

Britain: Left Unity launched

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The founding conference of Left Unity, the broad left party formed in response to the call prompted by Ken Loach's film Spirit of '45 detailing the left-wing acts of the 1945 Labour government in Britain, took place in London on 30 November 2013. This report is republished from Socialist Resistance, journal of the British section of the Fourth International. [IVP]

The first indication that Left Unity is different from most other left wing organisations came very early in its November 30th founding conference. Ken Loach, the person who is seen as having given the inspiration for the launch of the new party, proposed that we shouldn't take a decision on which of the political platforms to endorse. Ken lost the vote and conference moved on to next business. There was no dramatic tension, no sense of impending crisis. It would have been hard to imagine a similar scene at a Respect conference. [1] It was a very promising omen.

Around 400 people attended the event. The morning sessions was given over to a discussion on platforms - documents which were intended to establish the general framework of Left Unity's politics. Socialist Resistance was strongly behind the Left Party Platform which we think defines Left Unity as a radical socialist party with strong positions on ecology and feminism. To various degrees the other platforms wanted to define the new party as an explicitly revolutionary one.

The existing interim leadership received what was effectively a vote of confidence. Members voted to allow it to remain in place until a new leadership is elected at a conference to be held by the end of March.

The Left Party Platform (LPP) won convincingly with 295 votes in favour and 101 against. The Socialist Platform was supported by 122 members and opposed by 216. The significance of this is that it failed to win much support beyond the list of people who had originally signed the statement proposing it. By contrast the LPP got the endorsement of the majority of Left Unity's members in the hall.

Another thing that made the conference rather different was that it was impossible to predict which way any of the votes would go. This was hardly surprising as most of the participants were strangers to each other. A vigorous debate on the safer spaces policy saw conference agree to refer it back for further discussion. [2] While most participants understood the need for guidelines on protecting members from harassment and abuse the conference clearly felt that such a complex policy needed more time spent on it.

The afternoon was taken up with a long and intricate discussion on the constitution. From our perspective a crucial clause here was one which would have enabled Left Unity to organise in the north of Ireland. This emblem of the weight of British imperialism on the country's labour movement was removed. [3]

More explicitly than other attempts to launch new political parties Left Unity has set out to tackle issues of gender imbalances. It has a commitment to women comprising at least 50% of its

leadership and speeches in defence of male privilege were received coolly, this despite the fact that men were over-represented in the hall. Left Unity is set to be a self-consciously feminist organisation. [4]

Although the party only formally launched on November 30th it already has over 1200 members, 400 of whom were sufficiently committed or able to attend its first conference. That is a small but significant base which already makes it one of the largest organisations on the British left. It has come into being at a tricky time. There are local government elections in May 2014 and a general election the following year. Labour will win most of the anti-coalition votes as people want to punish the Tories and it will be hard to win a big audience for a new left wing party. But there is an audience for such a party. Many people will vote Labour with no great enthusiasm and will want a party that articulates something better, different, radical and socialist. Now Left Unity is there for them.

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P.S.

* From International Viewpoint. <http://www.internationalviewpoint.org/>

Footnotes

[1] An electoral coalition launched after the success of the 2003 mobilizations against the war in Iraq whose most prominent figure was MP George Galloway, formerly of the Labour Party. For more on this see on ESSF (article 30462), "[Broad parties and the fight for left unity in Britain](#)".

[2] This document laid out a series of rules and norms concerning behaviour of party members, notably in relation to sexist behaviour.

[3] For more on this see on ESSF (article 30565), "[Ireland isn't England - English based progressive parties should not organise in Ireland](#)".

[4] Left Unity also voted to allow women-only meetings.