

What is Britain's newly founded Left Unity party?

Chris Marsden
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Left Unity held its founding conference in London on November 30.

Advanced as a party “to the left of Labour,” what united the motley assortment of 400-plus aging cynics in attendance was a determination that any such party would not be revolutionary in its programme and intent.

Left Unity has nothing to do with an attempt to build a socialist party. It is a political manoeuvre led by Alan Thornett's Socialist Resistance group, the British section of the Pabloite United Secretariat of the Fourth International. It is seeking to emulate what it calls “broad left” party initiatives in other countries, particularly the Left Party of Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France, Syriza in Greece, and Die Linke in Germany.

All three of these are led by factions of the old Stalinist and social democratic bureaucracies, advancing a minimal programme of reforms as a means of blocking a more fundamental shift to the left by the millions of workers who have grown to hate and despise their parent bodies. All are staffed by a middle class layer of careerists, who have operated for years on the periphery of the old parties and in the trade unions and who now offer their services as propagandists of new bureaucratic and anti-socialist formations.

The aim of Left Unity is the same, but they have an added difficulty in that the Labour Party—easily the most right-wing among such formations—has suffered no significant defection by the supposed “left” in its ranks. This rump of a few dozen individuals is far too comfortable to strike out in a new vehicle, and is happy to reconcile itself to Labour's ever more pronounced rightward lurch.

For this reason, Left Unity was formed by amalgamating the Thornett group with a split-off from the Socialist Workers Party, the International Socialist Network, as a core. Then come the various ex-members

of pseudo-left outfits, who invariably portray their own tawdry life experiences as proof that “Marxism,” “Leninism” and “Trotskyism” are a “sectarian” diversion for which the workers have no time. To this must be added the leaven of a handful of highly vocal Stalinist die-hards, disenchanted Greens, feminists and other advocates of identity politics. The party is fronted by film director Ken Loach, a long-time political ally of Thornett.

In addition, there are the factions sent in to Left Unity by its left competitors, such as the Socialist Party and the Communist Party of Great Britain/ *Weekly Worker*, who are there in case Left Unity takes off or to win some of the discontented from an expected shipwreck.

Left Unity's own supporters verify such a description of its make-up and purpose. On its web site, Dan Milligan writes a piece entitled “Cuddling up for warmth...or striking out in a new direction?” He speaks of a “dismal scene composed mostly of forty something white men, three or four people of colour, and maybe thirty or forty women,” a meeting “saturated with a wary, and certainly weary scepticism from a mass of people who have seen it all before. Stalwarts and survivors from a raft of other attempts to unify the British left....”

He describes the “strategy implicit in Left Unity's activity” as “establishing practical links with existing left groups and parties...in the hope that the leaderships of far left and revolutionary groups will eventually opt to come into Left Unity.”

Loach was blunter in an interview with *Huffington Post*'s Salma Shaheen, who stressed that the director is “keen to ensure that whoever is leading the project, all shades of opinion are represented, ‘so that everyone's inside the tent pissing out, no one's outside the tent pissing in.’ ”

Proceedings at the conference were extraordinary. This must be the first occasion where a party has been founded with virtually no specified policies and little or no discussion on programme. Instead, the day's events were dominated by nominating a pre-selected leadership, rejecting the platforms advanced by various factions, and adopting a constitution.

A statement of aims was adopted, expressing only a "belief in the benefits of cooperation and community ownership" and "a democratically planned economy...within which all enterprises, whether privately owned, cooperatives, or under public ownership, operate in ways that promote the needs of the people"—i.e., a capitalist economy with some state ownership and regulation, no different to that which existed in Britain for decades in the aftermath of World War II.

Rather than speaking of the liberation of the working class, the aims specified only uniting "individuals and communities facing poverty and social oppression because of gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexuality, employment or under-employment."

This is now complemented by the fact that the "Left Platform," led by Thornett, was alone in winning enough support to be accepted—meaning that its policies become de facto those of Left Unity. The "Socialist Platform," the "Class Struggle Platform," the "Republican Socialist Platform" and "Communist Platform" were by turn rejected by conference.

The debate was undemocratic, with speakers supposedly chosen "prioritising women, black and ethnic minorities, and disabled." Aside from the movers of the various platforms, all eight speakers initially called by chair Liz Davies supported the Left Platform. She was then reluctantly forced to allow three additional delegates to speak in favour of the rest.

The advantage of the Left Platform, as far as most delegates were concerned, is that it says nothing that might alienate the Labour Party and trade union bureaucrats they hope to win. The statement speaks in the vaguest terms of "alternative social, economic and political policies" and the "democratisation of our society, economy, state and political institutions, transforming these arenas in the interests of the majority," based upon "an alternative set of values of equality and justice: socialist, feminist, environmentalist and against all forms of

discrimination." Only then does it speak politely of "redistributing wealth to the working class."

Internationalism is defined as working "with other left organisations and movements in Europe and internationally such as Syriza and Front de Gauche [an electoral coalition of the French Communist Party and the Left Party]" in "common actions."

Loach moved that some of the formulations employed in other platforms be incorporated into a founding statement—published six days later—meaning that the party now references the working class and states that it is socialist and internationalist more prominently.

Opposition platform supporters were in general a picture of humility and contrition, with one stressing, "I'm a revolutionary, but I'm happy to work with people who don't agree with me or believe in revolution."

The discussion on the platforms took proceedings up to the lunch break. The bulk of the afternoon session (three-and-a-half hours) was occupied with discussions on the constitution. A half hour of spare time was dedicated to agreeing to support a victimised trade unionist.

Only the most politically corrupt would have accepted such an agenda without demur. But for the most part, only the most politically corrupt were in attendance. They were not there to build a "party" in any commonly understood sense of the term, but to lay down the organisational framework, conditions and requirements for collaboration in facing a common political enemy.

Ultimately, the intention of bringing everyone under one roof is to oppose the only force that cannot and will not be incorporated into such a filthy opportunist block—the Socialist Equality Party and the International Committee of the Fourth International, which represent the Trotskyism so often employed as a term of abuse by supporters of Left Unity.



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