

Left Unity National Council Meeting 5 September 2015

Attendance: Kate H, Felicity D, Andrew B, Ed P, Dave I (SE), Sarah McD (London), Jack C, Jon D (Eastern), Tom W, David L (London), Anna B (SE), Louise C (London), Liam C (London), Kathy L (London), Simon H, Doug T (London), Fran B (Y and H), Oliver N, Eve T, Fred LeP (London), Pete McL, Yassamine M, Joseph H (London), Terry C, Alison T (NW), James T (NW), Sharon McC, Bianca T, Andy R, Matthew J (Scotland), Eleanor F (London), Darren McC (Observer), Bob W (Observer)

Apologies: Pip T, Len A, Anne, Dave T, Barbra S, Rachel GW, Liz S, Soraya L, Matthew C, Guy H, Pete G, Steve M, Richard F, Kerry A, Micheline M, Siobhan D.

Chairs: Eve T and Jon D; Minutes: Kathy L.

NC minutes 14 June: matters arising

1. Constitution commission – EC unable to find a convenor. Now with NC.
2. Disputes Committee - now up and running.
3. TUSC - National Secretary Kate H reported she and Nominating Officer Terry C had held an information-sharing meeting with Clive H of TUSC re upcoming elections.
4. NC 'Annual Meeting' - Clarification given that the 'annual meeting' is normally the first meeting of the newly elected NC and the one that elects the new EC.
5. Election Standing Committee - NC members be asked to contact Nominations Officer Terry C if they are willing to serve on the Election Standing Committee. No dates fixed as yet for Election Schools. Will depend on political situation.
6. Finance report – Request for more details for NC. Treasurer Andrew B undertook to circulate future financial reports presented to the EC to the NC as a whole.
7. Safe Spaces - Bianca T volunteered to help organise the workshop, previously agreed, which will aim to arrive at a consensus position on Safe Spaces to put to the national conference. EC on 3 October will make a final decision on how to handle this discussion.

Minutes of 14 June NC were APPROVED.

EC Minutes 11 July: matters arising

1. Autumn Political Event - Media Officer Tom W explained the event is being held jointly with other political organisations and is now planned for spring because of a crowded diary of Left events for October. No date yet.
2. National Conference - Kate H proposed new dates for national conference of 21-22 November. There is provision in the constitution for a priorities ballot re motions.
3. Tory Party Conference - important to have an LU mobilisation for the TUC demonstration in Manchester on October 4th and a fringe meeting if possible during conference week

- It was hoped to produce a leaflet for use in Manchester based on Sharon McC's introduction at the EC on the government budget. Written notes from Sharon awaited. There had been problems with finding a suitable venue for an LU fringe meeting.

-The NC gratefully accepted the suggestion of Alison T that the NW region organise the event. Women and Austerity to be one of the issues highlighted as previously agreed.

-Material produced would be for distribution at the demo at Tory Party Conference and at the LU fringe meeting.

-It was suggested the LU contingent for the demonstration should set off from the meeting point at Salford University already arranged by the NW region.

- Anna B requested homestay for those who needed it.

4. European Left Party – result of the party representatives' recommendation to the ELP executive concerning LU would be known by late September.

5. Youth and Students

- LU broadsheet aimed at students was planned for Freshers' Fairs in new university year.

- 'Red Futures' youth event had taken place on 29 August at Birkbeck College. Attendance rather disappointing, probably due to holiday period, but event seen as a useful stepping stone for building LU Youth and Student work.

- A national demo to take place on 4 November against university fees and education cuts. Very important event for youth and students. National Union of Students (NUS) Executive had given its backing.

EC proposals were ENDORSED.

EC Minutes 8 Aug 2015: matters arising

1. NC vacancies

There had been three resignations from LU which would make by-elections necessary. Vacancies have been created by Liz D and Luke C from the NC; Tony M from SoC; former NC member from Nottingham Mike S had resigned from LU – Kate H to circulate his resignation letter; Marianne CJ could no longer represent Eastern region as she had moved to the North East. By-elections would be held as soon as possible.

2. Forthcoming paper on "changing the political narrative"

Kate H explained the paper would be about challenging the dominant ideology in society. Work on it undertaken by Guy H was ongoing.

3. Scottish Left Project

Membership and Communications Officer Simon H had represented LU as an observer at the Scottish Left Project conference held on 29 August. Its purpose was to discuss the setting up of a new broad left electoral alliance in Scotland. 450 people had attended. The name, RISE, founding statements and a local branches structure had been agreed in principle but the founding conference would not take place till the end of November.

4. The Corbyn campaign

LU branches to be encouraged to start preparing now to organise local meetings in the autumn with local Corbyn supporters on the outcome of the Labour Leadership campaign and its wider implications for the Left.

5. Internal communications

Apparent absence of articles on the North West on the website was queried. It was explained that the website currently has no editorial board and that LU relies on members to write and send in articles from the different areas. The website also has a "local reports" section. A closed LU Facebook Group had now been set up and could be used as well.

6. Leeds Branch resolution

Jack C spoke against the inclusion of the last two sentences of an EC resolution passed on the dispute in Leeds branch. The sentences criticized coverage of the dispute by the Weekly Worker. The NC endorsed the resolution as a whole.

The proposals of the EC 8 August were ENDORSED.

NC Agenda 5 September

1. Late Motion

Agreed to accept late motion on Laurie McC tabled by Sarah M (but this was not reached - see below).

2. Conference Update

Kate H confirmed dates as 21-22 November and the venue at Student Central (ULU). Saturday would be given over to motions and Sunday to constitutional amendments. Childcare provision and homestay accommodation would be arranged.

Query as to why the national conference was not going to be a delegate conference. Answer: constitution stipulates that for LU to have a delegate conference requires a membership of over 2000. As this was not currently the case the national conference would be an open conference. **AGREED.**

Pooled fare proposed and **AGREED.**

Request that perspectives for developing LU over the coming months be presented to the conference for discussion. It was also suggested that in order to re-energize members and attract contacts, the conference needed to be as lively an event as possible with guest speakers and a possible fringe meeting/rally.

Kate H said that resolutions, presented in line with the priorities ballot, would determine the work of LU going forward. Perspectives could be put forward in the form of resolutions. The Conference Arrangements Committee (CAC) looking at the question of guest speakers and members could send that committee their other suggestions.

A conference timetable running on Saturday 11am-5.30pm and Sunday 11am-5pm was **AGREED.**

Motion (attached) on the proposed organisation of the Conference moved by Jack C was **DEFEATED.**

On the question of future national meetings and major LU events Steve H, NW region, argued that more of these needed be held outside London (preferably in Wigan) if LU was not to be seen as too London-centric. It was pointed out that there had previously been meetings and events in Manchester and Birmingham and that the next EC is being held in Manchester on 3rd October prior to the national demo in Manchester on the 4th October.

3. Labour Leadership Contest

Andrew B introduced the discussion on the campaign to elect Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party and its wider implications. He stressed:

- The Corbyn campaign will generally shift politics to the left
- There could be civil war in the LP if Corbyn wins
- LU has to understand that the Corbyn movement is a mass movement, not just internal to the LP, and we have to engage with it.

- The emergence of the Corbyn movement has to be seen in the context of the new parties and movements emerging throughout Europe in response to the capitulation of social democracy to the neoliberal austerity offensive.
- LU can only survive to the extent that it helps build the Corbyn movement.
- The Corbyn movement can only survive if it becomes a social movement itself.

There was general agreement in the discussion on a number of points including:

- (i) We can't be sure the LP will split.
- (ii) We are still going to be confronted with pro-cuts Labour councils.
- (iii) LU has to have a clear orientation to new layers emerging inside and outside the LP.

Proposals for a new online journal to debate with people in the wider movement, and the introduction of a "Friends of Left Unity" category whereby contact can be maintained with former members were AGREED.

Plans for a major spring conference with others (see above) on 'What future for the Left?' were AGREED.

4. Motion 1: Our strategy for left unity

This motion from Lambeth LU was taken in conjunction with the discussion on the Labour Leadership contest above. With the second paragraph and references to the Right to Strike campaign removed in agreement with the movers, the resolution was PASSED (see Appendix)

5. Motion 3 on Greece (attached)

An amendment was accepted which deleted the preamble and agreed to publish on Left Unity's national website the statement from a range of radical left organisations in Greece entitled "No to the New Memorandum, Call for Struggle and Mobilization Across the County". The motion as amended was PASSED.

6. Other Motions

Motion 2: Lessons from the Greece situation; and the late Motion on Laurie McC; were de-prioritized due to lack of time and were not reached.

7. Campaigns strategy paper (attached)

Discussion deferred due to pressure of time. Paper to be circulated and members asked to send in comments and contributions.

8. EU discussion paper

Discussion deferred due to pressure of time.

9. LU Information Items

The Economics Day School will be held on 10 October at Teatro Technis in London. The Trade Union event (non policy-making) and the Branch Organisers' Day School (open to non-LU members) will be held on the same day, 24 October in London at The Wesley, Euston.

Appendix

Motion 1 from Lambeth Branch

Resolution on our strategy for left unity

There are real possibilities opening up for a renewal of the socialist left today. Where Left Unity fits into the debates and realignments over the coming months will be crucial.

Many felt that the Labour party was closed off to any hopeful, left wing developments, but the enthusiasm which Corbyn's campaign has generated shows that there is an appetite for fighting, socialist politics among wider sections in society. The fact that he might win has galvanised thousands of people to sign up to support him.

Whilst people are right to be inspired but there are limitations to what can be achieved through parliamentary politics. Even if Corbyn wins the elections it would unleash a struggle within the party that could mean a split in Labour.

If he comes second this is a long drawn out battle against the centre and Blairites in the party at a time when the welfare state is being torn apart and the NHS is being privatised.

As socialists, anything that promotes the principles and ideas of socialism and creates a debate in wider society around those ideas is a positive thing. This means connecting with the ideals that Corbyn supporters have and working with them. It also means we have to be clearer as an organisation about why we do not think that Labour can be "reclaimed".

What can Left Unity add to the current debates?

- A clear, socialist, class based message against capitalism as well as austerity.
- That we want to build a party that is in parliament but puts greater emphasis on the extra-parliamentary struggle. Real power comes out of the mobilisation and organisation of the wider working class and popular forces, not through MPs.
- This means we have to see this as a chance to rebuild and galvanise forms of working class resistance.
- Concentrate on active involvement in the anti-austerity struggle, advocating the sorts of organization methods of direct action and that can achieve this.
- Produce a strategy document for victory over the Tories; one that provides a basis for joint work with the left wing in the Labour Party, the militants in the trade unions and the Peoples Assemblies.

In conclusion, there is a greater chance of a wider left unity happening today. We will need a non-sectarian approach to the Labour left and Green left, working with them in campaigns and on key issues but having a distinct contribution to make politically. The ultimate aim should be a united party of socialists and working class activists.

Motion 3 from Lambeth Branch on Greece:

The following part was agreed for publication on the website:

“NO TO THE NEW MEMORANDUM
CALL FOR STRUGGLE AND MOBILIZATION ACROSS THE COUNTRY

The undersigned, representing a wide range of forces and organizations of the Left reject the new third memorandum submitted today to the Parliament and call for large unitary struggles to overturn all memoranda and impose a new progressive orientation for the country.

The signing of a new Memorandum by a government that was elected to abolish the previous two, amounts to a major disaster for the Greek people and democracy. The new Memorandum means even more austerity, further restriction of the rights of the citizenry and the perpetuation of the country's regime of tutelage. The new Memorandum is a complete reversal of the mandate of the Greek people who rejected in the referendum of 5 July in their entirety the neoliberal policies of austerity and of neocolonial dependency.

Throughout the last five years the people opposed in every possible way the fear and blackmailing and struggled for an independent, just, reconstructed, democratic and sovereign Greece. As was the case for the previous ones, this Memorandum needs to be met with the wider militant resistance of a cohesive and determined society. We will continue down the path of July 5 until the end, until the overthrow of the policies of the Memoranda, with an alternative plan for the next day, for democracy and social justice in Greece.

The fight against the new Memorandum begins now, with the mobilization of the people in every corner of the country. For this fight to develop and win, it is necessary to build up popular organization at all levels and in all social areas.

We call for the constitution of a broad political and social nationwide movement and for the creation to of committees of struggle against the new memorandum, against austerity and against the tutelage of the country. This will be a unitary movement that will justify the aspirations of the people for democracy and social justice.

The fight that led to the triumph of "No" of July 5 continues and will win!

Thursday, August 13, 2015

Panagiotis Lafazanis (Left Platform - Left Current)
Alekos Vernardakis (Communist Renewal)
Nikos Galanis (Leftwing Intervention)
Dimitris Kavouras (Communist Organization Reconstruction)
Kaltsonis Dimitris (Association Yannis Kordatos)
Panagiotis Mantas (DIKKI – Socialist Left)
Anthonis Davanelos (Left Platform –DEA)
Andreas Pagiatsos (Xekinima)
Spyros Sakellaropoulos (ARAN – Left Recomposition)
Dimitris Sarafianos (ARAS – Leftwing Anticapitalist Regroupment)
Maria Souani (Workers Struggle)
Themis Tzimas (Former member of PASOK National Council)
Lambros Heetas (Initiative of the 1000)”

Campaigns strategy paper (draft for NC comment)

Aims:

- To support, strengthen and develop local campaigns and initiatives against the cuts and in support of working class communities and those most affected by Tory policies
- To defend trade union rights and help strengthen and rebuild the unions
- To support migrant communities and oppose the racist anti-immigrant agenda
- To help build an effective national resistance to Tory policies
- To challenge the dominant neo-liberal ideology, embraced by right-wing Labour as well as the Tories
- To work across international boundaries, in solidarity and coordination with peoples and movements in Europe, particularly the people of Greece

- To help strengthen the left in Britain and build Left Unity as part of that
- To engage in non-traditional forms of campaigning with the purpose of connecting with those who have been political disengaged

Detailed proposals:

To support, strengthen and develop local campaigns and initiatives against the cuts and in support of working class communities and those most affected by Tory policies

- Support and participate in local campaigns on housing, health, education, welfare, child poverty, white ribbon campaign, initiating where necessary
 1. Housing to include: no evictions/demolitions; build more council houses; private sector rent controls; stop the sell-off of HA properties
- Assist and develop local initiatives to directly support those under attack from the Tory government including the unemployed, women and children, disabled people and those in 'in-work poverty'

To defend trade union rights and help strengthen and rebuild the unions

- Encourage active trade unionism by Left Unity members
- Support and participate in the Right to Strike campaign
- Support the development of a cross-union broad left
- Build trade union solidarity links with Greece – using TUC resolution in support of GSC
- TU officer to coordinate with reps across unions

To support migrant communities and oppose the racist anti-immigrant agenda

- Support local campaigns and national initiatives in defence of migrant rights
- Work with and support anti-racism and anti-Islamophobia campaigns, linking with Muslim communities building on our work in support of Rabina Khan in east London

To help build an effective national resistance to Tory policies

- Participate in the People's Assembly against Austerity, building and working in local groups to assist in developing its grass roots character to help it develop fully as a national campaign
- Encourage broad participation in the PAAA at every level
- Work with other national initiatives as appropriate

To challenge the dominant neo-liberal ideology, embraced by right-wing Labour as well as the Tories

- Continue hard-hitting media presence
- Step up use of infographics in social media
- Increase theoretical and in-depth output and explore possibilities of on-line journal

To work across international boundaries, in solidarity and coordination with peoples and movements in Europe, particularly the people of Greece

- Continue to build the Greece Solidarity Campaign and work to raise political and material aid
- Continue to develop links with other anti-austerity parties and movements and explore possibilities of and mechanisms for increased European dialogue about new challenges post the latest Greek deal

To help strengthen the left in Britain and build Left Unity as part of that

- Support Jeremy Corbyn's leadership campaign
- Continue and expand dialogue with other left forces inc. Labour left and Green left
- Continue to build Left Unity in open and non-sectarian fashion

To engage in non-traditional forms of campaigning with the purpose of connecting with those who have been political disengaged

- Continue to look at innovative ways to spark political debate and action in addition to traditional methodology.
- Support training of left unity members similar to a “mckenzie friendship scheme” to support members and supporters in court and legal appearances.
- Share good and successful practice through articles, v.blogs, and other social media.

