

Left Unity National Council Meeting 7 November 2015

Attendance: Kate H, Felicity D, Andrew B, Sarah M (London), Jack C, Salman S, Anna B (SE), Kathy L (London), Oliver N, Eve T, Yassamine M, Joseph H (London), Terry C, Barbara S, Len A (Wales)

Apologies: Simon H, Fred L

Chair: Felicity D Minutes: Joseph H, Yassamine M, Kathy L

1. NC meeting 5 September 2015

Matters arising

(a) Oliver N (Trade Union Officer) reported on Trade Union Event 24 October in London. Poor turnout suggested LU needs to organise better but very good discussion. LU had established a teachers' fraction and other fractions were being set up. Modest but quite important steps forward. Follow-up meeting to take place 23 January in the North West.

(b) Branch Organisers' Day School 24 October in London. Simon H (Membership and Communications Officer) unable to report because of absence due to family bereavement. Joseph H, who had attended, made some points. Very good meeting. Interesting to hear the experience of how branches being set up. Clear information about LU membership and other practical administrative arrangements needed. Volunteers from branches willing to take up tasks now that the LU office was closing (see under 'Report on Finances' below). NC and officers should take up their offers of help.

Minutes of NC Meeting were **ENDORSED**.

2. EC meeting 3 October 2015

No matters arising. Minutes of the EC meeting were **ENDORSED**.

3. Political Context Discussion

General discussion on political situation after the LP leadership election and the implications of the new situation for LU. Discussion divided into themes with introductions to each. No votes taken.

(a) Labour Party

Introduced by Andrew B (National Treasurer). In the wake of Jeremy Corbyn's remarkable victory some former LU members were joining the LP. Others in LU were joining Momentum to support Corbyn and the wider anti-austerity movement. It was important to be prepared for imminent civil war within the Labour Party. To this end LU was seeking to maintain links with former members by setting up a *Friends of LU* network and keeping contact with the movement via debates in *Interchange* online newsletter.

(b) Right to Strike and TU Bill Campaigns

Introduced by Oliver N (Trade Union Officer). The Right to Strike campaign should not be prioritised over other TU campaigns. There were also National Shop Stewards Network, Unite the Resistance and the TUC all running similar initiatives. The fight against the Trade Union Bill must continue and everyone in LU should be involved.

(c) Trident

Introduced by Kate H (National Secretary). Broad opposition to Trident was growing daily and a decision by parliament would be taken sometime in 2016. There was a clear link with anti-austerity campaigning and even opposition from the military. A week previously 70% of Scottish Labour Party conference delegates had voted to change policy to scrapping Trident and the SLP MSPs subsequently voted along with their SNP counterparts against renewing Trident and for job diversification. LU has a clear policy on this and we should work with others to support Jeremy Corbyn on this issue. The importance of the national demonstration against Trident called by CND in February 2016 was underlined. Leeds LU branch had held a very successful public meeting on Trident and it was suggested that more branches should do the same.

(d) Refugee crisis

Introduced by Terry C (Nominating Officer). LU had joined the very successful national demonstration in support of refugees and migrants on 12th September. The party has a consistent record of supporting refugees nationally and locally. Activists were involved in actions in their areas and there was a need to know more about what branches were doing on this issue. The refugee crisis was being taken up widely in the labour and student movements. The lead banner on the recent student demonstration read *Free Education. No Borders.*

(e) Welfare cuts

Introduced by Felicity D. LU should take up issues relating to local government cuts. More cuts in housing benefits are certain to bring more protests. Council tenants are being told they will have to pay rent equivalent to rent in private flats in the same area. Ten thousand families in Liverpool may be evicted. Housing associations have agreed to accept no compensation from the government on the Right to Buy.

Although the government has been temporarily defeated on the issue of tax credits more cuts are on the way. There are proposals to slash universal credit payments, (for the first time since they were introduced). This would leave many women with no income, as the universal credit will go to one person in any family, usually the man. Local councils are told they have to implement 50% cuts to statutory services and 40% to non-statutory services. Labour will not be leading the struggles against these cuts. We need to get involved and the Left Unity spring conference has to come up with concrete proposals.

The general discussion that followed in this session raised points including:

- the need for a serious discussion on the LP at LU national conference in November;
- the need to differentiate LU policies from those of Labour under Corbyn;
- the need to look at how LU members could work in Momentum and how Momentum should respond to the cuts;

- the need to review LU strategy in elections given that the political climate has changed dramatically and that the party's resources are reduced;
- the proposal (due to come before Conference) that LU should dissolve as a party and operate instead as a think tank;
- the need for LU branches to be told who had left the party and who had cancelled their membership subscriptions.

It was suggested that the extent to which LU branches could collaborate with the LP might vary from region to region. LU in Wales reported that Labour there was failing to capitalise on the unpopularity of the Tories' economic strategy. In coordination with the People's Assembly, LU had won a lot of support for a poll against austerity, and went on to propose and publicise in the Welsh press an alternative manifesto to that of the LP in Wales.

LU members in the North West pointed out that in their region Labour Party councillors were implementing extensive cuts and that that they did not want to be associated with the Labour Right.

It was AGREED

- that branches should set up meetings on Trident
- that the leaflet on migrants/refugees be reviewed
- that the issue of cuts in local government be included in the spring conference.

4. Appeal re Open University

Barbara S of Bristol LU made an appeal on behalf of the staff of the OU. Seven regional offices were closing and 500 jobs were at stake. This would have a huge impact on disabled students in particular. There was an Early Day Motion from some Labour MPs coming up. It was agreed that LU branches should be encouraged to lobby their MPs to support the EDM and that LU should circulate information about the campaign nationally.

It was AGREED that a statement on the Open University cutbacks be added to the website.

5. Conference Preparations

(a) Kate H gave a short report on LU Conference preparations.

- So far 100 comrades registered.
- Small number of requests for accommodation received.
- Officers had been in touch with the families seeking help with childcare and arrangements were progressing.
- Standing Orders Committee (SOC) to publish a report and a draft agenda on 13 November.
- Guest speakers invited from Portugal, European Left Party, CND, Refugee campaign and national campaign against tuition fees.
- Speakers to be spread over the two days. 7-10 minutes each.
- SOC had asked for written reports (300 words) from officers, regional, national committees and caucuses.
- Safe Spaces motion omitted due to technical errors but there were some proposed amendments to the Code of Conduct.

(b) Kate H presented the current proposed agenda from the SOC for comments:

Saturday

11am conference welcome

11.05 NC report

11.20 SOC

11.30 Future of LU and LP

Sunday

Constitutional amendments

Reports

Policy debate

The meeting was informed that, given the number of motions on the constitution, SOC believed there would be time for policy motions to be debated on the Trade Union Bill and EU referendum.

Many members of the NC supported the proposal for a major debate at the conference about the future of Left Unity and were keen that all views should be expressed. The SOC proposal to keep the first day's debate on the LP and the future of Left Unity was AGREED.

There was no consensus on a proposal to invite a speaker from RISE in Scotland.

NC agreed to recommend to SOC

- that the conference starts with the National Secretary's report before the agenda is discussed.
- that on the first day a decision is made about that day's agenda and Sunday's timetable is discussed on Sunday morning.

(c) Travel costs

After a discussion on travel costs and a pooled fare for Conference it was AGREED to ask members to book their travel in advance and send in their receipts by 13 November. Terry C would be responsible for vetting any travel claims received after that date.

6. Portugal

Joseph H reported on the political situation in Portugal after the parliamentary elections of 28 September 2015. The election outcome had provided a powerful example of what broad anti-austerity parties of the left in Europe could achieve. The ruling Socialist Party had received a public rejection of its punishing cuts programme when it lost its overall majority while the anti-austerity left, mainly the Portuguese Communist Party and the Left Bloc, won a major breakthrough. The Left Bloc, which doubled its number of seats in parliament, agreed to back the Socialist Party on a case by case basis in the latter's attempts to form a minority government – but only as long as the Socialists refused to implement further austerity measures. Another election might prove necessary in the short term and a presidential election was due in January 2016.

7. Refugees

Felicity D gave a report about the catastrophic migrant exodus, citing in particular the fate of refugees attempting the perilous sea crossing on small boats to Greek island of Lesbos. The

number of those dying on this journey continues to rise. In line with our 'no borders' policy LU should contact other European Left parties about lobbying their MPs to demand an opening of the land route and the stepping up of aid to the refugees.

8. Finance report

Detailed accounts were presented to NC by National Treasurer Andrew B. The impact of comrades leaving the party meant economies had to be made. The officers had been obliged to take a provisional decision about the future of the LU office as it was expensive and it had not proved possible to share the premises with others to lower costs.

The officers had decided that LU would need to give up the office and return to Housmans. The only employee had already left to take up a new job and a decision to replace him could be taken after conference. Notice on the office had been given but it was still in use and there was thus still time for the NC to consider the matter.

The NC **RATIFIED** the officers' decision.

There was a proposal in the discussion on finance to increase membership dues but it was pointed out that conference had to make such decisions.

9. AOB

It was also decided:

- to hold an IT day for LU branches to help improve communications
- to establish an NC mailing list
- to take the motion on Laurie M (see below).

Motion on Laurie M

The motion was carried over due to lack of time from the NC meeting of 5 September. It was proposed by Jack C, Yassamine M, and Sarah M. Salman S proposed an amendment accepted by the movers of the motion which was defeated. Motion without the amendment defeated 12-3 with 5 abstentions.

