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Left Unity policy conference 2014

How to vote on March 29

Communist Platform recommendations for today's conference

Left Unity's de facto method of organising overloaded agendas in one-day meetings, making any serious discussion of individual issues impossible, is irrational and undemocratic. It would have been better to limit the agenda to allow proper discussion of fewer issues. The same can be said of the more fundamental alternative: that LU should have gone for a two-day delegate conference (even then on a more limited agenda) to enable a proper discussion.

It is clear that discussion of all of the issues on today's agenda will be severely cramped. There will be 70 minutes to get through all the motions on the economy and austerity. For a number of motions, listed at the back of the pack, time has not been allocated; and the various resolutions on aspects of building LU have, rightly, been referred to the incoming national council.

Certainly none of the motions for which time has not been allocated will be reached. To the extent that this concerns motions put forward by individual members, this is in theory justifiable under the constitution adopted in November; but there are question marks over the political choices made by the standing orders committee, which has included some individual motions under the relevant agenda headings, but has omitted others, and some branch motions. These are perhaps legitimate political choices, but in the absence of a published explanation of the reasoning it is hard to see what the ground of the choices is.

Despite this pruning of the agenda, it will still clearly be too tight and we should expect at least section 8 (foreign policy, etc) to drop off. Cardiff, Crouch End and Hackney have rightly proposed that the foreign policy commission document should be referred back. It would be better, therefore, to have this vote at the beginning of the conference, in order to enable the SOC to re-timetable.

Austerity, economic policy

The 'economics policy' commission document (No1) should be referred back: it is written too much within the framework of imagining that the UK can on its own break with the main lines of the dominant policy of the international capitalist class,



How should Left Unity challenge the austerity consensus?

and is in consequence unrealistic. It is not clear if there will be an opportunity to move reference-back. If not, a vote against the document would be appropriate.

However, some of the amendments would worsen it and others would improve it. The commission's arguments for rejecting the 'unconditional basic income' proposal are sound, and the amendments proposed by Leamington Spa (1A) and by Micheline and Christine Wilson (1B) should therefore be rejected.

Brighton and Hove's amendment 1C to add that "We would disregard intellectual property rights where those rights pertain to inalienable natural commons ..." is weak - there is a strong case even for free marketeers, let alone for socialists, for the complete abolition of intellectual property rights. But it is an improvement on the existing text and should be supported. Manchester's amendment 1D adds the useful point that an LU government would be willing to use expropriation as a means of coercing capitalist sabotage and should be supported. Lambeth's amendments (1E), on raising the state pension to median income levels, on placing the economy "in the hands of the

majority" and democratic decision-making, on a 35-hour week without loss of pay, the abolition of VAT, and raising the top rate of income tax to 90%, are all supportable.

The Class Struggle Platform's 'programme for resistance' (2) is a combination of minimalist and utterly vague proposals. It was also already out of date in November 2013 and is even more so now. It should be rejected.

West London (as amended by Sheffield and Loughborough - No3) proposes a unity approach to anti-cuts campaigning: clearly correct. Southwark (4) proposes a campaign for a 21-hour week - more radical than the commission's 35-hour week, but not strictly counterposed. This idea should be supported. The Manchester Central/Manchester South motion on zero-hours contracts has been improved by Oxford's amendment to add in working with trade unions (5); it should be supported.

Bristol, as amended by Barnet (6), calls for support for Owen Jones' 'Agenda for hope', and for LU to affiliate to the People's Assembly. It is quite right for LU to affiliate to the People's Assembly. But the 'Agenda for hope' is another Britain-only utopia. For this reason, if the resolution cannot be taken in parts, a vote against is appropriate. Norwich (7) offers another 'action

programme'. Brighton and Hove (7A) have correctly proposed that this "needs more work and should be remitted".

Birmingham (8) proposes a campaign against the proposed US-EU trade deal (TTIP). The reasoning is national-sovereignty based and thus unsound, but the substantive proposal is supportable.

Leicester's motion on Atos (9) is slightly dated, given the company's announced withdrawal from its contract, but makes the fundamentally correct point that "in so far as an assessment of particular individual needs is necessary, it should be undertaken by properly qualified professional experts". Glasgow (9A), for some reason, proposes to amend this by adding at the end "... who are in full-time work within the DWP". Why this is appropriate is not obvious: why would it not be appropriate for an assessment to be made by, for example, the claimant's own GP or relevant specialist? Glasgow's amendment should be rejected and Leicester's motion should be passed.

Wandsworth (10) proposes to "make it illegal to leave a person destitute: ie, without any money to live on". This proposal should be rejected. Who would be charged with this proposed crime? If it were actually to be adopted in legislation, it would no doubt be some poor sod of a junior official in a benefits office who got charged, not the senior policy-makers.

Health, housing

The health policy commission document (11) is supportable. The two amendments by Hackney (11A - one to add to the "immediate demands", and the other attacking "big pharma") should be supported. Lambeth's amendment (11B), directed against conflicts of interest in persons responsible for NHS purchasing, merely states the current law. It is therefore redundant, but mostly harmless and should be passed. Islington, West London and

Barnet's composite (12) calling for a unitary approach to campaigns for the defence of the NHS is clearly correct and should be passed. Birmingham's motion on defence of the NHS (13) appears to be redundant, duplicating material in the policy commission document, but if put to the vote should be supported.

All the housing motions should be supported, with the exception of the Farnos/Healy LGBT caucus motion (17). The main problem with this motion is its sectionalist method: it makes (mostly sound) proposals for general housing policy, but motivates them entirely by the suggested concerns of a particular section (lesbians, gay men and trans people).

Both Liverpool's motion (14) and the LGBT caucus motion contain a small error: the demand to "re-legalise rent strikes". Since rent strikes have never been legal (until 1977 they amounted to criminal conspiracy, and since then have continued to amount to tortious conspiracy), the right word would be 'legalise'. But, apart from making LU look slightly silly, the error does not affect the substance.

Liverpool's motion also contains the proposal that "Housing should be aesthetically pleasing to the eye and take into account existing designs of properties in the local area". In fact, diversity of housing provision and mixed-use neighbourhoods are most likely to produce the aesthetic merits aimed at. Nonetheless, this minor weakness - the motion is supportable.

West London's amendment 14A to Liverpool's motion, in support of housing cooperatives, should be supported. Lee Rock and Sarah McDonald have composed their motion on housing with Milton Keynes's 16 (both are derived from the Communist Platform model) and propose the remaining difference as an amendment (16A). So Milton Keynes calls for rents set at an "affordable" level, and Rock/McDonald,

following our original model, for them to be set at a "token" level. The substance of the difference is that the Communist Platform believes housing provision can and should be taken wholly into the need-based sector.

Europe, migration

The first item on this agenda point is No18, the anti-racism policy group's document on migration policy. This document is substantially better than the general 'anti-racism policy' document produced by this group, but is still written within the framework of the sectionalism dominant on the left, and also consists to a large extent of factual claims which will result in its becoming rapidly obsolete. We would argue for reference-back with an instruction to strip it down to the core of long-term policy proposals. But if - as seems likely - there is no opportunity to move reference-back or this fails, the essential policy proposals in the document are supportable and we are recommending that comrades vote for it.

No19, from Crouch End, supporting the European Left Party's declaration for a "refoundation of Europe", has been weakened by the acceptance of West London's amendment, adding that "There is no question that the EU is an anti-working class institution and we support the struggles against ... ongoing neoliberal attacks which are intrinsic to the EU": true enough, but in this context it omits to mention that the UK is also an anti-working class institution and "neoliberal attacks" are equally intrinsic to it (through its dependence on City finance), so that the effect of the amendment is to convey the impression that the EU is more anti-working class than the UK, which is straightforwardly false. Nonetheless, in spite of these weasel words, the motion is supportable.

Southwark's motion 20 on LU's stance in the 2014 EU elections - urging neutrality except where regions decide otherwise, where there is a threat of a "fascist or xenophobic" victory - should be rejected. The idea that LU should automatically be neutral where the choice is between Labour and Conservatives is nonsense: the Conservatives are as "xenophobic" as the UK Independence Party. We should not automatically call for a Labour vote - among other reasons because there may be better left candidates; but we should not make neutrality the starting point.

The AWL-model motion in its two forms from Lambeth (21) and Manchester/Barstow and Cashman (22), is also support-

Free movement: a right or a privilege?





House of horror: how does Left Unity utilise elections?

lated, though not identical, to the 'Agenda for hope'). This is the opposite error to the auto-anti-Labourism of Southwark's 20 and Lambeth's point 5 in No21, turning LU into a mere pressure group. It should be rejected.

Northampton's motion 28 on defending the right to protest, especially on campuses, is supportable. So is Glasgow's motion 29 on support for Edward Snowden.

It is odd to have an agenda item, part of which is on 'the state', and then exclude from this item Norwich's motion 49 on the monarchy and House of Lords, Tina Becker's and Peter Manson's No53 on democracy, Emily Orford's and James Turley's No54 on freedom of information, and Moshé Machover's and Steve Cooke's No55 on governmental power (the last three from Communist Platform): we are going to talk about 'the state', but only about concrete instances of repression, not about general principles. Perhaps this reflects the desire of some LU people to dodge the choice between constitutional loyalism and pursuit of independent working class politics. This is also reflected in the Manchester and West London amendments to the Europe motions, which falsely present the EU as more anti-working class than the UK's constitutional monarchy.

Trade unions, environment

Composite 30 from Sheffield, as amended by West London and Birmingham, should be supported. So should amendment 30A from Lambeth and West London's motion 31, which makes more elementary but still correct points.

The environment motions are also all supportable, though they would clearly have benefitted from more compositing and editing. Southwark's motion 32 on floods and climate change is largely composed of a newspaper-style article, but the substantive policy proposals at the end are sound.

Milton Keynes's motion 33 on the environment, based on the Communist Platform's model, is more general in character; we obviously support it. We also obviously support Michael Copestake's and Robert Eagleton's amendment 33A to restore to it the point from the model version that that not all wealth under capitalism is created by workers.

We oppose Lambeth's amendment 33B, which would delete the point that "Concrete jungles, urban sprawl, huge farms and uninterrupted industrialised agriculture are profoundly alienating and inhuman. Towns and cities should be full of trees, roof gardens,

able. Manchester proposes four amendments (21A) to Lambeth's version. The first and third should be rejected. Contrary to the first, opposing entry to the euro (in reality, this is not a live issue) is a British nationalist position. Rejecting the statement is just flat-earthism. The motivation offered for opposing euro entry ignores the equally undemocratic and unaccountable character of the Bank of England (and its undemocratic and unaccountable character when it was formally nationalised).

Manchester's second amendment would substitute "For a Europe of democratic socialist states" for the original's "For a European workers' government". 'Workers' government' slogans in the abstract are pretty meaningless, but "For a Europe of democratic socialist states" promotes socialism-in-one-country politics. This amendment should also be opposed.

The third amendment is to delete from the original "To refuse support from LU as an organisation to all non-working class parties and candidates and all parties supporting cuts, austerity and privatisation of our services". This amendment should be supported for the same reason that Southwark's motion 20 should be opposed: we should not be completely and automatically neutral between the open representatives of capital (Tories, etc) and the Labour Party, which claims by its name to represent the independent interests of the working class.

Crouch End's alternative amendment to this point - to add at the end of the original paragraph 5 "without excluding the possibility of specific discussions, for example with the Green Party, over how to ensure that a far-right or fascist candidate is not elected" - should be rejected. It reflects the common illusion that the Greens are part of the left - and is nonsense, since, where there is a real threat of a far-right candidate being elected, LU support for the Greens would not make the slightest difference to the outcome.

West London (22A) proposes to delete

the paragraph in the Manchester/Barstow and Cashman version which identifies demanding withdrawal from the EU as British nationalist. This proposal should be rejected, on the same grounds as Manchester's proposal to amend Lambeth's point 3: it is flat-earthist.

Milton Keynes' motion 23, also moved by Sarah McDonald and Phil Kent, is our own proposal from the Communist Platform and we obviously support it. The argument of the SOC that the motion should automatically fall if motion 22 and amendment 22A are carried is anti-democratic. While amendment 22A would delete the opposition to EU withdrawal from motion 22, it would put nothing in its place. Even if the two resulting motions are counter, they should be voted against each other.

Electoral strategy, the state

Rugby's motion 24, calling for steps towards "one party of the left" is correct and should be passed. The same is true of Pete McLaren's and Dave Landau's motion 27 calling for discussions to avoid clashes and for electoral pacts in the 2015 general election.

What was previously Crouch End's motion to the November founding conference and West London's and Huddersfield's amendments to it is now motion 25, put forward in the name of West London. The amendments improve the motion, but leave in place the 'poison pill' that the best (election campaigns with local mass support) is made the enemy of the good (election campaigns as a means of winning local mass support). It should be rejected. So should Rugby's amendment 25A, allowing local LU groups to contest elections, but to choose "under what electoral label they stand". This would leave LU merely as an umbrella group for the left status quo ante.

Bristol's motion 26 calls for prospective Green and Labour candidates to join us in campaigning for an eight-point plan (re-

planted walls, allotments, wild parks and little farms." It is not clear what the point of this amendment is.

The Stockport and Manchester composite 34 on fracking is also clearly to be supported.

Anti-racism, national question

This agenda item consists of the anti-racism policy group's main document, plus three resolutions on the national question. We would urge reference-back of the former (35). It is framed by the assumptions of sectionalism and 'intersectionality'; it fails to recognise the existence of forms of nativism, particularly against European migrants, which cannot be characterised as 'racism'; and it fails to recognise the existence of systems of carrot-based divide and rule, under which the state treats certain 'elders' of particular BME 'communities' as authoritative interlocutors and beneficiaries of largesse from central and local government. Reference-back would allow these serious problems to be corrected and some of the worthwhile policies proposed to be adopted on a clearer basis - or at least a fuller debate. If it is not referred back, we would recommend a vote against.

We support Glasgow's motion 36 on internationalism and the national question, and oppose Cardiff's amendment 36A to remove "Left Unity will not support Scottish or Welsh nationalism". We also oppose West London's amendment 36B, for reasons referred to above in connection with the Europe agenda point.

This obviously implies opposition to Steve Freeman's and Russell Caplan's motion 37 (supported by Southwark and Worcester), which is in substance advocacy of a 'yes' vote in the coming referendum on Scots independence.

We support Ben Lewis's and Justin Constantinou's motion 38, which is our model motion offering a strategic alternative policy on the national question.

Foreign policy

We urge reference-back of the foreign policy commission document (39) - it is incoherent and informed by 'socialism in one country' ideas. It is good that Crouch End, Cardiff and Hackney (39A) are all proposing to refer it back, and this proposal should clearly be supported. An alternative refer-back version with positive directions from Hackney appears out of logical order as No39C. How this will be voted is not clear, but presumably the Hackney version, 39C, will be subsumed in the general proposal; if not, it is supportable.

If reference-back fails, amendments will be taken from Crouch End, Nottingham,



Lambeth and Leicester. Crouch End's amendments (39B) are hard to follow; they appear to be within the same incoherent general framework as the policy commission document and should be rejected. Nottingham's amendment (39D) usefully stresses Britain's imperialist past and present, and should be supported. Lambeth's (39E) also stresses the issue of imperialism and is supportable. Leicester's motion 41 is effectively an amendment to the policy commission document, urging unilateral nuclear disarmament, and should be supported.

Leicester's motion 40 on setting up an international exchange programme for youth is in principle supportable, but should be remitted to the national council to address the issue more concretely. If not, vote in favour.

Manchester's motion 42 on the Syrian civil war should be supported. Sheffield's amendment 42A, reducing point 1 of the positive policy recommendations to "Oppose all foreign intervention in the Syrian civil war" strengthens the resolution by simplifying it, and should also be supported.

The composite motion 43 on Palestine and the boycott, divestment and sanction campaign from Waltham Forest, Glasgow and York is stronger than either of the motions previously circulated. It is true that advocates of BDS sometimes draw an illusory parallel with the fall of apartheid in South Africa, which actually resulted from the unionisation of black workers and the fall of the USSR, removing the geopolitical need of the USA to support the apartheid regime. The point of boycott campaigns is, however, solidarity in symbolism; and this resolution commits LU to no more than participating in this solidarity in symbolic rejection of the settler-colonial regime in Israel. It should be supported.

Motion 44 on war and peace from Milton Keynes is a modified version of the Communist Platform model and we urge support for it. Also, we support the amendment from Yasmine Mather and Mike Macnair, which would restore to the motion the point

Soldiers of mercy: a force for good?

in the original model that "Peace cannot come courtesy of bodies such as the United Nations - an assembly of exploiters and murderers. It is the duty of socialists to connect the popular desire for peace with the aims of revolution. Only by disarming the bourgeoisie and through the victory of international socialism can the danger of war be eliminated." Illusions in the UN should be combated.

Motion 45 from Mark Fischer and David Isaacson on the standing army and people's militia is again a Communist Platform model motion and we support it. It draws out the concrete implications of a really defensive policy.

Others

The remaining policy motions, 46-55, are very unlikely to be taken, since time has not been allocated for them. In the unlikely event that any of them are put to the vote, here are our recommendations.

Leicester's No46 on art and culture is inoffensive, but should be referred to the national council. Nottinghamshire's motion 47 on sex workers proposes merely to move police powers and the 'unlawfulness' of prostitution around. The LGBT caucus's amendment 47A would draw the sting and should be supported; if that is not passed, the motion should be rejected.

Birmingham's motion 48 on a "listening campaign" is a Blairite proposal for policy-making by focus group and should be rejected. Norwich (49) on the monarchy should be supported. Nottinghamshire (50) identifies politics in terms of intersectionalism and should be rejected.

Ian Donovan's and Simon Wells' No51 on crime is a Communist Platform model and should be supported. Nos53-55 are Communist Platform model motions on fundamental issues about the state structure, and should be passed

HAVE A GOOD CONFERENCE!