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Britain

Build a Broad Left Party, fight for Marxist Unity

- Debate - Building new parties of the left -

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Phil Hearse made this submission to the April 2013 Socialist Resistance conference. The position it sets out was accepted by the organisation.

Comrades, we face major opportunities in the next period to help work towards a new broad left party and a refounded Marxist regroupment in this country. The left – and its far left component in particular – is undergoing a profound shake up, the precise contours of which none of us can yet see. The left that comes out of the next two years in England and Wales will look very different to the way it looks now. Our task is to grab that opportunity with both hands.

On the train out of Clapham Junction station you can see the big PCS building on which hangs a huge banner: “Austerity isn’t working, support our alternative”. When even George Osborne’s old buddy, the IMF’s Christine Lagarde is saying the austerity is going too far in the UK, the need for an alternative is obvious. But Labour promises nothing – not a single pledge about the future will they give. Most people don’t know what the PCS’s alternative is: a radical alternative is all but absent from the national political framework.

Ken Loach didn’t launch ‘an appeal’ for a broad left party, it was just an opinion in an Open Democracy interview that an SR supporter put on their website, and it was picked up by Andrew Burgin for Left Unity in a very intelligent way. It was made ‘an appeal’ by popular acclaim. The fact that now more than 7000 people have signed shows the political space that has been opened and which Left Unity has walked in to, without major national political figures heading it up. That’s a disadvantage but also an advantage – Respect was always too beholden to the vagaries of George Galloway. But we can now say we have a much better platform to fight for a broad left party.

There is still a long way to go to move towards a real national political party type formation – whether it will call itself a ‘party’ is open for debate and not the crucial issue. The crucial question is how it operates – democratically and not by top down diktat, open to the social movements and mass campaigns and of course standing in local elections. But one thing must be clear from the outset. You must build a national political framework with a name that is known and used in elections. Infinite fronts, committees and local alliances don’t get you that national profile and national recognition.

In any case how does fighting for a broad left party chime in with revolutionary regroupment? Some people will say once you have a broader framework, then why do you need a Marxist organisation? I disagree with that unless you have something like the early SSP experience in which the decisive section of the broad party leadership are the Marxists themselves. The old Militant Labour decided to set up the International Socialist Movement inside the SSP, but it flopped. Everybody asked: why do we have to go to two meetings a week to discuss the same issues? Of course that’s a nice problem to have in some ways, but it wouldn’t work in England and Wales with a really broad party. Then the organisation of a Marxist trend would be an inevitable and vital development.

It is obvious that there is an objective convergence going on with the ACI and the ISN saying a lot of the same things that we are about revolutionary organisation today. But this moment won’t last: organisations that don’t come together soon find reasons for staying apart.

You could say that Socialist Resistance has prefigured the critique of sclerotic archaetrotskyism for a long while, but that’s only partly true. It’s true that many of the things said by the AI and ISN have been themes in our politics for a long time – internal democracy, feminism, a less sectarian attitude to the rest of the left – in fact going back to the Fourth International documents on women’s liberation and Socialist Democracy at the 1979 world congress. But other comrades, particularly crystallised in the book by Luke Copper and Simon Hardy [\[1\]](#) have deepened this

critique and allowed us to see the crisis of the sect formation in a new and more profound way. They have helped develop our thinking on these things as well.

An exciting prospect

I think that we should adopt the algebraic formula 'for Marxist unity' or 'a united democratic revolutionary organisation', but the arithmetic content we should for the moment advance is a unification of the AI, ISN and SR as a platform within the Left Unity. A united democratic revolutionary tendency would be a major force for opening up the path to a new broad left party and would be a permanent rebuke to the sects. It would have a powerful attraction within the far left and hopefully be much more capable of opening up a dialogue with radical youth. This is an exciting prospect: it would open up the road to a major renewal of left and revolutionary forces.

It's a big pity that Counterfire for the moment has not evinced any enthusiasm for Left Unity or for the regroupment process. In the longer term their view can change if the regroupment process takes off. And of course we will be continuing to work with them in the Coalition of Resistance and Stop the War. We should also be supportive of the Firebox initiative and publicise Neil Faulkner's book [\[2\]](#) etc.

But of course there will be subjective problems at a national and local level. Comrades who've been in competing organisations often developed less than comradely personal relations, and indeed the snarling, dismissive and cynical factionalism of the sects is a way their leaderships wall off their members from competing groups and ideas. We have to get over this and see the bigger picture. In particular we have to get over any temptation to have a superior or lecturing attitude because we saw some of these problems earlier.

If we did start thinking about some of these things earlier than others, by the way, it was mainly because of our links with the Fourth International. Our discussions were always heavily influenced by international experiences, for example the Left Bloc in Portugal, the PT and then the PSOL in Brazil, the Communist Refoundation and Sinistra Critica, the RMP in the Philippines etc. I think we should also say to some of us, like me in particular, spent too much time in the 80s and early 90s criticising what comrades elsewhere were doing (although on some questions we were obviously right). In any case we need to change our mindset on the Fourth International profoundly. We should stop regarding this treasure trove of experiences, this invaluable network of revolutionary cadres internationally as our personal property as far as Britain is concerned. The experiences of revolutionary militants internationally in the framework of the Fourth International should become of the common patrimony (matrimony?) of all those committed to building a democratic Marxist unity, not a badge of honour through which we divide ourselves off from others and recruit to ourselves.

The youth camp in Greece is a good opportunity to start this process by the way. I know comrades from the ACI are going and I hope people from the ISN will go as well.

[\[1\]](#) Luke Cooper and Simon Hardy, *Beyond Capitalism?*, Zero Books 2012

[\[2\]](#) Neil Faulkner, *A Marxist History of the World*, Pluto Press 2013