



To: The Socialist Students steering committee; The Socialist Workers Student Societies (SWSS); Workers Liberty Students; The Marxist Student Federation; Student Socialist Alternative; The Young Communist League; Labour Students

August 2023

An invitation to discuss campaigning for free education at the next general election

Dear comrades,

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) all-Britain steering committee is writing to invite your organisation to discuss how we can campaign for free education at the next general election – including the possibilities for organising trade unionists, socialists, and student and social movement candidates prepared to stand up to the establishment politicians at the ballot box.

The choice at the last two general elections, in 2017 and 2019, was clear. The Labour Party, with Jeremy Corbyn as the leader, was committed to the principle that education should be free. Labour's Manifestos pledged to bring back Education Maintenance Allowances for 16-18 year olds, to abolish university tuition fees, and to reintroduce maintenance grants for higher education students. With the latest figures from the Student Loans Company showing that the average sum owed by graduating students now stands at just under £45,000, there can be no question how transformative the implementation of Labour's pledges would have been.

TUSC, co-founded in 2010 by the then general secretary of the RMT union, the late Bob Crow, did not contest the 2017 and 2019 elections and instead campaigned in support of a Jeremy Corbyn-led government with a socialist programme.

But the situation that we will be faced with at the next election is completely different. Sir Keir Starmer is purging both the personnel and policies from the period of Jeremy Corbyn's leadership. He seeks to reassure the ruling establishment that a government he led would not even begin to fight for the fundamental system change needed to meet the economic, social and environmental crises that we face. This includes confirming, in a Radio 4 Today programme interview on May 2nd, that, among other pledges he was abandoning, he was 'moving on' from the commitment to free education.

To meet this situation TUSC strongly hopes that, before the election, a new working class political alternative will have been established by more authoritative forces than those currently involved in our coalition or any other currently existing party or alliance – the trade unions organising the workers' fightback, or potentially around Jeremy Corbyn himself standing independently of Labour.

However, recognising that the necessary steps for this might not be taken in time, we also believe that discussions should begin now about what to do in the general election. This should include, in our opinion, organising to put every individual Labour candidate under pressure to stand by the previous commitment to free education and, where they don't, discuss the possibility of organising a candidate to stand against them.

Join the discussion

The next general election must be held no later than December 2024 but, even if in the unlikely event it is not called before then, planning has to begin now. In particular we would like to discuss with you:

- Is your organisation prepared to consider standing candidates, or supporting candidates standing against establishment politicians, in the next general election?
- Would your organisation, and its local groups, be prepared to join delegations to local Labour Party prospective parliamentary candidates (PPCs) to see where they stand on the previous Manifesto pledges for free education? Every individual Labour candidate retains the ability to take their own personal policy stance, on this and other issues, so they should be asked to do so.
- TUSC is, as its says, a coalition – constituted to allow candidates on its lists from a wide range of organisations provided the candidate accepts a minimum core policy platform for the relevant election (beyond which they are free to run their election campaign in whatever way they wish, including presenting policies that go beyond the TUSC core policies and promoting their own organisations). The draft policy platform for the next general election is at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/TUSC-draft-GE-platform-for-2024.pdf>. Would your organisation allow its members to stand under the TUSC umbrella on the basis described, or would that be considered a breach of your membership rules?
- Free education is not the only issue that shows the need to campaign, as TUSC does, for a new mass working class party with socialist policies. Would your organisation consider affiliating to TUSC and potentially joining the steering committee to play a fuller role in that fight?

We look forward to your response.

In solidarity,

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

Clive Heemskerk, TUSC National Election Agent