the following formula to enable branches to fund all legitimate expenses, including travelling expenses, publicity, etc. Branches will also have the right to raise funds separately to fund local activities as they see fit.

i) national office = 50%

ii) region = 10%

iii) branch = 40%

e) In the case of members not attached to a particular branch will be divided between the national organisation and local/regional activities according to the following formula:

i) national office = 80%

ii) region = 20%

## **17. STANDING ORDERS COMMITTEE**

A Standing Orders Committee will be elected each year by OMOV of the national membership. This committee will:

- a) deal with the organisation and arrangements of the Annual Conference and the timing and running of conference agenda, including sending out a prioritised motion or resolution ballot form to each local group, and facilitating the compositing of motions where appropriate.
- b) be made up of 10 people but including no members of the NC
- c) The minutes of all meetings shall be published
- d) The Standing Orders Committee will maintain a set of Procedures & Standing Orders for conducting the business of National Conference that may be amended from time to time by National Conference.
- e) Between National Conferences, the Standing Orders Committee shall be the final authority on the interpretation and application of the party's constitution and procedures.

## **18) ALTERATIONS TO THE CONSTITUTION**

Any changes to this Constitution must be proposed to a National Conference by the NC, branches or a motion signed by no less than 20 members. Any change must be agreed by at least two-thirds of those members present and voting. The proposed changes must be made public and included in the notice posted announcing the

Conference in good time to allow proper consultation

## **Appendix 1 - Safer Spaces Policy**

Left Unity as an organisation committed to fighting oppression and exploitation is committed to working to make our organisation – our meetings, our website and other channels of communication – as safe spaces as possible for members of all oppressed groups. We believe that only by putting such a policy at the heart of what we do can we create the sort of organisation we need that can aspire to successfully change the world from one based on the greed of the few to one based on the needs of the many.

From this point of view we will facilitate the formation of caucuses for liberation strands within Left Unity – for black people, disabled people, LGBT people and women as well as for young people at whatever level of the organisation such groups want to organise.

So we want to produce a safe space system based on existing good practice, but to go beyond that where possible.

We acknowledge that we will have difficulties with the problems of this society; we cannot be immune. Racism, xenophobia, sexism, gender based violence, disability hate crime, homophobia, trans phobia and prejudice exist.

Discrimination against and neglect of the interests of disabled people and those with caring responsibilities exist. Two women a week are killed by their male partners and many more are abused in gender related violence. That is the world in which we as a party will operate.

As a party, as an organisation we aim to defeat these great social ills.

Whilst we admit that we cannot be immune to such problems, we intend to create an organisation committed to consciously and publicly overcoming these issues within our organisation as well as in society at large.

Many other left organisations have seen internal sexism and even sexual violence.

We will not set ourselves up as being above the law or beyond the reach of the law. Where transgressions occur that are within the reach and scope of the legal system, such issues will be referred to law if the complainant wishes.

**We will ensure that all meetings are in accessible buildings** and such access needs as members require will be made available to the very best of our ability.

We will aim to provide childcare or assistance with child-minding fees in all meetings (using the experience of Scandinavian teachers unions).

We recognise people's rights to freedom of religion and belief. We would not, however, expect the party to be used for recruiting or proselyting for any religion or belief.

Members organising for the party will be expected to be kind to each other and try to consider other people's needs in addition to those needs mentioned above (again as would be normal in a unionised workplace). Venom should be reserved for those who would destroy us. Tolerance of other habits and norms will be expected (for example The Youth may make more noise).

We will not ignore examples of transgression, or situations where transgressions occur.

We recognise that much offence and violence occurs within power structures in parties as elsewhere. We will therefore attempt to monitor all power structure developments and ensure effective local and national democracy.

We will expect members to keep to rules on sexual conduct that are normal within the unionised working environment.

- No adult to teenager sexual contact.
- No sexual contact where the power relationships are disproportionate.
- No use of emotional or political pressure to gain sexual relationships.
- No use of political position, power or resources to help secure relationships.
- When one person is considerably younger, no relationships should be secret or clandestine.

Each new member joining the organisation should be offered a longer serving member as a rep. The purpose of the rep is to ensure that the new member is well acquainted with the workings of the organisation and acts as a point of contact for any matter to do with personal safety and the democratic workings of the party.

e.g. a disabled person tells the rep that a meeting place is inaccessible, the rep is then responsible for sorting out an alternative venue, or contacting the organisers to do so; the onus therefore is on the organisation not the individual.

When a dispute occurs the aim of the reps should be to provide reconciliation **except**

- In matters where it should be referred to the law.

- Where the offence is very grave within our movement; e.g. associating with known fascists to the extent that the security of activists is compromised. In such matters the presumption of reconciliation will not exist.
- Where the offence to one member is so great that both being present in a meeting is intolerable.

Complaints/Reconciliation should initially be at branch level and informal; a separate document on conflict resolution will be produced.

Formal proceedings should be used if this has not been effective: see below

A national safe spaces group will be elected to hear cases that have not been resolved locally.

## DEFINITIONS

We define the following as abusive behaviours which are not tolerated by Left Unity:

### **Physical abuse**

1. Violence and threat of violence (unless in self defence)
2. Use of force and threat of force (unless minimal to protect users of the space and the space itself)
3. Rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment and disability harassment.

### **Verbal abuse**

1. Personal insult (insults or aggression towards an individual)
2. Oppressive language (insults or generalisations about a group of people)
3. Verbal Harassment, sexual or otherwise (repeated uninvited personal comments or requests)
4. Verbal abuse in writing (all of the above in written form)

### **In Detail**

This section outlines what we mean, and what we don't mean, by each of the behaviours defined as abusive.

### **Physical abuse**

1. **Violence and threat of violence:** A deliberate action that is likely to cause

somebody physical pain, or the threat of such action, made verbally or implied physically.

**This does not mean:** Acting in self-defence or in defence of others, as a last resort, in response to a clear and direct physical threat.

**2. Use of force and threat of force:** Preventing a person from leaving a situation or forcing them into one, either by physically restraining them, blocking their way, refusing to stop following them or refusing to move away from them when asked. Threat to carry out any of these actions.

**This does not mean:** Preventing somebody from doing violence to themselves or others, or preventing somebody from damaging a space being used collectively, using minimal necessary force.

**3. Rape/Sexual assault/Sexual harassment:** non-consenting sex or sexual touching, as well as acting in a sexual way towards somebody, invading their personal space or making sexually suggestive moves or gestures to them without their explicit consent.

**This does not mean:** Telling somebody that you find them attractive or initiating a flirtation, provided that **lack of enthusiastic reciprocation is taken as an unequivocal "NO" with immediate effect, and all attempts at flirtation cease.** Disability harassment is the deliberate and/or repeated refusal to meet stated access needs, or the blocking of accessible spaces. E.g. Leaving bags etc on the floor when people with mobility impairments need a clear space to move in or consistently failing to provide written information in advance when it has been requested.

## **Verbal abuse**

**4. Personal insult:** This means insulting terms specifically applied to individuals, or criticism made abusive by being shouted or expressed aggressively, with the outcome of causing hurt, intimidation or humiliation. This applies regardless of whether the outcome was intentional. It is not the intentions of the person who made the remark or the offence felt by the person being insulted that is being addressed here, though these issues will be relevant to any resolution or disassociation process that follows. The behaviour is problematic because it is a means of forcing a point through the use of intimidation rather than reason, and this works to silence dissent and stifle constructive and reasonable discussion.

**This does not mean:** A ban on insults, compliments or personal remarks in conversation amongst friends who know and respect one another's limits. However, when engaging in such banter, we should always be aware of our context – where we are, who else is around us and how what we're saying affects the general atmosphere of the space. It is not enough to assume that everybody within earshot knows our intentions, or even to state that we don't mean anything by our use of insulting terms, or that they are being used ironically. The trust that is being asked by somebody who uses insulting or aggressive language in jest has to be earned and maintained, and is not automatically due to anybody with good intentions.

**5. Oppressive language:** This is language used in general conversation, not

necessarily in connection with a specific person, that insults, expresses prejudices or reinforces preconceptions about a group of people that are marginalised, disadvantaged or oppressed by mainstream society. This includes (but is not limited to) any racist, sexist, homophobic, transphobic or ablist language. The reason for this is not “political correctness” or fear of criticising people’s values. The real problem with such language is that it normalises prejudices and recreates the very hierarchies that we aim to oppose, as well as creating a space that is unwelcoming to anybody outside of a narrow demographic.

**This does not mean:** Compiling lists of unacceptable words and phrases in order to catch out the unwary – we don’t need to ban words, we do need to meet challenges to our language without defensiveness, be prepared to apologise for unintentional offence and take the opportunity to reconsider our language, the implications behind it and the impact it can have on others. Free expression ends at the point where it becomes an act of oppression to another.

## **6. Verbal Harassment, sexual or otherwise.**

This includes making unsolicited and inappropriately personal remarks (complimentary or otherwise) about somebody’s appearance or other personal attributes, or making repeated personal requests of them, sexual or otherwise, which have been previously refused, ignored or not met with enthusiasm.

**This does not mean:** This isn’t a ban on developing sexual relationships or flirting. Develop personal relationships at appropriate times and places, where nobody is likely to feel trapped, coerced, isolated or embarrassed, and make sure anybody you are flirting with has ample opportunity to exit the situation or end the flirtation at any time. It bears repeating: **always treat the absence of enthusiastic reciprocation as an unequivocal “no” with immediate effect.**

It is also disability harassment to demand explanations from disabled people as to why they have the access needs they state, or suggest they are making it up. It is important to remember that many conditions are not visible.

## **Applying the Safer Spaces Policy**

### **Who does this apply to?**

This applies to everybody signing up to Left Unity and attending meetings.

### **How do I enact the policy?**

Contact a member of [saferspaces@leftunity.org](mailto:saferspaces@leftunity.org) to begin a process to deal with a behaviour you have experienced.

You will be offered anonymity and confidentiality for all complaints, and given the opportunity to nominate trusted members of LU to mediate for you in any process that follows (though you are also welcome to speak for yourself directly if you prefer).

Complaints involving physical violence, rape, sexual assault or sexual harassment will be dealt with through a survivor-led process, and need not involve any one who the survivor(s) have not nominated. Anybody who has been named as a perpetrator of these or other violent and serious abuses will be asked not to enter meetings or post messages or to contact you while the process is ongoing.



Complaints not involving violence will be dealt with through a Conflict Resolution procedure, and both/all parties will be encouraged to communicate their concerns in constructive ways – with mediation, if required – with a view to restoring the ability to work together effectively in a space safe for all concerned.

### **Policy for Left Unity meetings**

Left Unity cannot completely meet its goals if its meetings are not fully inclusive, or if it leaves anyone feeling marginalised, unrepresented, or unwelcome. This safe space policy is designed to ensure that meetings take place in a considerate and relevant manner, without participants being undermined for discriminatory reasons.

If someone violates these agreements three times, they will be asked to leave the space. The three-strike policy can be bypassed if a serious infraction of these agreements happens, to the extent that someone feels unsafe. Examples of serious infractions include, but are not limited to, harassment, bullying, theft, sexual harassment, sexual assault and threatening or violent behaviour. Left Unity takes all violations of these agreements seriously, so please don't hesitate to make your concerns known.

1. To ensure that the safe(r) space policy is followed, it is imperative that the chairing process is not impeded.
2. Discrimination of any kind is unacceptable and will be challenged. This includes, but is not limited to: racism, ageism, homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, sexism, body-shaming, slut-shaming or ableism. Similarly, prejudice based on ethnicity, nationality, class, gender identity, gender presentation, language, impairment, asylum status, political or religious affiliation will not be tolerated.
3. Respect each other's physical and emotional boundaries. Always get explicit verbal consent before touching someone or crossing boundaries, regardless of the intentions behind the contact. Sexual harassment or sexual assault will lead to the perpetrator being banned from meetings and police involvement, if desired by the victim(s), will be fully supported. If you encounter any kind of harassment or assault please let us know, so that those responsible can be dealt with.
4. Be aware of the social space you occupy, as well as the positions and privileges you may be conveying, including racial, class and gender privilege. If a member of a liberation strand requests that you change your use of language regarding topics about their liberation strand, please be respectful and change your use of language. If you are unsure as to the reason your language was inappropriate or offensive, please politely contact the relevant liberation strand officers.
5. Avoid assuming the opinions and identifications of other participants. Examples include, but are not limited to, assumptions regarding sex, sexuality, gender identity, preferred personal pronouns, neurotypicality, non-disabled status, socio-economic background, political opinion, relationship model and religious beliefs.

6. Recognize that we try not to judge, put each other down or compete, or dominate by taking up more time in a meeting than others. Try not to jump into silences - these can allow less confident members to put forward their views.

7. Be aware of the language you use in discussion and how you relate to others. Try to speak slowly, clearly and use uncomplicated language. Please do not applaud people as it impacts on the accessibility of events. If you are unsure of the terminology relating to another's circumstances it is generally preferable to seek clarification, rather than risk using inaccurate or stereotyping terms.

8. The group endeavours as much as is feasible to ensure that meeting spaces are as accessible as possible to the widest range of people. Where it is allowed by the venue, there will be a supervised quiet/safe space room available at every event. In addition to this, if there has not been an access break in the previous 90 minutes, or if the atmosphere of a meeting has become counter-productive to reasoned discussion, then an access break of no less than 10 minutes must be taken by everyone, if requested by any one person.

9. Conferences, training events and workshops are alcohol- and illicit drug-free. There shall be no consumption of alcohol in the venue during the specified conference, training event or workshop times. Social events organised outside of these by Left Unity will allow the consumption of alcohol, unless stated otherwise by the event organisers.

10. Foster a spirit of mutual respect: listen to the wisdom everyone brings to the group and treat people with respect.

11. Give each person the time and space to speak. In large groups, or for groups using facilitation: use the approved hand signals to indicate you wish to speak. These hand signals will be clarified at the start of each discussion.

12. "Respect the person; challenge their behaviour." Whilst a person's behaviour may be problematic, everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and their behaviour does not negate that fact.

13. Whilst ground rules are a collective responsibility, everyone is also personally responsible for their own behaviour.

## **Online discussions**

The following policy statement will be posted on the Left Unity website and on all internal policy forums:

"Thank you for taking part in the online discussion at Left Unity. Our aim here is to foster a constructive and open conversation on the left about where we go from here.

"We aim to moderate comments with a light touch. However offensive, sexist, racist, disablist, homophobic, transphobic or otherwise inappropriate, venomous or just plain annoying comments may be deleted, or edited, when necessary.

We hope to create a space where we can disagree with each other productively. Personal abuse or excessively abrasive posting can act to kill discussion or create a toxic space where many people will be put off from commenting so we reserve the right to delete comments and even ban those who are repeat offenders.

We request that you do not use gender specific pronouns to describe someone else unless they have used them to describe themselves .

We welcome links that inform the debate, but please don't use this site simply to advertise your website/group/pet project or just cut and paste comments from elsewhere. We may consider this spam and delete it. If you think your comment may have been caught in our spam filter, thanks for your patience, please email us at ... and we'll take a look."