



## Steering Committee briefing note:

# Union conference discussions on political strategy

The position of TUSC is clear. We do not see our coalition as the new, mass vehicle of political representation that the working class needs as an alternative to the establishment parties but as a means to campaign for such a party to be created; and that it requires more authoritative forces to act than those presently participating in our coalition, above all the left-led trade unions, to bring such a party into being.

Regarding the next general election, while TUSC will contest as many seats as it is able to do if the vacuum of working class political representation remains, we hope for, and work towards, the left unions organising at the very least a list of workers' candidates – including, hopefully, Jeremy Corbyn standing independently of Labour – as a step towards the new party that we need.

So how the debate is progressing in the unions is very important for the TUSC steering committee to assess.

Listed below are resolutions that have been reported to me as being tabled for debate at, firstly, the RMT annual general meeting (annual conference) from 25th-29th June; and secondly, the proposed rule changes on Unite's relationship with the Labour Party going to the union's rules revision conference from 9th-10th July. There is also an amendment going to the policy conference that follows the rules revision conference (11th-14th July) which argues for the union to *"organise a referendum of all UNITE members asking them if they agree with opening up our political fund to support any candidate, inside and outside of the Labour Party, that the Executive Council deems supports the Union's members, including Jeremy Corbyn and other genuine socialist and trade union candidates"*.

And lastly is another motion, passed by 52 votes with none against at the PCS Wigan area branch of the civil servants' union PCS, which was constitutionally submitted to the union's Annual Delegates Conference (ADC) that took place from 23rd-25th May.

It was not discussed, however, after the conference arrangements committee tabled it in such a position on the agenda that it was almost guaranteed to be timed out and not debated, which is what happened.

**Clive Heemskerk**  
TUSC National Agent

# Two motions before the RMT AGM, 25-29 June

## 1. Jeremy Corbyn

This RMT AGM notes the announcement by Labour leader Sir Keir Starmer that Jeremy Corbyn will not be allowed to defend the Islington North seat, that he has held since 1983, at the next general election.

This RMT AGM believes that:

- This is an utterly undemocratic act, removing Jeremy's right to take part in a selection contest.
- Jeremy Corbyn has been a consistent supporter of RMT members taking action and RMT policies such as the renationalisation of the railways and the repeal of the Tory anti-union Trade Union Act.
- As with Jeremy's suspension from the Parliamentary Labour Party, this is a political statement by the Labour leadership, moving the party to the right politically, proving its credentials to big business and the capitalist establishment. It follows the refusal of Starmer to support striking workers, and the sacking of Sam Tarry from the shadow cabinet for speaking up for union action from the picket line.
- It is confirmation that, under Starmer's leadership, Labour does not represent the interests of workers and working-class communities.
- Therefore, workers need political representation that supports their action against the cost-of-living squeeze, and stands for policies such as re-nationalisation, opposition to cuts, and for the repeal of the Tory anti-union laws.

Therefore, this RMT AGM agrees to instruct the union NEC to:

- Give full support to Jeremy Corbyn, and to campaign for his re-election as the Islington North MP if he decides to stand in the next general election, including as an independent candidate.

## 2. Political strategy review

This AGM is alarmed at recent developments within the Labour Party, under the leadership of Kier Starmer.

On 13 May, Starmer told the Progressive Britain conference. "That's why I say this project goes further and deeper than New Labour's rewriting of clause IV... This is about rolling our sleeves up, changing our entire culture, our DNA. This is clause IV on steroids".

This comes following the Labour NEC decision on 28 March 2023 to exclude Jeremy Corbyn from standing as a Labour candidate in the next general election. We further note Starmer's comments (BBC Radio Four, 2 May 2023) that Labour will abandon its commitment to abolish tuition fees and the Labour shadow Health Secretary's repeated calls to increase the role of the private sector in the NHS (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-65638171>).

Our 2018 SGM took the decision to align RMT's political strategy to the Labour Party, while remaining unaffiliated. Developments, since the election of Starmer, call in question whether Labour does align with the aims, objectives and policies of our union.

With the next 18 months encompassing elections to the Greater London Authority, six Combined Authority Metro-Mayors, 105 councils and a general election, this AGM believes that it is time to review our political strategy by involving branches and regions in a discussion and inviting resolutions to be considered at a Special General Meeting, held in good time to allow the union to make a meaningful intervention in these contests and beyond.

## **Rule changes for the Unite rules revision conference**

The current Unite rulebook states, under **Rule 22. Political Organisation – The Labour Party**:

**22.2** Neither the Union, nor any constituent part of the Union, shall affiliate to or give support to the candidates of any other political party in Great Britain and Northern Ireland other than the Labour Party.

There are three proposed 'delete all and replace' changes to this rule that have been submitted to the rules revision conference, which are:

### **Submitted by NEYH Health RISC and NEYH LGBT+ Committee**

Neither the Union, nor any constituent part of the Union, shall affiliate to or give support to any political candidates or organisations other than those who pledge to support the Union, its policies and rules, without condition.

### **Submitted by Waltham Forest Council Branch, LE/1228, London and Eastern**

The Union, or any constituent part of the Union, may affiliate to or give support to the candidates of any political party in Great Britain and Northern Ireland that the Executive Council deems supports the Union's members, policies and objectives.

### **Submitted by Brighton Branch SE/6246 South East**

22.1 The Union, and any constituent part of the Union, may affiliate to or give support to the candidates of any political party in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, excluding:

- (1) any Party that does not demonstrate support for trade unions, collective action, strikes or any other form of lawful industrial action;
- (2) any Party that by its words or actions does not support socialism;
- (3) any Party that advances racist or fascist beliefs.

22.2 Each Branch of the Union in Great Britain and Northern Ireland shall be entitled to affiliate and elect delegates to Parties in appropriate areas subject to approval of the Executive Council (who shall act in accordance with Rule 22.1).

22.3 A portion of the political fund, to be determined by the Executive Council, shall be remitted to each Region.

22.4 The Executive Council shall designate a Regional Political officer in each Region, who shall act as liaison with political Parties approved by the union or any constituent part of the union. Any individual Regional Political Officer may also have other responsibilities. The Executive Council is free to designate this role to a different employee at any time as it sees fit.

22.5 The Union shall support a parliamentary group of MPs who are members of the Union. Such support shall be determined by the Executive Council in accordance with Rule 22.2.

22.6 The Union shall maintain a panel of members wishing to seek political office including becoming member of the UK, Scottish, Welsh Assembly and European Parliaments and any such other public bodies as the Executive Council may decide. The composition, including the process and the qualifications required to become a member of the panel, shall be determined by the Executive Council in accordance with Rule 22.2.

## Motion tabled but not debated at PCS ADC

Conference notes the passage of A38 at ADC 2022 regarding political strategy. It agreed to “support political networks of PCS members active in political parties and campaigns to build support for our industrial demands within those organisations”.

Conference further notes that PCS took a clear position to give “national union support for a Corbyn-led Labour government” in 2018 not least because the manifesto, if implemented, would have had clear benefits for all PCS members and in line with our policy objectives, not least his pledge to restore national pay bargaining for civil servants.

We note with regret the decision by the Labour Party National Executive on the 28 March to ban Jeremy Corbyn from standing for Labour at the next general election. Jeremy Corbyn’s consistent support for our strike action, and our union’s consistent support for his anti-austerity programme means that one of the few voices that fights for our members interests could be lost.

PCS took a clear position against the attempts within the Labour Party to sabotage Corbyn’s leadership. In 2016, our general secretary correctly made clear PCS’s support for Jeremy Corbyn against “a choreographed and undemocratic attempt to unseat him”.

Further, we note:

- That Keir Starmer has made clear his intention to ‘wipe the slate clean’ of Jeremy Corbyn’s 2019 anti-austerity election manifesto and that he has made no commitment on restoring national pay bargaining for civil servants.
- The ‘Blairite’ wing of Labour has now succeeded in their “choreographed and undemocratic attempt” to ban Corbyn and to abandon the programme he stood for.
- That two members of our parliamentary group, Jeremy Corbyn and Diane Abbott, are now being blocked from standing as Labour MPs.

Conference believes that it is beneficial to our members to fight for voices in Parliament that support and will campaign for policies in line with the aspirations of PCS.

Conference therefore asserts:

- That it is time to enact our 2012 membership ballots 78.9% decision, to “stand or support candidates in national elections that would help to defend members’ jobs, pay, pensions and public services”. Average real pay fell by 7.75% last year, the biggest fall in over half a century. This constitutes the “exceptional circumstances” required to enact this decision.
- That we should give political and material support to Jeremy Corbyn if he stands in the general election, including should he stand as an independent candidate.
- That we should provide political and material support to other genuine pro-trade union, anti-austerity candidates in the next general election, with any elected executive committee of the union free to propose such support, and this support for candidates to be ratified by the NEC.