



## **TUSC Steering Committee Briefing: Planning for the next general election**

Recent meetings of the TUSC All-Britain steering committee have begun to discuss the next general election, which must be called no later than December 2024.

We have agreed to open up the process of preparing a TUSC general election core policy platform (see below) and, at the May meeting, agreed the text of a letter to trade union executive committee members (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/474.pdf>) inviting them to become involved, either through joining the steering committee or acting as a 'policy consultant'. This appeal was sent out at the beginning of June.

However, recent political developments have shown that a general election could be held well before the 2024 statutory date – and that therefore we need to step up our preparations and consider them in greater detail than before.

### **Hope for more, but prepare for a TUSC challenge**

In the letter to trade union NEC members we wrote “TUSC strongly hopes that, before the election, steps towards a new vehicle for working class political representation will have been taken by more authoritative forces than those currently involved in our coalition – primarily from the trade unions or potentially around Jeremy Corbyn himself standing independently of Labour in the general election”.

“But it is also possible”, we warned, “that such steps might not have been taken in time” for the next election and that a TUSC challenge would be necessary.

*No definitive position on the likelihood or otherwise of a more authoritative force being formed in time needs to be decided upon by the TUSC steering committee at this point.* While both the recent FBU and ASLEF conferences voted to remain affiliated to the Labour Party, in decisions taken since the May steering committee, this will not be the last word on this issue, in these unions or others. Developments could be accelerated by many factors, including the growing wave of industrial action showing to ever-wider numbers which side Sir Keir Starmer’s revived Tony Blair-style New Labour party is on. And Labour’s own general election planning could push things forward, not least its candidate selection process.

Local constituency parties in non-Labour seats are beginning to select their parliamentary candidates while trigger ballots on whether sitting Labour MPs will face a full selection vote in the autumn are scheduled to be completed this month. Their aim is to have a full list of general election candidates in place by March 2023, just eight months away.

So the question will be posed quite soon: who will be the candidate that trade unionists and socialists should back in Jeremy Corbyn’s seat of Islington North? What will happen to the Socialist Campaign Group MPs in Merseyside in the coming months, where the Labour NEC

decided last year that all selections would be taken over by the national party until 2026? Will the Labour leadership and its supporters allow the Socialist Campaign Group MP Apsana Begum to stand again in Tower Hamlets, with its new Aspire-led council? And so on.

It may be possible then that a wider coalition than TUSC currently is could be in place by the next general election.

But *at this point in time* it is also clear that *there is no more developed individual party or coalition than TUSC* that would be able to organise a significant all-Britain socialist and trade union-based challenge at a general election – this year if events necessitate it, or in 2023 or 2024. And that the steering committee, and the constituent components of TUSC, need to plan accordingly.

## **Qualifying for a Party Election Broadcast**

One important benchmark for what would constitute a serious election challenge is whether or not the minimum threshold of candidates is reached in order to qualify for ‘fair coverage’ from the broadcast media, including a party election broadcast (PEB).

The threshold for ‘fair media coverage’ is to stand a candidate in 15% of seats – 98 for the UK as a whole – which guarantees a PEB and coverage of a manifesto launch event as a minimum. The qualifying threshold secures additional coverage by the Scottish broadcast media if the 15% figure is reached there (meaning nine candidates need to stand in Scotland) and Wales (six candidates); but also by the regional news programmes in England (if there are eleven candidates in London, for example, or nine in Yorkshire or the West Midlands, five in the North East, and so on).

Of course achieving the statutory minimum coverage is one thing; using that as a foothold to push for additional broadcast and print media coverage, is something else. But reaching the qualifying threshold can be done. TUSC did so in 2015, producing a well-received broadcast (which can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcEMrCTVRdg>). And *having the qualifying threshold as a target*, including building it into financial planning (see below), will focus the discussion about a general election intervention.

That includes discussions with other groups not currently involved in TUSC – if they are thinking of standing in the general election, would they plan to reach the threshold? Could they realistically do so on their own? And if not, *why would they not agree to be part of the TUSC list?*

## **Descriptions on the ballot paper**

Linked to this is the issue of what ‘party description’ appears on the ballot paper with a candidate’s name.

The TUSC rules (at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/449.pdf>), and the reality of how our coalition has functioned, are clear. Individual candidates would have to accept the general election core policy platform (see below) as the minimum basis in order to be on the TUSC list. But beyond that they would be free to run their own election campaign in whatever way they wish, including campaigning on additional issues and advertising their own party or organisation – if they belong to one – as they chose. TUSC is an open and inclusive coalition for trade unionists, working class community and social movement activists, and socialists, of different parties or none.

What is also clear is that the BBC, which acts as the lead organisation for Ofcom in election coverage, insists that only candidates appearing on the ballot paper using one of the descriptions of a registered party (including its Scottish and Welsh variants) go towards the PEB qualifying

threshold number. Standing as an Independent or under the name of another political party registered with the Electoral Commission *would not count*, even if the party or individual candidate declared their alignment with TUSC, whether in a 'non-aggression pact' or a mutual endorsement agreement.

Our general starting point then in any discussions we may have with other organisations should be that, given the freedom that candidates would have to decide the content of their own campaign material including the promotion of their own organisation, *they should use one of the TUSC descriptions on their ballot paper* as a contribution to reaching the PEB threshold.

## **Room for flexibility?**

There is a further consideration that might allow for some flexibility, for example with organisations that have a well-established local or national presence but would not be able to reach the PEB threshold themselves. This is the provision under electoral law to *register joint descriptions* between registered parties.

Each party is allowed to have twelve registered descriptions in addition to the party name, and these can include a joint description. For example, TUSC currently has eight registered descriptions, one of which is 'Left Unity – Trade Unionists and Socialists', registered jointly with the Left Unity party in 2015. This was used by seven of the Left Unity members who stood as part of the TUSC challenge in that election (there were a further three Left Unity candidates who did not use the joint description but appeared on the ballot paper as Left Unity, and two other Left Unity members who were happy to use the TUSC description alone).

It is true that it was not tested in 2015 as to whether the joint description candidates met the PEB qualifying threshold – because, even without them, TUSC had 128 candidates on the ballot paper. But the broadcasting authorities have in the past accepted candidates using joint descriptions towards the PEB qualifying threshold so this may be another avenue to explore.

The other descriptions that TUSC currently has registered include two that cannot be removed if we had to make space for further joint descriptions: Scottish Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition and Welsh Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition. I would also recommend that we keep the Trade Unionist and Socialist Candidate description and Trade Unionists and Socialists Against Cuts, which is still sometimes requested by candidates. (This is not to be confused with the TUSC Against Cuts *emblem* which almost all TUSC candidates use). But there is no strong argument I can see to retain the others: Carlisle Socialist and Trade Union Candidate; Walsall Socialist and Trade Union Candidate; and Dundee Against Cuts – TUSC.

## **Finance**

To get 100 candidates onto the ballot paper costs a minimum of £50,000, with a £500 election deposit payable for each one. The BBC and the other broadcasters will only accept a PEB for transmission that reaches their technical standards: in 2015, we paid £9,698 to produce the TUSC election broadcast. In addition, candidates are entitled to have an election address distributed to every household in their constituency free of charge by Royal Mail: but have to pay the cost of getting the leaflets printed. A serious general election challenge will not be cheap.

In 2015 TUSC was fortunate to receive donations of £67,500 from the Socialist Alliance, who had received a legacy in 2014, to pay for the election deposits of our 135 candidates, and a further £5,000 towards the cost of the election broadcast. The Socialist Party raised over £60,000 for the

campaign, and the RMT paid £10,000 from its national political fund towards the spending of those TUSC candidates who local RMT branches had requested be provided with financial support. The SWP financed the campaign material of the 12 candidates they contributed to the TUSC list. But a national general election fund had only been established, and received its first donation, in November 2014, just months before the May 2015 contest.

One reason for this is that the original policy of the TUSC steering committee was that individuals who were authorised to contest elections as TUSC candidates – receiving the legally necessary Certificate of Authorisation to use the TUSC name and emblem on the ballot paper – should be responsible for the conduct of their own election campaign including its finances (submitting election spending returns as required under the Representation of the Peoples Act). So the bulk of fund-raising has always been done locally, for specific candidates' campaigns.

But to set an all-Britain target of 100 candidates in the next general election suggests there is a case for a *TUSC national election fund of £60,000*, to guarantee the minimum number of deposits to secure a PEB and the funds to pay for its production; and a serious campaign, in the trade union movement in particular, to achieve it.

### **The general election core policy platform**

The steering committee has had some preliminary discussions on drawing up a core policy platform for the general election, with the 2015 platform being the 'default' core policies to be updated, amended, added to, or supplemented with new policies (TUSC did not contest the 2017 and 2019 general elections given the possibility then of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government).

We have also agreed that there should be a *consultative conference*, which I propose should be held *in February 2023*. TUSC has usually organised its annual conference around that time and, on this occasion, it could focus on the general election, as well as playing the role that it does of preparing for the May local elections.

This timetable would mean that the steering committee would need to have a finalised *draft* core policy platform (with this process opened up as we have discussed before) for the January 2023 steering committee meeting. Which, on our normal schedule, gives us five meetings (in July, September, October, November and December) to get something ready to 'sign off' then.

The 2015 platform (appended below) is 912 words in total, comprising of a 206 word preamble and 33 bullet points under ten headings. The 2019 Labour Manifesto is not a comparable document – it is a programme for government rather than the minimum commitment a broad coalition can expect from its candidates – but it had five sections (A Green Industrial Revolution; Rebuild Our Public Services; Tackle Poverty and Inequality; The Final Say on Brexit; and A New Internationalism) with 22 sub-headings. We need to agree what type of document we are looking for, including a target length and any new headings to be covered, and begin the process – possibly by discussing a couple of policy headings at each meeting – from the next steering committee meeting in July.

**Clive Heemskerk**  
TUSC National Election Agent  
15th June 2022

# What TUSC stands for

THE Con-Dem government has inflicted five years of savage austerity on working class people. Unfortunately there is no prospect of this changing beyond the general election, as the leadership of the Labour Party has made it clear that a Labour government would not mean an end to austerity.

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) argues that working class people should not pay for a crisis that we did not cause. That was why TUSC was set up in 2010, co-founded by the late Bob Crow, to show that there is a clear left-wing alternative to policies of public sector cuts, privatisation, militarism and environmental degradation.

TUSC has accepted from its start that there will be some Labour candidates who share our socialist aspirations and will be prepared to support measures that challenge the austerity consensus of the establishment politicians. But it is also committed to standing candidates or supporting others if that is the only way a working class anti-austerity socialist alternative can be articulated at election time.

Our coalition, of trade unionists, community campaigners and socialists, is united on the need for mass resistance to the ruling class offensive, and for an alternative programme of left-wing policies to help inspire and direct such resistance:

### **PUBLIC OWNERSHIP, NOT PRIVATE PROFIT**

- Stop all privatisation, including the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) and Public-Private Partnerships (PPP). Bring privatised public services, industries and utilities back into public ownership under democratic control, with compensation only on the basis of proven need.
- No to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) and all secret austerity treaties.

### **NO CUTS – FOR QUALITY PUBLIC SERVICES**

- Re-nationalise all rail, bus and ferry services to build an integrated, low-pollution public transport system. Take Royal Mail back into public ownership to guarantee our postal services. Bring prisons, probation, and all other parts of the justice system back into the public sector.
- For a high-quality, free National Health Service under democratic public ownership and control.
- Stop council estate sell-offs and build high-standard, eco-friendly, affordable council housing.
- No to academies and 'free schools'. Good, free education for all, under democratic local authority control; student grants not fees.

### **JOBS, NOT HANDOUTS TO THE BANKERS AND BILLIONAIRES**

- Bring banks and finance institutions into genuine public ownership under democratic control, instead of giving huge handouts to the very capitalists who caused the crisis.
- Tax the rich. For progressive tax on rich corporations and individuals and an end to tax avoidance.
- For massive investment in environmental projects.

### **EMPLOYMENT AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS**

- Repeal the anti-trade union laws, reverse attacks on facility time and the right to collect subs by check-off for trade unions, particularly in the public-sector.
- Support the TUC's demand to increase the minimum wage to £10 an hour, and for it then to rise in line with inflation or wages, whichever is higher.

- Scrap zero hour contracts. Guaranteed hours and full employment rights for all. Cut the working week to 35 hours with no loss of pay.
- Invest to create and protect jobs, including for young people.
- Solidarity with workers taking action to defend jobs, conditions, pensions, public services and trade unions. Reinstatement of full trade union rights to prison officers.

### **PROTECT OUR ENVIRONMENT – STOP GLOBAL WARMING**

- Deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions – otherwise climate change, caused by capitalism, will destroy us.
- Invest in publicly-owned and controlled renewable energy. Oppose fracking.
- Move to sustainable, low-pollution industry and farming – stop the pollution that is destroying our environment. No to profit-driven GM technology.
- Produce for need, not profit, and design goods for reuse and recycling.

### **DECENT PENSIONS AND BENEFITS**

- Abolish the bedroom tax.
- Reverse cuts to benefits; for living benefits; end child poverty. Scrap benefit sanctions.
- Restore the pre-Thatcher real value of pensions. Reverse the increases imposed on the state retirement age, creating jobs for younger people.

### **STOP THE ATTACKS ON DISABLED PEOPLE**

- Promote inclusive policies to enable disabled people to participate in, and have equal access to, education, employment, housing, transport and welfare provision.
- Support measures to ensure disabled people receive a level of income according to needs. Equal pay for equal work.

### **DEMOCRACY, DIVERSITY AND JUSTICE**

- Welcome diversity and oppose racism, fascism and discrimination. Defend the right to asylum, repeal the 2014 Immigration Act and all racist immigration controls.
- Ensure women have genuinely equal rights and pay.
- Full equality for LGBT people.
- Defend our liberties and make police and security democratically accountable.
- For the right to vote at 16.

### **SOLIDARITY NOT WAR**

- No to imperialist wars and occupations!
- Justice for the Palestinians, lift the siege of Gaza, recognise the state of Palestine.
- No more spending on a new generation of nuclear weapons, huge aircraft carriers or irrelevant eurofighters – convert arms spending into socially useful products and services.
- An independent foreign policy, based on international solidarity – no more being a US poodle, no moves towards a capitalist, militarist United States of Europe. No to austerity and anti-working class policies, whether from the EU or Britain.

### **SOCIALISM**

- For a democratic socialist society run in the interests of people not millionaires. For bringing into democratic public ownership the major companies and banks that dominate the economy, so that production and services can be planned to meet the needs of all and to protect the environment.