

AN APPEAL TO MEDIA WORKERS

HELP US GET FAIR COVERAGE IN THE EU REFERENDUM DEBATE



The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is today making an appeal to media workers – please do what you can to get some recognition of voices such as TUSC in media coverage of the EU referendum debate.

TUSC is arguing for a leave vote on June 23rd. We stand in the tradition of the late Bob Crow, the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) workers' union leader, who was one of our co-founders. Bob was well known for his support for international workers' solidarity while opposing the EU as an instrument of pro-austerity and anti-worker policies.

TUSC includes members of the media unions – the National Union of Journalists, BECTU and Equity – and we know that many media workers, regardless of where they stand on the EU debate, are frustrated by the output of the organisations they work for. Why do senior figures so rarely encourage viewpoints that challenge the official narrative? Why do they so often go for the safe option and trivialise what are serious issues?

CHALLENGE TORY NARRATIVE

The coverage of the Obama visit is the most recent case in point. The trade deal that Obama said Britain would be at “the back of the queue” for if it voted for EU exit is the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). TTIP, if it is agreed by the EU and the US, will significantly increase the power of multinational corporations, including over our public services.

Surely some voice should have been allowed in the media coverage of Obama's comments to challenge the idea that we want to be in any 'line' at all for a trade deal that will open up the NHS, for example, to US private health companies?

But the media organisation chiefs stuck rigidly to the 'official' script. The Tory-dominated Vote Leave campaign that has been chosen by the Electoral Commission as the 'lead' campaign group for Leave, could not provide an answer to Obama. They have no principled opposition to the institutionalisation of privatisation that the TTIP negotiations are aimed at or the investor-state court mechanism to enforce this.

And so, while tens of thousands of people demonstrated against TTIP in Germany, here the issue was reduced to an inane debate over Boris Johnson's bigoted comments about Obama and a Churchill bust.

ALTERNATIVE VOICES

There are plenty of organisations that could provide an alternative voice on this and other issues in the EU debate – TUSC is not special pleading.

But TUSC was one of three EU exit organisations that applied for recognition from the Electoral Commission to be the official Leave campaign.

It is the sixth biggest presence on ballot papers in this year's elections, with over 300 local council candidates (and has been so for the last four years).

And TUSC, comprised of individual trade unionists and community campaigners alongside its three constituent organisations – the 80,000-strong RMT union, the Socialist Party (formerly the Militant tendency) and the Socialist Workers Party – has a significant presence on the ground. Far more so, in fact, than other 'go-to' organisations for media appearances, like the Taxpayers' Alliance for example.

TUSC was not designated as the official Leave campaign by the Electoral Commission but that does not mean our message should not be heard at all. We are organising our own campaign for exit, including a 20-city tour of public meetings under the heading, 'The Socialist Case Against the EU'. All media workers are more than welcome to come along.



TUSC AGAINST CUTS



@TUSCoalition



Trade Unionist and
Socialist Coalition



www.tusc.org.uk



17 Colebert House, Colebert
Avenue, London E1 4JP

EXIT LEFT IS NOT THE SAME AS EXIT RIGHT

TUSC wrote to the Electoral Commission arguing that it was actually not meaningful to speak of a 'leave campaign' in the sense of sharing a common position. Therefore, we said, they should not make an official designation at all for lead campaign status, as they were legally entitled to do (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/17197/30-03-2016/tusc-sends-formal-letter-to-election-watchdog-dont-back-ukip-amp-tory-eu-outers>).

But this was too bold a step for the Commission, an unelected quango, which was why TUSC submitted its own bid against the reactionary, Tory and UKIP-dominated campaigns.

Eventually the Commission tamely went along with David Cameron's preferred choice of opponent, the Vote Leave campaign, which has Boris Johnson as its most high profile figure. So the Electoral Commission too have contributed to keeping the EU debate largely as a battle between Old Etonians, with another ex-public schoolboy Nigel Farage in the ring as well.

But our point still applies – because they operate within the same economic and political framework as the government, the Vote Leave campaign cannot properly scrutinise the Remain arguments. Media organisations should not uncritically go along with the resulting non-debate.

THE EU AND THE ECONOMY

TUSC, and the wider anti-austerity constituency, oppose the EU treaties that have embedded what can only be described as a neo-liberal economic framework into the EU. But the Vote Leave campaign, like the government, does not oppose an austerity agenda.

While 750,000 people from our constituency demonstrated against austerity in March 2011, six weeks later individuals who have become prominent figures in the reactionary Leave campaigns organised a 'rally for cuts', in May 2011. They included Nigel Farage, Tory cabinet outer Priti Patel, and the Taxpayers' Alliance, whose founder, Matthew Elliott, is now the chief executive of Vote Leave. How can they offer an economic alternative to the government in the EU debate?

THE EU AND PRIVATISATION

A similar dichotomy exists in attitudes to the EU treaties and service directives driving the liberalisation of markets in energy, transport, postal services and other public services, and the EU's state aid rules.

TUSC's core policies include bringing privatised public services, industries and utilities back into public ownership, including transport, Royal Mail, the NHS, and the justice system, and democratic public ownership of the banks and major companies. None of these are compatible with the EU treaties

– but they are policies which Vote Leave would never champion against the government's position, for example, in the debate over the steel crisis.

THE EU AND WORKERS' RIGHTS

TUSC, with its union roots, has first-hand experience of how EU directives and European Court of Justice rulings are used to undermine workers' rights.

Vote Leave, on the other hand, is dominated by the same politicians and big business interests that are behind the new Trade Union Bill, and cannot speak with any credibility on this issue.

Vote Leave could not even provide a spokesperson for the Newsnight debate on Jeremy Corbyn's EU speech – while TUSC's Dave Nellist, a former backbench colleague of the Labour leader, was interviewed only on Sky News.

A REAL DEBATE MIGHT EVEN BE INTERESTING...

There are many other issues in the EU referendum debate where Vote Leave will not only be unable to effectively challenge the government but where an alternative viewpoint would engage new audiences. It should not be forgotten how out of touch the tops of the media organisations were – bound by the established narrative – to what was happening on the ground as Jeremy Corbyn campaigned for the Labour leadership last summer.

In the US Bernie Sanders too has rightly called out the myopia of the 'establishment media' towards his phenomenal grassroots campaign.

Most media workers want to work in a creative environment where different ideas are explored. Let's make sure that's possible in the weeks that remain of the EU debate.

WHAT IS TUSC?

TUSC was founded in 2010. Along with the RMT it involves leading trade unionists from the PCS civil servants union, the National Union of Teachers, the Fire Brigades Union, and the Prison Officers Association, together with the Socialist Party, the Socialist Workers Party, and independent socialists.

For information and video clips about TUSC see: www.tusc.org.uk

For interviews and any other information requests, please email: info@tusc.org.uk or call Clive Heemskerck, the TUSC National Election Agent on 020-8988-8773 or 07989-360158. The TUSC national chairperson, the ex-Labour MP Dave Nellist, can also be contacted on 07970-294237