

# **Report from Foreign Policy Commission To Left Unity Policy Conference 29 March 2014**

We believe that if Left Unity is to be successful, its foreign (and other) policies must meet three conditions.

First, we must recognise, amplify and seek to direct **a widespread popular dissatisfaction with today's politics**. In foreign policy particularly, however, we have responsibilities, not only towards the peoples of the UK, but also to work for a world in which everyone has access to their basic human rights.

Second, against the pressure of conventional thinking about 'Defence', our policies must be **consistent with the values that inform our party's foundation**. It is our duty to stay true to our democratic, socialist values as global citizens who strive for peace. There is also, however, a task of adapting them, in concept, in language and in detailed application, to take account of the constant contemporary changes and the larger historical shifts.

Third, our policies must be **realistic in recognising the conditions of power in the world and the means needed to pursue and defend our gains**. We cohabit a threatened planet with powerful (but never all-powerful) hegemonic forces, where control is constantly struggled over, and access to basic necessities such as water, food and energy is fundamentally unequal.

In this report our stress is **on possibilities** of successful policy building, **on hope rather than critique**. Following the template sketched above, we start with possibilities and end with policies.

## **The People Do Dissent**

Contemporary anti-war movements have been the sharpest expression of popular dissent against Blairite, neo-Conservative and Coalition foreign policies. They have assumed an unprecedented scale and taken many different forms: from demonstrations of an unparalleled scale, (Iraq and Afghanistan) to smaller focussed protests against nuclear weapons, drone wars, and the trade in arms. Most recently they have resisted the threat of adding to the grievous sufferings of the Syrian people attacks from NATO, however carefully targeted,.

'Not in Our Name', however, has been part of a very much wider mood of war-weariness and of scepticism about costly military adventures, especially while people are made to go hungry and homeless at home. War is not a political asset any more. Falklands/Malvinas bolstered an unpopular Thatcher government and enabled the assault on the miners; Iraq destroyed the political career of Tony Blair and helped dissolve New Labour.

Of course, this wide unease is ambiguous. This is why we must offer it new and believable directions. Disgust with politicians can issue in rightwing responses: little England, anti-foreigner, re-workings of the old nationalisms and racisms. Though migration is the key issue, contemporary war commemoration is also pertinent. Remembrance can recognise the destruction and human loss of war and can work for future peace; or it can glorify heroism, sacrifice and a narrow national pride. It is up to Left Unity to promote the 'No Glory' meanings in popular mourning and develop policies to make wars less likely.

## **Global Power Shifts**

The shifts and tensions in popular culture correspond to material shifts in global power, the harder kernel of strategic calculation. We disbelieve in recent policies because they don't match current realities any more. They speak an older Cold War language - of 'nuclear deterrence' for instance. They harbour ambitions 'to reorder the world around us' (Blair) that we should not aspire to and simply can't afford. They assume that the USA is still the only super power and that its influence, and the economic system it exemplifies are necessarily positive. The recent costs of this 'special relationship' to us and to others are very clear. In truth, power in the world is shifting and unstable, much more multi-polar than before, with no single hegemon, several rising powers, and many intermediate ones. Since foreign policies also construct national identity at home, we note that many of our people are also now mourning for an older Britain or England, which many contemporary developments have pulled apart. We need to deliver our people from vengeful, closed, self-defeating responses to this sense of loss by offering a new view of our place in the world. In this way, and in others, our foreign policies should be post-nationalist.

## **We Have a Vision**

As a broad left party we might thank David Cameron (with our tongues firmly in our cheeks) for encouraging us to recall the socialist, internationalist and anti-war movements of the decades before and after World War 1. This was the Spring Time of modern socialism, communism, feminism and anarchism and it sounded the key notes of oppositional foreign policies: on the one side the solidarity of oppressed groups and classes, over-riding those of nation or empire; on the other the commitment to peace-making, to treaties, to international institutions and conscientious objections to war. These broad principles are the common ground of our political heritage (rather than the many differences) so should underpin our approach to foreign policy. Though policy-making for a new party is exciting work, we never start from scratch but from a history.

At the same time, Left Unity cannot abandon the need for security or for defence – in a more authentic sense. Any major challenge in Britain to the juggernaut of neo-liberal capitalist development at home or abroad will meet major opposition from global elites, financial interests, large corporations and those international organisations that are under the sway of conventional economic thinking. For some of these interests, war is not at all an adverse outcome. We have to have the means to defend our own advances as well as to promote our visions.

It is our view, however, that the weight of thinking and policy about 'security' should shift away from military solutions and towards cultural influence, alliances, the development of appropriate international institutions and the creation of support in a wider world for our nation and its new government as a force for global betterment. We should be known not for our military adventures and our creation of new enemies by a perpetuated 'war on terror', but for our role in diplomacy, peacemaking, human development greener adaptations, protection of the planet and its species, and the promotion of greater economic justice.

## **Selected Policies**

Defence and Foreign policy covers a huge area and we have discussed many particular issues in this Commission. We have also sought consensus, so sometimes our recommendations are not exactly in line with personal preferences. We have selected a few broad areas where agreement was in reach and we can to recommend specific policies and campaigns.

## 1. Defence & Security

*Nuclear Weapons.* Replacing Trident, in effect modernising it, is simply incompatible with pursuing nuclear disarmament, nationally and internationally, the wish of everyone on this Commission. We recommend that Left Unity should oppose replacement in any form and support all campaigns – those of CND and ICAN for instance, to this end. However, there is a debate to be had – or continued – about whether to scrap the existing nuclear weapon system (said to be inoperable by 2024) in one step, or disarm in a series of steps to foster the movement towards universal abolition. In either case, nuclear disarmament is a hugely symbolic aspect of the larger military and diplomatic transition we seek. It should have a high priority. Unlike the Coalition, in power and as a party, we should attend international conferences, honour promises to disarm (at NPT and UN), and ally with non-nuclear weapon states and NGOs in moving towards a nuclear weapon free world.

*Military Matters.* We must intervene strongly in the current chaos around the purposes and capacities of our military forces. They should be reconfigured for authentic defence needs, humanitarian projects and peacekeeping missions under UN mandates. Climate change, the networks of violence created by past policy, and cyber subversion are much greater threats to our security than military attacks from individual states or blocks.

*First Steps* We recommend that we should launch our own Strategic and Defence Review to coincide with the next official one (2015) specifying the practical implications of our aims in more detail. In the meantime we should campaign now to end the RAF drone attacks in Afghanistan and to withdraw support from the CIA's illegal drone attacks in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, counter-productive because they heap up hate for 'the West'. We will push for an international framework of law to control the production and use of drones and seek a complete ban on the production, trading and use of cluster bombs, uranium weapons, and pre-programmed robotic war machines. We should support immediately campaigns against the sale of arms to oppressive regimes.

## 2. Economic Aspects

### *Real Security Dividends*

Apart from the £100bn saved on Trident replacement, we would expect a 'real security dividend' from giving up ambitions to 'police the world' in co-imperial adventures with USA or NATO or France. Some savings should be used to support skilled workers in converting from arms manufacture to socially useful engineering. This could include remedying the damage caused by the nuclear industries and speeding the halting development of green alternatives with public investment.

### *Aid policies*

Reducing military intervention does not mean withdrawing from our still considerable influence in the world. We need to embed ourselves in alliances, trading relations, and reciprocal projects for our own security and to pursue the aim of greater global justice. Our aid policies should be addressed towards the betterment of aided populations, not towards our own narrow strategic or business interests. We should aid the development of education, the creation of functioning democratic institutions, the honouring of human rights and the provision of basic services especially in fragile states and societies. We should use our diplomatic influence and alliances to secure a greater say for developing countries in international organisations like the IMF and World Bank.

### 3. Alliances and International Organisations

#### *UN and other International Institutions*

As a party and potentially as a government, we should push hard for the UN and the Security Council to properly represent all sovereign states on Earth. Initially, we might aim for the existing Security Council to include other existing or emerging powers such as Germany, India, Brazil, South Africa and Mexico. Eventually, it might be possible to establish a system of regional representation, through regional groupings, which in principle we favour. We should push to abolish the veto powers of members of the Council. We should seek to strengthen the International Criminal Court and the International Court for Justice.

#### *Alliances: USA*

We should seek to move away from our current subordination to the foreign policies and alliances centred on the United States and its continued hegemonic ambitions. We should seek greater autonomy by recognising the multi-polar nature of power in the modern world, constructing multiple relationships and alliances in Europe, but more especially outside.

#### *Alliances: EU*

We debated Britain's relation to the EU in some detail but with quite polarised views. The balance of opinion in the Commission is that we should stay in the EU and join with other Left parties in Europe in changing the neo-liberal policies and reforming the very undemocratic institutions of Commission and Parliament.

#### *Alternative States, Parties, Civil Society*

Our alliances, as party and as government, will especially be with those rising states, parties, social movements and NGOs that embrace alternative policies to neo-liberal development, especially to marketisation and the privatization of public services, and which seek to curtail the largely unhampered power of international finance and global corporations.

#### *Who Are the Enemies?*

We should reconsider the orthodox map of potential 'enemies' according to our understanding of how "Us" and "Others" are made, and craft appropriate policies. We should recognise for instance the historic concern of the ruling party in China to better their own population and the historic fear of Russia about the encirclement by "Western" power. Everywhere, we will foster relationships with civil society institutions and social movements that seek to serve the human development of their local populations, including indigenous and displaced peoples, and nations, like the Palestinians and the Kurds, that still have no state.

#### *Cultural Understanding and Dialogue as International Relations*

Our alliances, from our local branches and networks, to our formal policies, will involve cultural dialogue and exchange as well as mutual security. A major purpose will be to address humanitarian and environmental issues, in particular the underlying causes and the growing consequences of man-made climate change.

In further developing our policies we will need to attend not only to our membership – organized and articulate in different ways - but also the expertise of NGOs and researchers working on similar lines.

## Policy and Campaign Points Summarised

*NB We have added this section to our draft report to aid discussion at Conference, but wish our whole report to be available there. If agreement can be reached on general orientations and fundamental values more particular policies will be easier to agree on. Below, we distinguish current campaigning from longer-term policies.*

1. Don't replace Trident. Scrap existing system possibly in stages, linked to initiating multi-lateral moves, providing alternative jobs for Trident-related workers and Scottish developments around Faslane. **Campaign** with CND and ICAN and Alternative Agenda States for a nuclear weapons free world.
2. Form a Commission, with appropriate expertise, to plan the re-configuration of UK military and emergency forces (e.g. a 'Peace Corps?') around authentic defence and security needs and a capacity for international humanitarian work, under UN mandates. Issue a report to coincide with the official Security and Defence Review (2015). Campaign, with Drone Campaign Network, Stop the War and others, to end UK drones strikes in Afghanistan, withdraw support from illegal CIA drone strikes in Pakistan, Somalia and Yemen, create a system of international law on unmanned military vehicles and ban pre-programmed military vehicles altogether. **Campaign** with CAAT and others to ban arms sales to oppressive regimes and control arms sales generally.
3. Use 'real security dividend' to ease transition to greener economy with less stress on arms production as part of an alternative economic strategy. **Campaign** with Trade Unions on this Armaments-to- Green transition programme in the context of broader economic strategy.
4. Reconfigure aid policies away from immediate business and military concerns and towards education, democratic institutions, human rights and the provision of basic services especially in fragile states and societies.  
  
Link with appropriate **campaigning** groups on more detailed campaigns– e.g. World Development Movement, War on Want.
5. Develop our own detailed plans for the reshaping of the UN and its agencies, the International Criminal Court and the International Court for Justice, drawing on appropriate expertise and the NGOs active in these areas. **Campaign** for ending Security Council vetoes and creating a more representative UN.
6. Redraw patterns of alliances. Broad lines of development: pursue greater autonomy from USA and its alliances, stay in Europe but ally with parties and movements that seek alternative policies and institutional reform, ally with states, parties and movements worldwide according to political criteria developed from humanitarian and planetary concerns, alternative to neo-liberal economic development, and mutual defence. As campaigning priorities (a) establish relations and cultural dialogue with aligned parties and movements (b) work culturally to break down established patterns of Othering with states and peoples, especially those subordinated in the world system.

(2500 words)

