

Britain's Left Unity lays out its right-wing policies

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Left Unity's national conference in Manchester was attended by just 200 or so people—half of the numbers in attendance at its founding conference less than five months ago. The conference was to lay down the party's policies, after it was founded without any being specified.

Consisting primarily of the detritus from various pseudo-left groups, Left Unity pretends to be a socialist alternative to the Labour Party. Writing in the *Guardian* in advance of the conference, the director Ken Loach complained, "The Labour party is part of the problem, not the solution. The Greens have many admirable policies, but we look in vain for a thoroughgoing analysis for fundamental change. We need a new voice, a new movement—a new party."

This is window dressing. Left Unity has no intention of organising a fight against Labour, much less building a socialist party. 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 modelled on the "broad left" parties in Europe—SYRIZA (Coalition of the Radical Left) in Greece, Die Linke in Germany—with the aim of preventing a rebellion against the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

This was made apparent at the conference. The motion on Left Unity's economic policy was presented and agreed with barely any discussion. Blaming "neo-liberalism" for the rise of social inequality over the last 30 years, it presents a list of minimal reforms within the vague framework of a "vision" of a "society organised on completely different principles from those which govern capitalism."

It states that Left Unity is in favour of "an internationalism which recognises that in a world of global capital and finance we cannot put an end to capitalism in one country alone nor abolish Britain's reliance on exchange and trade with both Europe and the rest of the world."

In the hands of the Pabloites, et al., this statement is cynically employed not to mount an international struggle against capitalism but to justify opposing revolution and the abolition of capitalism anywhere.

Behind all the phoney debate on "Robin Hood" taxes and

the minimum wage, Left Unity's real political relationship to capital was made clear in the debate on the European Union.

The economy motion stated, "We are for joining with others across Europe to campaign for a different form of European Union, a 'socialist reconstruction', as called for by the 4th Congress of the European Left Party."

The European Left comprises 25 parties, mostly with roots in the former Stalinist parties. Last year, it elected Alexis Tsipras, chairman of SYRIZA, as its leading candidate.

While it bemoans austerity, it is a loyal upholder of the European Union, claiming that it can be reformed by "restructuring" the European Central Bank and organising a write-down of "illegitimate" debt.

Tsipras has made clear a SYRIZA government will work within the framework of the European Union (EU) and has indicated the European Left's desire to build alliances with some among the social democratic parties who are largely responsible for piloting austerity in the first instance.

This is the programme adopted by Left Unity. A motion submitted by Crouch End and carried by conference calls for the "refoundation of Europe...based on solidarity, social justice and popular sovereignty."

It claims that "If the current choices are upheld [i.e., austerity] the EU will increasingly be reduced to an authoritarian management board and producer of social regression, threatening any idea of solidarity and European justice."

One would never know that the EU has been the instrument through which the European bourgeoisie and its banks have imposed mass spending cuts and layoffs across the continent that have already produced a "social regression" in Greece and elsewhere not seen outside of a war.

It continues, "For us, there is no question of waiting for the European Union to crumble, and for the monsters that could emerge from the rubble, nor of promoting nationalist solutions setting the peoples against one another."

Once again, the false presentation is made that the only

alternative to the EU is a descent into nationalism and reaction. Ruled out a priori is an independent perspective for the working class, based on a unified struggle to abolish capitalism and establish a United Socialist States of Europe.

Having set up an Aunt Sally, Left Unity allies itself with the EU and the “monsters” it has already unleashed of poverty, mass unemployment and, especially under circumstances in which the European bourgeoisie is backing US and NATO provocations against Russia, the danger of nuclear war.

The motion from Milton Keynes Left Unity states, “Left Unity opposes all programmes and demands for a British withdrawal from the European Union. By the same measure we oppose the EU of commissioners, corruption and capital.

“However, as the political, bureaucratic and economic elite has created the reality of a confederal EU, the working class should take it, not the narrow limits of the nation-state, as its decisive point of departure.”

On this basis, conference endorsed calls for “Power to the European parliament” and a “democratically controlled European Central Bank.”

“There is no question that the EU is an anti-working class institution”, the resolution proclaims, but it holds out that it can be transformed nonetheless.

Left Unity might as well commit itself to transforming the Conservative Party into a tool of workers’ liberation—although the subject closer to Left Unity’s heart is of course the Labour and trade union bureaucracy.

It is noticeable that while the EU must be defended at all costs, the same does not apply to the United Kingdom.

Conference was divided on its attitude to September’s referendum on Scottish independence.

Glasgow Left Unity had proposed a compromise motion stating that there should be no support for Scottish or Welsh nationalism, or for the “quasi-democratic status quo” in the UK. Individual members should be “free to campaign both for and against Scottish independence,” it argued.

Time and again, the argument was made that the break-up of the UK was progressive, that anything that damaged the British state must be supported, etc. In the end, an amendment to remove the motion’s opposition to Scottish and Welsh nationalism was carried.

One can only make sense of conference decisions when one understands that Left Unity’s policies are not determined by political principles but by the class interests of the petty-bourgeois layer that make up its number. Whether or not something can be “transformed” depends on whether it aids their social advancement. The EU gravy-train, with its handouts for political activists, NGOs and academic think tanks, gets the green light, as does Scottish and Welsh nationalism, because it offers the opportunity of getting a

seat at the table of power.

That is also why conference endorsed the journalist and Labour Party “activist” Owen Jones’s nine-point “agenda for hope”. Jones is openly hostile to socialist revolution and has stipulated that it is not possible to build anything outside of the Labour Party. He has described his “agenda” as “common-sense, mainstream ideas” that are “backed even by Conservative voters.”

A motion for unifying the smaller “left” groups into one organisation was defeated. As various speakers made clear, Left Unity does not want to be identified in any way with Trotskyism or revolution—even of the fake variety—which was dismissed as “ideological lumber”. When it speaks about “unity” it is with the Greens, the Labour “left” and the trade union bureaucracy.

To this end conference endorsed the Stalinist-led Peoples Assembly, while leaving open the possibility of electoral agreements with Greens, Labour and others.

Its role in opposing any expression of independent political activity by the working class was summed up in the debate on the trade unions.

A motion on the need to build relations with the trade unions was carried, while an amendment calling for Left Unity to orient “to the rank and file of the trade unions above privileging any relationship with left-wing officials, because we recognise that union leaders, lefts as well as right-wingers, are prone to compromise and call off action at the decisive moment” was defeated.

Amid calls to throw out the “sectarian methods of the left”, it was Thornett, fittingly, who gave the official imprimatur to the defence of the trade union bureaucracy.

The amendment was a “big problem,” he said, and would be “disastrous” because it would stop Left Unity building support among “left” trade union leaders, such as the recently deceased Rail, Maritime and Transport trade union Bob Crow. It was those like Crow, he said, that had to be won to “Left Unity if we are to have any influence” in the trade unions at all.



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