



May 2023

A renewed appeal to discuss preparations for the next general election

Dear comrades,

You will recall that last October the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) wrote to you, along with more than twenty other campaign groups and socialist organisations, to ask you to discuss with us your plans for the next general election (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/478.pdf>).

We thank all those who responded, even if it was to inform us that they had no clear plans at that point. But we make no apology for returning to this matter again. The events of the intervening seven months – the ongoing strikes against the cost-of-living crisis; the formal exclusion of Jeremy Corbyn as a Labour candidate followed by the suspension of Diane Abbott; and now Keir Starmer’s open declaration that he will go “further and deeper than New Labour’s rewriting of Clause IV” to change the character of the Labour Party after Corbyn – are justification alone.

It is true that, since we wrote, there have not been definitive moves by the left-led trade unions with Jeremy to establish a new vehicle for working class political representation; or even to coordinate a list of workers’ candidates to contest the general election, although steps towards this are being debated this summer at a number of union conferences. It is still our hope that something will be initiated by more authoritative forces than those currently involved in TUSC.

But the fact of TUSC organising a successful clearly-identified working class electoral challenge in the recent English local council elections – involving socialists from four different organisations and none – has renewed our belief that even in the absence of such an initiative it will still be possible to bring together a significant force of trade unionists, socialists and working class community and social movement candidates in a common general election campaign.

We hope you think so too; and will begin serious discussions with us about the next steps.

The next steps for an election challenge

The TUSC all-Britain steering committee is planning to step up election organising on the ground, including working to establish local steering committees in local government areas or parliamentary constituencies where a general election challenge is being considered by any of our constituent organisations, as in our *How TUSC Functions* rules (see <http://www.tusc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/How-TUSC-Functions-September-2022.pdf>). The participation of

representatives from your organisation in such committees, with the same rights as all other participating organisations, would be very welcome.

The all-Britain steering committee is not recommending early moves to select candidates – we have not, for example, produced an Application Form for Parliamentary Candidates at this stage – but instead local campaigns for a workers' candidate. This could include, we have suggested, along with public meetings, debates and so on, the organisation of local delegations of trade unionists, students, social movement campaigners etc to Labour's prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs), to see where they stand, particularly on the policies in Labour's 2017 and 2019 manifestos under Jeremy Corbyn. Again, your organisation's participation in this type of campaign would be most welcome.

The 'fair media coverage' issue and core policies

In our October letter we raised the issue of the threshold set by the broadcasting authorities for 'fair media coverage' in election periods – including a party election broadcast – of contesting 15% of the seats (which for a general election would be 98 for the UK as a whole) under one of the TUSC descriptions registered with the Electoral Commission or an additional agreed joint description. We would still like to explore this further with those who were non-committal on the matter, as we believe that reaching the threshold would make for a qualitatively different campaign compared to a 'clash avoidance' arrangement not to stand candidates against each other.

One factor in the responses, understandably, was a questioning of the political basis of a joint election challenge, with arguably a greater degree of agreement required to stand under a common name. As you know TUSC is actually constituted to include candidates on its lists from a wide range of organisations provided the candidate accepts a minimum core policy platform for the relevant election (beyond that they are free to run their election campaign in whatever way they wish). But there still has to be a minimum policy platform.

After a series of discussions, including at the TUSC conference in February, the all-Britain steering committee has produced a draft core policy platform for the next general election (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/TUSC-draft-GE-platform-for-2024.pdf>). But again we see this as a draft minimum platform, which we would be happy to discuss with your organisation.

We ended our October letter with the observation that "none of us can be sure of the date of the next general election". But also then with the appeal that "if a new authoritative working class party has not been formed by the time it is called, at the very least the discussions that we have now can hopefully ensure that there will be the most unified and effective alternative possible available on the ballot paper that defends the basic principles of trade unionism and socialism".

We still believe that to be so and look forward to engaging with you.

In solidarity,

Dave Nellist, TUSC National Chairperson, former Labour MP 1983-1992

Clive Heemskerck, TUSC National Election Agent