THE LACK OF STRATEGIC IMAGINATION WITHIN LEFT UNITY BY PHIL SHARPE

Critical interpretation of two important policy documents passed at policy meetings of Left Unity indicates a serious lack of strategic imagination.(1) What is not explained is how the policies outlined in the documents can be realised. Instead we have policy represented without any connection to the methods or means by which they can be realised. In other words we have the justification of a lack of strategic imagination which results in the implicit acceptance of a reformist type of standpoint. The economic policy document has a reasonable introduction in terms of the description of the effects of the economic crisis and the introduction of austerity policy. It outlines how the results of the actions of the Coalition government are to uphold the interests of the rich and powerful. The conclusion made is that: “Radical measures are necessary to ensure a transformation in the economic structure and a reversal of the damage inflicted over the last thirty years of attacks waged by the rich and powerful on the rest of us.”(2) This is a moral statement that lacks any concrete validity in terms of its failure to outline how this standpoint can be realised. Instead we are meant to be persuaded by the moral force of the argument and therefore gloss over the inability to connect means to ends. Crucially the document does not outline what should be the strategy that would enable these radical measures to be implemented. Instead in a completely absurd and irrational manner the policy document makes an ultimatum to the existing reactionary government that it should reverse cuts to public spending, end privatisation of public sector services, abolish zero-hour contracts, raise the minimum wage to the level of a living wage, and transform the tax system to benefit the poor instead of the rich. The implication is that these demands are an expression of ‘common sense’ and so could be realised by the ‘goodwill’ of reasonable people. What is not acknowledged is that the only common sense recognised by the existing government is the aim of ending the deficit and establishing a surplus. According to the Institute of Fiscal Studies the realisation of this aim will require £55 billion additional cuts between 2015 and 2019. These cuts will be on top of the £35 billion cuts that have been made in the years 2010-2014.

In other words the policy document does not recognise the extent of the polarisation caused by the austerity policy. There is a popular opposition to austerity but it has not been mobilised because of the unwillingness of the trade union leaders to wage struggle against the deflationary actions of the government. The only manner in which the economic standpoint of austerity could in any way be ended or even modified is if a mass movement of opposition develops. This process will involve ideological struggle against the ideas of the ruling class that have made austerity acceptable and the related development of a strategy that can unite the various diverse strata of the working class against this policy. (3) Only in relation to the promotion of a mass movement of struggle could we contemplate the possibility that the reforms advocated by Left Unity would become feasible. This prospect would express a situation in which the Coalition government would consider that the alternative to the implementation of these reforms would be revolution. In other words what would make reforms realistic would be progress in the class struggle to the extent that the Coalition government considered its very survival was in jeopardy. But this is not the context in which the advocates of Left Unity make their demands instead they make abstract ultimatums that lack any strategic validity, and in a rationalist manner assume that the moral logic and truthfulness of their standpoint will somehow realise their reformist demands. Hence it is not possible to realise reform if the very aspect of its relation to revolution is repudiated. This is the point made by Lenin in 1916: “Reforms do not, of course, exclude revolution. But that is not the point at issue. The point is that revolutionaries must not exclude themselves, not give way to reformism, i.e. that socialists should not substitute reformist work for their revolutionary work.”(4) This is precisely the error being made by the supporters of Left Unity because they consider that it is possible to influence the reactionary Coalition government in a reformist direction and so create the conditions for the introduction of its minimum programme. This is an illusion. The government is seriously committed to its austerity policy and is determined to continue this deflationary approach in the period of the next Parliament. Consequently the only possibility to undermine this commitment is in relation to the success of a mass movement that has the perspective of bringing about the overthrow of the government. Thus if the Coalition government was to implement the collection of reforms demanded by Left Unity it would only be the result of an action of self-preservation resulting from the progress of the mass movement. Hence the alternative to this reformist package would be revolution as a result of the dynamic logic of collective mass struggle. However Left Unity makes no mention of this type of scenario instead it outlines its support for structural change in a manner that has little relationship to the role of class struggle. The vague suggestion is that the election of Left government will enable it to realise its programme of the transformation of society. This standpoint is similar to the Second International separation of the minimum and maximum programme, as explained by Trotsky: “Classical Social Democracy, functioning in an epoch of progressive capitalism, divided its programme into two parts independent of each other: the minimum programme, which limited itself to reforms within the framework of bourgeois society, and the maximum programme, which promised the substitution of socialism for capitalism in the indefinite future. Between the minimum and maximum programme, no bridge existed.”(5)

This strategic problem of Social Democracy is manifest in the perspective of Left Unity. There is no ‘bridge’ between the possible implementation of the minimum platform and the ultimate realisation of socialism. This is because of the complete absence of the role of mass and collective struggle by the working class to both realise the proposed reforms and to then create a momentum that would result in the realisation of a revolutionary process. Instead in abstract the principles of an alternative society are articulated. The conception of socialism is not connected to the importance and character of mass struggle and is instead related to the moral worthiness of the standpoint of Left Unity. Instead of the justification of a precise strategy of revolutionary change the document argues: “Left Unity as a broad party contains a healthy diversity of views on how a socialist society could be attained. We are under no illusions that any such programme can be implemented without meeting resistance from the richest 1% in Britain and elsewhere, especially those elites who control transnational corporations and global finance.”(6) Thus in the name of party unity it is not possible to outline a credible strategy of change that can facilitate the realisation of socialism. Instead the importance of strategy is effectively rejected and the related role of the class struggle is denied any importance. What is justified is a conception of party revolution because the most important task of Left Unity is to bring about the transformation of society. Presumably the working class has to be the passive supporters, or electoral fodder, of this process. In this context the relationship between the present and the future is not articulated. There is no discussion of the existing lack of socialist culture within the population and the related dire conditions of Left parties. Instead we have the idealist assumption that the immaculate logic of the proposals of the policy document will be sufficient to establish an impetus towards the realisation of the goal of the alternative society. How the present low level of class consciousness, and demoralisation within the working class and the Marxist Left, can be overcome, is not explained. Instead these aspects are effectively ‘wished away’ and a miraculous leap from the present to the future is justified. Therefore the aspects of what can be defined as socialism are outlined without any connection to the role of the mass movement. Hence what is absent is any outline of demands that would advance the mass struggle for socialism, and nor is there a defence of an action programme that would promote the mass mobilisation of the working class to struggle for socialism. Instead in a propagandist manner we have the outline of a series of aims that express the character of the future society. Apparently these demands are sufficient to motivate the striving for the alternative social system. However this type of reasoning seems a backward step that upholds the separation of the minimum and maximum programme.

The economic aims of Left Unity include the principle of economic decision making in the workplace and communities. Furthermore, common ownership of natural resources, nationalisation and workers co-operatives, distribution in accordance with the principle of ‘from each according to their ability to each according to their needs’. Support for internationalism and rejection of socialism in one country. End the effects of neo-liberalism, and so reverse privatisation and challenge the domination of the financial sector. Introduce a national plan for the regeneration of the economy. Respond to climate change. Adhere to the principle of full employment. Introduce measures to tackle the problem of capital flight.(7) These measures are worthy and supportable but it will not be possible to implement them without the support and involvement of the working class, which is the major force that can implement the process of transition to socialism. For example, economic democracy is not credible if it is a policy that is based on the dominant actions of state officials. Historical experience has indicated that if economic decision making is based on the primary role of centralised state agencies the result is not progress towards socialism. Instead the result is the formation of new types of class society that are based on the surplus produced by the working class being appropriated by the centralised state. Hence the definition of communism is defined by the ability of the producers of surplus labour to be able to appropriate and distribute it: “Communist appropriation differs in general from non-communist appropriations in that (1) the producers are also the appropriators of their surplus, and (2) the appropriation is done collectively not individually.”(8)

This issue is not tackled by the policy authors because it is assumed that the relationship between the producers and the state is un-problematical and that the result is economic democracy. However this assumption is unprincipled if the state is being conceived as the major allocator and controller of the surplus. This situation actually justifies new forms of exploitation unless the state is the agency of the communist appropriation process. Thus the policy document justifies both the autonomy of the producers and the dominance of the centralised state. The principles of economic democracy co-exist uneasily with the conception of a national plan administered by the state. In order to resolve this ambiguity it is necessary to be explicit that the planning of the state is an expression of the ability of the producers to control the process of the generation of the economic surplus. Any alternative is likely to promote various forms of exploitative society based on the strategic importance of the state in the control and allocation of the economic surplus. Instead we have to be explicit that the state should be the instrument of a communist form of appropriation of the surplus.

The tensions in the approach of Left Unity are because the strategic assumption is that the most dynamic expression of the process of the transition to socialism will be the role of the reformed state and not the working class. Hence the policy document does not challenge the traditional assumption that socialism is expressed by the combination of nationalisation and planning. This means economic democracy is formally recognised but it is not elaborated as the primary principle of the socialist economy. Instead the implicit assumption is that the state, in consultation with the producers, determines the process of control and allocation of resources. The task of transforming the relations of production is part of the initiative of the socialist state and the importance of economic democracy is an expression of the policy of the state. This is why the task of the expansion of the public sector is outlined in terms of what the Left Government would do. (This point is outlined in terms of the role of the Left Unity government in providing purple jobs, or the growth of the caring sector provided by state investment)The importance of the initiative and creativity of the role of the working class is not elaborated in this context.

The authors of the policy document could argue that the above criticism ignores the following proposal: “Creation of a Vertically Integrated Co-operative sector as part of a general economic plan. A vertically integrated sector is one which produces all inputs and outputs from initial production to consumption goods. A workers owned and operated sector (that is locally or regionally based) can be targeted initially to revitalise areas of the country that are suffering from severe unemployment under workers control and management as part of a transformational project away from a capitalist competitive basis towards cooperative organisation of work. Initial start up funds and investment will be provided by the national government at zero interest.”(9) This comment seems to represent firm support for the role of workers co-operatives and the principles of economic democracy. However what is still problematical is that the national government still has primary control over the allocation of economic resources. Hence the activity of the co-operatives is subject to the priorities and imperatives of the centralised plan and the role of state agencies. It could be argued that this relationship is necessary because the only alternative is complete enterprise autonomy which would mean the market would be dominant in terms of competition between the different workplaces. However there is an alternative to both the primacy of the centralised plan and market socialism that is expressed by the ability of the producers of the different enterprises to be able to combine in a manner that decides the priorities of economic activity in terms of both the allocation of resources and the control of the surplus. In this context the role of the state would be reduced to that of guidance of the aims of the producers. Instead of this perspective Left Unity still envisage the economic actions of the state being primary and the workers co-operatives would have to fulfil the guidelines of the centralised plan. This means that economic democracy becomes the problematical and volatile aspect of the imperatives of the general national economic plan. There would be an immense temptation for the state to become the most dynamic expression of economic activity in terms of control of the surplus and the basis of economic planning. This is what happened in the USSR: “What replaced the czar as appropriating state capitalist was a collective of state officials eventually called the Soviet Council of Ministers. The council appropriated and distributed the surplus produced by Soviet productive workers in state enterprises. The form of producing, appropriating, and distributing those surpluses remained decidedly capitalist.”(10)

The point is that the problem of the continuation of a form of capitalism is contained within the proposals of Left Unity because the assumed primary responsibility for economic policy is with the government and state apparatus. Working people are not considered to be the creative initiators of policy in terms of the application of the most principled form of economic democracy. The result of this situation would be that the state would continue to be an alienating instrument that is not controlled by means of economic and political democracy. Instead what is conceived as economic democracy is considered to be what is permissible by the Left Unity government. The policy document does argue: “”We recognise, however, that state ownership alone does not suffice.”(11) But this comment is not expanded in terms of the explicit rejection of state capitalism and the hierarchical relationship between centralised plan and economic democracy. Instead economic democracy continuously throughout the document is presented as being something that only happens in terms of what is permitted by the Left Government. The dominant role of the state is not challenged in terms of the conception of the producers controlling the economic surplus. Indeed the very conception that the state would be transformed and become an expression of the interests of producers and consumers is not outlined. Instead an elitist understanding of the role of the state is assumed by the economic policy document in terms of the relationship of hierarchy and subordination between the Left government and its working class supporters. The ultimate result of this approach is that what is being advocated is a government that would represent state capitalism and not socialism or communism. The basic cause of this standpoint is the failure to elaborate a principled revolutionary strategy that indicates the importance of class struggle for the transformation of society, and which also means that socialism is based on popular democratic organs and the principles of workers control of production. Instead the Left Unity economic document assumes that socialism is based on the policies of a government which instructs the masses about how to realise socialism. They do not seem to realise that the ultimate result of this approach will be state capitalism and not socialism or communism.

Despite these criticisms what is welcome in the policy document is the commitment to support for the EU and opposition to withdrawal. This perspective becomes the basis for the vague conception of struggle within the EU as an integral part of the internationalist struggle for socialism. It would express progress if this vague commitment to a socialist strategy within the EU was made more precise. For example this could consist of advocating the perspective of a general strike within the EU against the austerity policy. We require more than vague and sentimental support for the EU. Instead the EU should be considered to be the most important forum of the present stage of international class struggle.

The second policy document of Left Unity concerns international policy. This outlines the role that the struggle for peace has played in the radicalisation of British and international politics. The document suggests that the era of globalisation has not ended the importance of war, and indicates how the imperialist powers ultimately resort to war in order to further economic and hegemonic ambitions. The section on peace concludes with the following comment: “We must shift away from military alliances, imperial ambitions, preparations for war and the construction of enemies and towards cultural dialogue, cross-national solidarities, the critical recognition of our own imperial history and the development of more just international institutions. We oppose the military adventures of the British ruling class and seek to develop international policies that promote the interests of the working class internationally through diplomacy, peacemaking, human development, greener adaptations, protection of the planet and its species, and the struggle for economic justice.”(11)

This standpoint is inadequate because it does not make the obvious point that only socialism can promote the cause of peace effectively, and what is not explained is how the condition of diplomacy and peace will be realised. What is the relationship between the struggle for peace and the generation of a state that upholds the cause of negotiation rather than imperialist war? Instead of discussing these issues the paper outlines in terms of moralistic humanism that the cause of peace is superior to imperialism and war but the strategic imagination that could elaborate how we progress from the present situation of international tensions to one of cross-national co-operation is not explained. The DSA would argue that the cause of peace can only be promoted by the progress of the international class struggle which would relate class objectives to opposition to imperialist war. The standpoint of the socialist offensive would be to connect the aim of peace with victory in the class struggle, and so the establishment of a workers government as the result of successful class struggle would advance the prospect of international peace and undermine the tendency towards war which is caused by the connection between capitalism and imperialism. Instead of this precise and principled strategy the cause of peace is assumed by Left Unity to express the very logic of the prospect of the formation of governments that are anti-imperialist and in favour of international diplomacy. But we know from historical experience that the exclusive struggle for peace is not sufficient to realise the transformation of the international situation and end wars. The primary emphasis on the perspective of peace can only result in pressure being exerted on imperialist states to ‘change their ways’. This is an illusory strategy which rarely results in victory.(The success of the anti-war movement in America in relation to the Vietnam war is an exception) We know that the massive demonstrations for peace in relation to the war in Iraq in 2003 did not undermine the determination of various imperialist governments to engage in military action. Does this criticism of peace as a strategy for change mean that the aim of peace is futile? Certainly not, instead we should relate the aim of peace to the struggle for socialism. The success in establishing workers governments can advance the cause of peace by undermining the hegemonic power of imperialism and the result will be that the prospect of military adventures are replaced by negotiation.

Possibly some of the supporters of Left Unity have rejected the role of the class struggle because of its associations with violence. They prefer a peaceful alternative approach in relation to realisation of the aims of anti-imperialism. Presumably they would oppose the following comment of Lenin: “Disarmament is the ideal of socialism. There will be no wars in socialist society; consequently, disarmament will be achieved. But whoever expects that socialism will be achieved without a social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat is not a socialist. Dictatorship is state power based directly on violence. And in the twentieth century – as in the age of civilisation generally – violence means neither a fist nor a club, but troops. To put “disarmament” in the programme is tantamount to making the general declaration: We are opposed to the use of arms. There is as little Marxism in this as there would be if we were to say: We are opposed to violence!”(12) The problem with Lenin’s view is that he refers to what might happen in the class struggle in relation to the issue of violence and does not accept that it would be preferable for revolutionary victory to occur in a peaceful manner. We should prepare for the prospect of violence in terms of supporting the formation of an armed militia but it is necessary to hope that the potential for violence will not be exercised and instead the mass movement will be able to overcome capitalism in a peaceful manner.

Lenin comment’s that: “Civil wars of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie for socialism are inevitable. Wars are possible between one country in which socialism has been victorious and other, bourgeois or reactionary, countries.”(13) The first part of this comment is dogmatic because it could be the very social power of a mass movement of opposition to capitalism which can ensure victory in the class struggle without resort to violence. The second part is true in that the aim is to establish socialism peacefully at an international level without the prospect of wars between socialist and capitalist countries. Peaceful co-existence is not opportunist if it is based on continued support for international revolution. Lenin would reply and suggest that the above arguments gloss over the fact that the capitalist class is armed and ready to oppose any attempts to realise the revolutionary transformation of society: “And in face of this fact, revolutionary Social Democrats are urged to “demand” “disarmament”. This is tantamount to complete abandonment of the class struggle point of view, to renunciation of all thought of revolution. Our slogan must be: arming of the proletariat to defeat, expropriate and disarm the bourgeoisie. These are the only tactics possible for a revolutionary class, tactics that follow logically from, and are dictated by, the whole objective development of capitalist militarism.”(14) Lenin’s view would be valid if in the name of peace it was decided not to establish an armed militia for possible armed conflict against the repressive state apparatus of the bourgeoisie. But what is the most favourable situation for the success of revolution would be the peaceful victory of the working class in the class struggle. This is possible given the general contemporary distaste for violence and the popularity of the aim of peace. In contrast Lenin was writing in a situation of inter-imperialist war and the violence of the bourgeois state. Many sections of the working class accepted that the class struggle would assume violent forms. Hence it seemed logical for Lenin to argue that the rejection of the role of violence would mean resignation about the possibility of achieving victory in the class struggle. That is why Lenin could not conceive of the possibility of peaceful revolution: “The main defect of the disarmament demand is its evasion of all the concrete questions of revolution. Or do the advocates of disarmament stand for an altogether new kind of revolution, unarmed revolution?”(15)

However in the present period we know that one of the major issues that result in radicalisation is the question of peace. Hence we can assume that peace will become an important aspect of any movement to bring about socialism. In this context it would be sectarian and in opposition to the aspirations of the potential mass movement to advocate armed revolution. This does not mean that an armed militia should not be formed but it is to be hoped that it should never have to engage in armed conflict. Instead the very concerns of strategy should be about how we can achieve the victory of the class struggle without resort to violence. It is entirely possible that if the class struggle becomes civil war a considerable part of the mass movement would reject continuation of the attempt to realise socialism. Only the ruling class has an interest in making the class struggle a violent conflict. However, despite these disadvantages it would be dishonest and unprincipled for the forces of the struggle for socialism to reject the tactical use of violence. The standpoint of dogmatic pacifism would mean capitulation to the class antagonist. That is why the following comments of Lenin are one-sided in the contemporary context but not totally invalid: “He who accepts the class struggle cannot fail to accept civil wars, which in every class society are the natural, and under certain conditions inevitable, continuation, of the class struggle. That has been confirmed by every great revolution. To repudiate civil war, or to forget about it, is to fall into extreme opposition and renounce the socialist revolution.(16) And: “Only after we have overthrown, finally vanquished and expropriated the bourgeoisie of the whole world, and not merely of one country, will wars become impossible.”(17)

The point being is that Lenin is justified to argue that violence could be part of the process of class struggle. We cannot shirk this possibility. But this very prospect should make us intensify our efforts to advance the cause of socialism by peaceful methods. Furthermore, it is also perceptive of Lenin to accept that wars could occur between countries that claim to be building socialism with countries that are still imperialist and capitalist. It would be dogmatic to envisage that the success of revolution will automatically end the possibility of war between countries with different social systems. However this very problem means that in an age of nuclear weapons we should intensify the struggle for peaceful co-existence when socialism is achieved in international terms. In this manner this type of realism about the difficulties of the class struggle in relation to the issue of peace would mean that Lenin following criticism was invalid: “The “social” parsons and opportunists are always ready to build dreams of future peaceful socialism. But the very thing that distinguishes them from revolutionary Social Democrats is that they refuse to think about and reflect on the fierce class struggle and class wars needed to achieve that beautiful future.”(18) The fault of Pacifism is that it glosses over the difficulties of the class struggle. Lenin is right to make this point. Instead of the consolationist schemas of dogmatic pacifism we should have a sober assessment of the prospects of the relationship of violence to the class struggle. Our perspective should also be to avoid violence if the prospects for socialism are to mature in the most favourable terms. However we should also prepare for violence in national and international terms. Unfortunately the Left Unity policy document evades this question and instead attempts to construct a conception of the victory of socialism without the problem of violence and war. This is a dream of socialism without connecting this dream to reality. We must reject the dream and instead outline a strategy that tackles complicated realities such as the problem of violence in relation to the attempt to realise socialism in national and international terms.

The Left Unity policy document has a welcome call to work within the EU against austerity and to develop solidarity movements with this aim. However, the aim of opposing imperialist war seems to be connected to reform of the UN in order to establish a more just basis for the resolution of international conflicts. Instead of this moderate approach we should consider that opposition to imperialist war is an integral aspect of the struggle for world socialist revolution. The strategic approach is established by Lenin: “Neither we nor anyone else can calculate precisely what portion of the proletariat is following and will follow the social chauvinists and opportunists. This will be revealed only by the struggle, it will be definitively decided only by the socialist revolution. But we know for certain that the “defenders of the fatherland” in the imperialist war represent only a minority. And it is therefore our duty, if we wish to remain socialists, to go down lower and deeper, to the real masses; this is the whole meaning and purport of the struggle against opportunism. By exposing the fact that the opportunists and social chauvinists are in reality betraying and selling the interests of the masses, that they are in defending the temporary privileges of a minority of the workers, that they are the vehicles of bourgeois ideas and influences, that they are really allies and agents of the bourgeoisie, we teach the masses to appreciate their true political interests, to fight for socialism and for the revolution through all the long and painful vicissitudes of imperialist wars and imperialist armistices.”(19)

The point being made is that the opposition to imperialist war should be an integral part of the class struggle. Justification of war by various opportunists means that the revolutionary forces can demarcate themselves from them by indicating that imperialist conflict is in the interests of the capitalist system and is opposed to the aim of socialism. The very struggle for socialism is based on rejection of the role of inter-imperialist conflict. This conception can also be utilised in order to oppose contemporary imperialist military intervention against third world regimes. Hence the struggle for peace is not just about rejection of the national chauvinist support of imperialist war but is also recognition of its relation to the class struggle. The successful attainment of peace can only be realised when a majority of the working class oppose the imperialist war and instead consciously struggle for socialism. This process will also involve conscious struggle against the imperialist government. What is not being argued is not justification of the slogan ‘turn the imperialist war into a civil war’. This is because civil war would not necessarily be to the advantage of the struggle for socialism. Instead what is the strategic priority is the peaceful attempt to bring about the revolutionary transformation of society. Hence a more precise slogan would be ‘reject the imperialist war and instead support the struggle for socialism’. However, the policy document avoids discussion of the relationship between the striving for revolution and opposition to imperialist war. Instead opposition to imperialist military action is defined in isolated terms. This means the ultimate justification of opposition to imperialist war is understood in pacifist terms instead of its connection to the aim of socialism. It would improve the Left Unity policy statement if this principled understanding was incorporated into its approach.

At present people have a high regard for peace but are sceptical about the importance of socialism. We have to provide arguments that would challenge this contradiction. It is crucial to outline reasons that are convincing as to why the consistent realisation of peace is not possible without the realisation of socialism. Hence we have to improve efforts which indicate the relationship between capitalism, imperialism and war. This task cannot be achieved without opposing nationalism. What this involves does not mean ridiculing the major cultural achievements of any specific nation but instead opposing the concept of an identity of interests between the ruling class and working class of a given nation. In this context it is necessary to oppose the myths that constitute the justification of national identity. It has been argued that the alternative to nationalism in terms of the international unity of the working class is an ambitious aim that can never be realised. However the tenuous nature of the internationalist standpoint is because the various parties claiming to represent the working class have tended to be national chauvinist. Furthermore, the official ideology of the ruling class has also been national and based on the promotion of the mythical national identity. However the major reason for the decline of internationalism has been because of the lack of influence of Marxism. The growth of Marxism becomes a conscious exponent of internationalism and the adherent of world revolution. Left Unity upholds an anti-imperialist ideology but this is not connected to explicit support for the perspective of world revolution. This means that they do not advocate a type of politics that would be the most effective alternative to nationalism. The approach of anti-imperialism may be able to develop sympathy for the causes of the oppressed but it does not represent a strategy that can establish the connection between peace and socialism. Crucially this radical approach does not tackle the issue of nationalism that results in the generation of common cause between the ruling class and the working class.

We can appreciate that what is being advocated is not easy to achieve. The formation of the nation and national identity has been occurring over hundreds of years. It is dogma to assert that the creation of the nation has been limited to the historical period of capitalism. Instead we could argue that the formation of England and the UK began with Alfred the Great. In contrast socialism is an ideology that has effectively developed over the last 150 years. Furthermore it has also been distorted by nationalism, as in relation to the history of Social Democracy, and the Stalinist doctrine of socialism in one country. In practical terms the international unity of the working class does not exist and instead it is divided in national terms. However we have to have the optimism that it is possible to overcome these divisions in relation to the progress of the class struggle. In this regard we have to accomplish the difficult task of indicating the close relationship between peace and socialism. Imperialism may have been modified by globalisation but it still has a tendency to promote forms of expansion that result in national rivalries. Peace is not possible on the basis of the continuation of capitalism and imperialism: “That being the objective state of affairs, it is the obvious and imperative task of every sincere socialist policy, every honest proletarian policy (not to speak of conscious Marxist policy) first of all and above all consistently, systematically, boldly and unreservedly to expose the pacifist and democratic hypocrisy of one’s own government and one’s own bourgeoisie. Lacking that, all talk of socialism, syndicalism, internationalism is a sheer deception of the people.”(20)

What historical experience has taught us is that the conciliation of imperialist national chauvinism has not resulted in peace or socialism. Marxism is superior to all other forms of ‘socialism’ because of its internationalist standpoint. The Marxist is opposed intransigently to imperialist aggression by national governments. This means opposition to all social chauvinists who try and dilute socialism by providing it with nationalist justification. Only in these principled terms will it be possible to develop support for the related aims of peace, internationalism and socialism. However Left Unity’s anti-imperialism sometimes glosses over the complexity of these connected tasks and instead suggests support for good causes will result in the decreasing influence of nationalism. This is an illusion instead it will be explicit support for world revolution that will overcome the alternative ideology of national chauvinism.

At present people are very confused. They tend to combine a yearning for peace with tentative support for imperialist intervention in the third world in humanitarian terms. These contradictions can only be overcome by the incessant ideological struggle to indicate the connections between socialism and peace. This process involves opposition to national chauvinism and the reactionary role of imperialism. However, what provides the strategic clarity of this approach is support for the aim of world revolution. The present anti-imperialism of Left Unity is not an adequate substitute for this perspective. Consequently the policy document on international issues requires elaboration and improvement if it is to truly express the aims of international class struggle.

FOOTNOTES:

(1) Left unity.org/economic policy, 29th March 2014 and left unity.org/international policy, 14th-15th November 2014

(2)Economic policy p2

(3)Richard Seymour: Against Austerity, Pluto Press, London, 2014

(4)V.I. Lenin: Bourgeois Pacifism and Socialist Pacifism, in collected works volume 23 Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1964 p193

(5)Leon Trotsky: The Transitional Programme: Pathfinder Press, New York, 1973 p114

(6)Economic policy op cit p3

(7) ibid p3

(8)Stephen A. Resnick and Richard D Wolff Class Theory and History Routledge London, 2002 p14

(9)Economic policy op cit p5

(10)Resnick op cit p163-164

(11)Economic policy op cit p6

(12)International policy op cit p3

(13)Lenin: The Disarmament Slogan op cit p95

(14) ibid p95

(15) ibid p96-97

(16) ibid p100

(17)Lenin: Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution ibid p78-79

(18) ibid p79

(19) ibid p79

(20)Lenin: Imperialism and the Split in Socialism ibid p119-120

(21)Lenin: Theses for An Appeal to the I.E.C. ibid p208