

Institution: University of Dundee

Unit of Assessment: 21 Politics and International Studies

Title of case study: Seven Year Itch? The European Left Party: Struggling to Transform the European Union

1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)

In January 2011 and May 2012, Richard Dunphy presented two workshops to the National Council of Democratic Left Scotland (DLS) based on research he had conducted in collaboration with Luke March (University of Edinburgh). Dunphy's presentation explained the nature and character of the European Left Party. As a direct result of the discussion that followed, the National Council decided to recommend to the 2012 AGM that DLS seek observer membership of the European Left Party (EL). This application was ratified by the EL Council meeting in Berlin in January 2013. Dunphy's work had direct impact on the political strategy and policy focus of this political network of the Scottish left (see corroborating letters 5.1 and 5.2).

2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)

The European Left Party (EL) is the newest of the European Union's transnational party federations (TNPs). Richard Dunphy (University of Dundee) and Luke March (University of Edinburgh) are involved in collaborative research on EL which has produced several conference papers, a published refereed journal article and a forthcoming book with Manchester University Press (2014). The underpinning research was carried out between January 2010 and January 2013, on an equal and shared basis. The research is the first ever in-depth study of this TNP in the English language.

Radical Left Parties (RLPs) have been relative laggards when it comes to developing transnational structures. In part, this reflects deep divisions on the left over European integration. EL was launched in 2004 by the RLPs which eschew extreme euroscepticism, and are committed to changing the direction of the EU away from neo-liberalism. Such parties perceive the need for a transnational party structure to embody this politics. From the outset, both hard-line communist parties that preach euroscepticism (for example, the Greek and Portuguese) and left-nationalist parties (for example, Sinn Féin) have refused to engage with EL, whilst Reform-communist parties sympathetic to European integration in Spain and Italy and New Left movements, principally Syriza in Greece, have played the leading role in launching and developing EL.

The research which forms the basis of the impact study focused on the first seven years of EL, 2004-2011. Our research confronts issues of direct concern to the participants and helps develop their own self-understanding. It assesses whether or not EL has developed as an effective actor in Europe and offers criteria to assess the success or failure of its political strategy. The research is underpinned by field research in Brussels; numerous, in-depth, structured interviews with MEPs, European Parliament officials, and officials from national parties and TNPs; and, of course, primary and secondary sources. The work was mainly undertaken in the 2010-12 period. It attempts a qualitative analysis of several innovations introduced by EL itself and engages in comparative analysis with other TNPs – Party of European Socialists, European People's Party, and Greens.

Amongst the key issues explored in the study which were of prime interest to the workshop participants were the problems of leadership in a TNP which has 28 full and 14 observer members but still insists on the principle of consensus; the efficacy of innovations such as permitting direct, individual membership of the TNP; the distinctions between full and observer membership; and the possibilities inherent in various forms of external association and collaboration.

3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

Richard Dunphy and Luke March, 'Seven Year Itch? The European Left Party: struggling to transform the European Union', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, (forthcoming: Vol. 14, No. 4, December 2013; also published by Routledge in I-First format in March 2013. (listed in REF2).

Richard Dunphy and Luke March, 'The European Left Party and the 2009 European Parliamentary Elections', paper presented to the Political Studies Association 60th conference, Edinburgh, 29 March, 2010. Presented at a day-long conference workshop on 'The Left and European integration' organised by Dunphy and March. (available on request).

Richard Dunphy and Luke March, 'Seven year itch? The European Left Party before and after Lisbon: Struggling to transform the EU' paper presented to conference "Where now for Europarties: Reflections post-Lisbon", University of Maastricht, 20-21 June, 2011. (available on request).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

Dunphy was invited by the National Council of Democratic Left Scotland to disseminate the results of his and March's research on EL at two workshops in January 2011 and March 2012. Drawing on research undertaken over the period 2010-2012, the two sessions involved significant participation by the political leadership of DLS, and focused on negotiating the complexities of European political alignments, the advantages of pan-European collaborations, and the processes by which new relationships could advance relevant political agendas.

The first, in January 2011, provoked such interest that Dunphy was invited to organize a second in May 2012 organised around debate on the article, 'Seven Year Itch? The European Left Party: Struggling to transform the European Union'. Dunphy's brief was to explain the nature of EL; to outline the different forms and levels of membership and participation available to parties and non-party organisations; and to clarify the vision of the EU to which EL is committed.

DLS is not a political party, but a campaigning political network. Its membership is open to members of various political parties and none and it currently includes in its ranks members of the SNP, the Labour Party and the Greens. At times of European Parliament elections, its members can be found campaigning for rival political parties. For this reason, full membership of a TNP is not appropriate for DLS. Notwithstanding this, DLS was clearly interested in pursuing contacts in Europe so as to be better equipped to challenge Euroscepticism at home and to overcome a sense of national isolation. Hence the invitation to Dunphy to disseminate the research.

EL was the first TNP to introduce the concept of individual membership, allowing EU citizens to bypass nationally-based parties and to participate directly in EL activities. Until this innovation, all TNPs had been federations of national parties, in essence. The concept of direct individual membership was seen as an important way of encouraging the emergence of a European political consciousness and ultimately a European civil society. Dunphy explained that individual membership has advanced considerably in some countries (for example, Italy); but stagnated in others (for example, France). The UK lies somewhere between these extremes. Deep divisions within EL have frustrated attempts to find a clear role for individual members.

Key to the DLS National Council's decision-making regarding transnational political party participation was consideration of membership distinctions and association status. Dunphy explained the distinction between full and observer membership, and the concept of external association. Full membership is extended to parties that sign up to the EL manifesto and statutes and agree to fight European elections on the basis of a common and agreed platform. Observer

Impact case study (REF3b)

membership is available to parties and non-party networks that are in basic sympathy or agreement with the project but do not commit themselves to a common electoral platform. In addition, EL has developed networks and 'friendship circles' on common themes that allow 'external association' on specific campaigns. For example, EL-Fem (feminist issues), and EL-Trade Unions.

Dunphy's work was used to clarify how political organisations in Denmark and elsewhere had managed and negotiated such processes and issues. For example, he explained how the Danish Socialist People's Party, which sits with the Greens in the European Parliament and is a member of the Green TNP, nevertheless allows its trade unionist wing to participate through external association in EL-Trade Unions. Dunphy explained that full membership was inappropriate for a network like DLS; observer membership and external association were both possibilities with different levels of involvement; alternatively, DLS could urge its members to apply for individual membership of EL, but the research showed that this was ill-defined and the subject of internal battles within the TNP. If individual membership was considered as a pathway, then the Greens might offer a more congenial TNP than EL.

Dunphy also presented a full and detailed critique of EL's policies on European integration, its manifesto for the 2009 European elections, its attempts to use the European Citizen's Initiative (introduced by the Lisbon Treaty) to campaign for change and transformation of the EU from within, and its activities and alignment within in the European Parliament.

As the corroborating letters [corroborating evidence 5.1 and 5.2] indicate, the dissemination of the research had a clear and direct impact on policy-making. As a direct result of the workshop, the DLS National Council took a decision to recommend to the September 2012 AGM that DLS become an observer member of the European Left Party. A representative attended a meeting of EL's Council in Berlin in January 2013 where the application for membership was approved. Dunphy and March can thus state that the dissemination of their research findings had a direct bearing on a policy decision which has seen the transnational party, the EL, receive its first ever UK member-organisation.

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

1. Letter from the Convenor, National Council, Democratic Left Scotland.
2. Letter from the Secretary, Dundee trades Union Council and member National Council, Democratic Left Scotland.