



Record of correspondence between TUSC and the *Transform* founder groups, 2021-2023

Appended below as a reference record is the text of selected correspondence between the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) and the core individuals and organisations involved in the recent call for a new party of the left under the name of Transform.

TUSC was effectively re-launched in September 2020, having not contested the 2017 and 2019 general elections when Jeremy Corbyn was the leader of the Labour Party, and while we had a relationship with one of the Transform groups before 2020 – the Left Unity party, founded in 2013, which registered a joint description with TUSC for the 2015 general election – the correspondence here covers just the three years since our re-launch, and is presented broadly in chronological order.

What and who is Transform?

The formation of Transform was announced on July 25 this year with a joint statement issued in the name of four organisations under the heading, ‘Together, We Call For A New Party of the Left’ (see <https://transformpolitics.uk/>). The organisations were the Breakthrough Party, Left Unity, and the Liverpool Community Independents, with the fourth group listed being the People’s Alliance of the Left (PAL) – although by this time PAL, which had never registered as a political party with the Electoral Commission, had effectively become an alliance of Breakthrough and Left Unity only.

Arguing the case that in “an era of crisis” the Labour Party under Keir Starmer “is failing to provide an answer”, the statement outlined ten core principles and urged “all who agree” with these “to move rapidly towards founding a new party of the left” and to “sign up to support the call”.

As well as representatives of the organisations listed, the initial call was endorsed by individuals including the former Colne Valley Labour MP Thelma Walker and the former Momentum national co-ordinating group member Solma Ahmed. Also signing the call were the president of the BFAWU Ian Hodson, the broadcaster India Willoughby, and the former Lewisham Green Party councillor Romayne Phoenix – although these are not members of the initial co-ordinating committee.

The launch received coverage in the Morning Star and Voice newspapers and, in the last publicly reported figures, over 5,000 had signed the call for a new party by mid-August and over £12,000 had been raised towards an initial launch crowdfunder appeal of £25,000.

A further FAQ posting on the Transform website (at [Transform | FAQ \(transformpolitics.uk\)](https://transformpolitics.uk/)), and presentation slides at post-launch regional zoom meetings, have supplied additional details.

The initial co-ordinating committee or steering group is drafting a proposed constitution for the new party and aiming to organise a founding conference for later this year. All individual members – at this point, it seems, those who have signed the call for a new party – will be able to participate in the founding conference either in-person or online.

Details of how a democratic discussion on the draft constitution could be organised with these arrangements, how amendments could be tabled by members and genuinely debated by the conference, and how voting on competing proposals through the different means of participation could be facilitated, are to be resolved by the co-ordinating group.

Existing socialist organisations are able to participate in the formation of the new party on the basis that, while whether or not they would ultimately dissolve and merge themselves into Transform would “be decided by the respective memberships of the founding parties”, they would have to be at least ready to do so.

What the correspondence shows

These initial facts themselves give a sense of proportion as to what is involved with the announcement of Transform. The obvious difficulties that the leadership of a many-thousands-strong trade union that wanted to participate would have, while retaining its union’s own independent political position and its accountability to the union membership, is a clear example.

This, of course, is in contrast to the position of TUSC, which does not require of any of its participants that they renounce their own political identity or organisational independence.

We, more modestly, do not see our coalition as ‘the’ new party – 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 mass party to be created; and that it requires more authoritative forces to act than those presently participating in our coalition, most importantly the left-led trade unions, to bring such a party into being.

These are the arguments – made, we believe, in an open and constructive spirit – that are a theme of the correspondence that we have had with what are now the founders of the Transform initiative over the past two-and-a-half years.

That neither TUSC nor Transform will be the definitive answer to ending the vacuum of working class political representation means that they will surely be revisited many times – again, we hope, in the same spirit of solidarity – in the events ahead. That is why they have been brought together in one report.

Clive Heemskerck
TUSC National Agent

13th September 2023

Initial correspondence with ex-MP Thelma Walker

Following the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn from the Parliamentary Labour Party in late October 2020 the former MP for Colne Valley (2017-2019), Thelma Walker, announced her resignation from the Labour Party. In spring 2021 she stood for the newly formed Northern Independence Party in the Hartlepool parliamentary by-election.

TUSC, standing for the first time since our relaunch in September 2020 – in the local elections being held on the same day as the Hartlepool by-election on May 6th 2021 – reached out to Thelma, who in turn invited TUSC to participate in a meeting she hosted on 12th May for the initial discussions about what was to become the People's Alliance of the Left (PAL), as traced in the correspondence below.

1. Letter from TUSC to Thelma Walker

On 27 Apr 2021, at 15:13, Dave Nellist <dave@nellist.net> wrote:



Hi Thelma,

I hope you are well and that the campaign is going well in Hartlepool (which, incidentally, is only 13 miles up the coast from where I was born and brought up).

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is holding a pre-election Zoom rally on Tuesday, May 4th at 7pm, and we would like to invite you to speak.

It's always difficult to predict attendance at Zoom events, but the conference launching our campaign in February attracted over 500 trade unionists and socialists; I hope the election rally could be similarly well supported...

I hope you might be able to join us next Tuesday evening (even if, with the pressures of your campaign, it was only for your own slot).

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Solidarity,

Dave

Dave Nellist
Chair, Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

2. Thelma Walker to TUSC

From: **Thelma Walker** <thelma.walker@hotmail.co.uk>

Date: Tue, 27 Apr 2021 at 19:04

Subject: Re: Invitation to speak

To: Dave Nellist <dave@nellist.net>

Hi Dave

Thanks for the invite.

I will pass your email onto the team to see what I have on next week and whether it's possible.

Best wishes

Thelma

3. Thelma Walker to TUSC and others re: PAL

From: **Thelma Walker** <thelma.walker@hotmail.co.uk>

Sent: 20 May 2021 14:36

Subject: The Progressive Alliance of the Left (PAL)

Dear Comrade,

Following our discussion and your valuable contribution at our initial meeting [on May 12th], I would like to propose that we meet again on June 9th at 7pm to follow up on the action points agreed.

These included:

The feedback from your members about the idea of a Left alliance working together.

To plan an agreed strategy about future elections and who should (or shouldn't) stand where.

An update from The Breakthrough Party and the by-election in Chesham and Amersham.

If there are particular groups or individuals you feel should be invited to the discussion please contact me with their details.

If a majority of the group wish to meet again, I will send you the zoom link and we will go ahead on June 9th.

Solidarity,

Thelma

4. From TUSC to Thelma Walker

4th June 2021



Hi Thelma,

Thank you very much for the invitation to TUSC to attend the proposed meeting on June 9th, following up the initial meeting convened on May 12th.

The TUSC All-Britain Steering Committee has not met since May 12th – our next meeting is on June 16th – but having consulted by e-mail, members are happy for me to once again represent TUSC at the June 9th meeting.

Regarding the action points you have highlighted, I am attaching a PDF of the recently published *TUSC Directory of Elections 2022*, providing a breakdown of the statutory elections scheduled for next May (involving over 6,700 council seats, plus mayoral contests).

Also attached is a copy of a briefing paper, *The Way Forward After May's Elections – Initial Points to Consider*, presented by Dave Nellist and myself to the last TUSC steering committee meeting, which – while obviously aimed at the organisations and individuals involved in the TUSC coalition – includes references to the action point on working collaboratively (amongst other issues raised).

It might be useful to circulate these to the other participants in the PAL discussions or, if you feel it might come across as aggrandising 'self-promotion' by TUSC, refer them to the link on the TUSC website – at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/17544/04-06-2021/forward-planning-the-tusc-directory-of-future-elections> – which introduces the two documents.

But please don't hesitate to give me a call if you want any more information or to discuss further.

In solidarity,

Clive Heemsker

TUSC National Election Agent

Collaboration in PAL – but then TUSC was excluded

From the initial meetings in May and June 2021, TUSC was represented at every one of the zoom meetings held under the PAL banner – until our exclusion, a year later, in May 2022.

Reprinted below is, firstly, an example of how constructive relations were established at this time. This exchange is then followed by the social media posting from the TUSC All-Britain Steering Committee on the subsequent and regrettable decision made in May 2022 to exclude TUSC from PAL by three of the PAL core organisations – including two of the core organisations in the new Transform Politics initiative, Left Unity and the Breakthrough Party – which was published as a statement of record on the matter.

1. Letter from PAL working group co-ordinator

From: James Thornbury (NIP) [<mailto:james.thornbury@freethenorth.co.uk>]

Sent: 09 November 2021 22:42

To: alex.mays@breakthroughparty.org.uk; Clive Heemskerk; doughthorpe@btinternet.com

Cc: alex.dhawan@freethenorth.co.uk; Philip Proudfoot

Subject: Memorandum of Understanding - Meeting 3

Hello TUSC, Left Unity, and Breakthrough,

Great meeting yesterday. When are we all available for a follow-up? Wednesday and Thursday this week are out for NIP, how about everyone else?

I will circulate the updated record of decisions along with the proposed timeslot for our next meeting.

Warm regards,

James Thornbury

Consultant on Operations, Campaigns, and Political Strategy

Northern Independence Party

2. Letter from TUSC to the PAL working group

From: Clive Heemskerk

Sent: 11 November 2021 19:45

Subject: RE: Memorandum of Understanding - Meeting 3



Hi All,

Just a quick note to let you know that last night's meeting of the TUSC Steering Committee agreed to the proposal that I made at our meeting on Monday, to circulate TUSC candidate applications to PAL participants before they are approved or not by the TUSC Steering Committee.

The minute of this reads:

Arising from the report it was agreed that to show TUSC's preparedness to collaborate with all forces attempting to build a socialist electoral alternative after the defeat of Corbynism within the Labour Party, the cover-list of the TUSC candidate application reports (the councils, the ward names and the prospective candidates' names) that are circulated to TUSC steering committee members prior to our formal meetings to approve candidates would now also be sent to the named electoral officers of the participating organisations in PAL on the same timetable. Unlike the TUSC steering committee members they would not have the right, under the TUSC consensus rule, to veto candidate applications but they would have a chance through this procedure to input into our deliberations.

In solidarity,

Clive Heemskerk

TUSC National Election Agent

3. TUSC website posting, 20th June 2022



On May 23rd a social media announcement was made under the heading, 'Statement on the Change of Relationship between the People's Alliance of the Left (PAL) and TUSC', effectively excluding the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) from the series of zoom meetings that have been held under the name of PAL since May 2021.

A report on this development, drafted by the TUSC representative at the PAL meetings, was presented to the TUSC All-Britain Steering Committee meeting held on June 15th, which agreed to publish it as a statement of record.

Report on TUSC and the 'People's Alliance of the Left'

On May 23rd a social media announcement was made under the heading, 'Statement on the Change of Relationship between the People's Alliance of the Left (PAL) and TUSC', by three of the five core organisations of PAL – the Northern Independence Party, the Breakthrough Party, and Left Unity – effectively excluding TUSC from the series of zoom meetings that have been held under the name of PAL. This followed a decision taken by the TUSC steering committee earlier this year to agree observer status for the Workers Party of Britain at our meetings.

The statement recognised "that TUSC is a coalition of different organisations and individual socialists and trade unionists who in their great majority do not share the politics of George Galloway and the Workers Party". But, it went on, the various constituent components of TUSC "are prepared to critically collaborate with the Workers Party as they (TUSC) consider it to be an organisation with origins in the labour and trade union movement".

That is not the approach of the Northern Independence Party, the Breakthrough Party, and Left Unity, who view the Workers Party as being outside of or even hostile to the labour movement. So TUSC was excluded from PAL meetings along with the fifth core organisation, Resist, who, while being part of the TUSC coalition, have also been attending the PAL meetings in their own right. The left-wing former Labour MP and Resist founder Chris Williamson was removed from the PAL WhatsApp group on May 26th.

What is PAL?

Since May 2021 a series of zoom meetings have been convened by another former Labour MP Thelma Walker, who had served as John McDonnell's parliamentary private secretary from 2017-2019, to discuss, in her original call-notice, "thoughts on the way forward for a progressive alliance". Thelma herself had resigned from the Labour Party following the suspension of Jeremy Corbyn in November 2020 and stood in the Hartlepool by-election in May on behalf of the Northern Independence Party, finishing eighth (out of 16 candidates) with 250 votes (0.8%).

As the TUSC national election agent I attended the initial meeting on behalf of TUSC and all eleven meetings since. At the December meeting this network was formalised as the 'People's Alliance of the Left' (PAL), agreeing that PAL itself would not participate in electoral politics nor make electoral endorsements so that those still in the Labour Party could be part of it (although no minutes have been taken or presented at any of the meetings). To be clear, at this point, PAL is not registered as a political party with the Electoral Commission and cannot, therefore, contest elections in its own name.

Alongside the Northern Independence Party, the core participants in the PAL discussions have been the Breakthrough Party (a registered party who finished sixth out of eight candidates with 197 votes, 0.5%, at the Chesham and Amersham by-election in June 2021); Left Unity (also a registered party, but who have not contested elections since 2015); TUSC; and Resist. The Breakthrough Party and the Northern Independence Party stood, respectively, two and eight candidates in May's local elections, polling a combined total of 1,189 votes. More information, along with the results of the 271 candidates who stood under the TUSC umbrella in May – polling 29,169 votes – can be found on the TUSC website at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/472.pdf>.

In addition the Compass and Cosmos political think-tanks were regular attendees at PAL meetings in 2021; the Peace and Justice Project established by Jeremy Corbyn in January 2021 have zoomed in to three of the eleven meetings; the BFAWU president Ian Hodson has attended two, as has the Lancaster city councillor Andrew Sinclair (part of a four-strong Eco-Socialist group in a ruling coalition with the Greens on the council); and one meeting apiece has been attended by Anna Rothery (a Liverpool Community Independents councillor), Howard Beckett (the former assistant general secretary of Unite), the Newham Socialist Labour Network group, Steve Walker from the Socialist Telly YouTube site, and Crispin Flintoff, host of the Not The Andrew Marr Show YouTube show.

None of these latter organisations or individuals have attended the 'business' part of the PAL meetings, including the discussion on whether to exclude TUSC or not, which, as a matter of record, was a decision of the Northern Independence Party, Breakthrough and Left Unity representatives.

Different conceptions of unity

The decision to exclude TUSC from the PAL discussions was not unanticipated, following one of the closed business meetings held on February 8th to discuss PAL membership.

TUSC has always been conceived from its foundation in 2010 by Bob Crow and others as an inclusive coalition around the goal of building a working class political alternative to, at that point, Tony Blair's New Labour, now Sir Keir Starmer's. A broad coalition, rather than a closed one, would inevitably have to involve collaboration – and robust debate – between organisations and groups within the working class movement holding often sharply different views.

But participating organisations, and individual candidates, are accountable for their own positions not those of others, except where they depart from the agreed common core policy platform. A genuine coalition should be a 'united front', marching separately but striking together under the same banner at the ballot box.

This, however, has not been the conception of what unity means held by the representatives of the Northern Independence Party, Breakthrough and Left Unity who have attended the PAL meetings, as their decision to exclude TUSC and Resist demonstrates.

The discussion at the February meeting was reported back to the TUSC steering committee where it was agreed that I would continue to participate in PAL meetings on behalf of TUSC – if permitted to attend by the host – but would not be authorised to accept any restrictions prescribed by PAL on the activities or political positions of any component part of TUSC, nor of the coalition itself without the approval of the steering committee.

Implications for future electoral co-ordination

While it is disappointing to be excluded from the PAL discussions it need not have much practical impact on TUSC's goal of attempting to secure the greatest possible electoral co-ordination of left-wing forces standing against Starmer's new New Labour.

I would recommend, for example, that the practice that we introduced for this year's local elections, of circulating the cover-pages of the TUSC candidate application reports (the councils, the ward names and the prospective candidates' names) to the electoral officers of the Northern Independence Party, Breakthrough and Left Unity before our formal meetings to approve candidates, should continue, if they wish it.

I would also propose that we still strongly encourage the three organisations to join in local TUSC groups with the TUSC constituent organisations and others, to participate, for example, in local People's Budget campaigning, and as the first point of contact to discuss their electoral activity.

No doors should be closed in the struggle to build the alternative that the movement needs.

Clive Heemsker
TUSC National Agent
15th June 2022

Solidarity with the ex-Labour Liverpool councillors

In spring 2022 eight Labour Party councillors in Liverpool were suspended and subsequently expelled from Labour for voting against the cuts budget being proposed by the ruling Labour Group. The first TUSC steering committee meeting following the May 2022 local elections agreed to write to the independents group, in the letter reprinted below with the response from one of the group, councillor Alan Gibbons.

1. Letter from TUSC to the Liverpool Community Independents



To: The Liverpool Community Independents Councillors Group

16th June, 2022

Relations with the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition: an invitation to discuss

Dear comrades,

We are writing on behalf of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) All-Britain Steering Committee to propose a discussion on what collaboration may be possible between us in the period ahead.

Our steering committee very much welcomes the stand you have made against the austerity policies of Liverpool's right-wing Labour Party administration and the formation of the Liverpool Community Independents Group to lead the opposition to them on the council. We applaud your campaign in the council by-election for the Fazakerley ward on June 30th and send greetings and support to your candidate Laura Wharton. It is encouraging that, as we have, you see the need for socialists to challenge the revival of Tony Blair-style New Labour politics in Sir Keir Starmer's Labour Party not only by campaigning action in the community and workplace but also at the ballot box.

The dominance of 'New Blairism' within the Labour Party obviously has implications for the efforts of any councillor to defend their communities and resist the pressure for new austerity measures that councils face from central government. This poses the need to discuss how councils could stand up to the government but also how a national alternative to austerity politics can be built, which is why we are writing to you.

TUSC is a coalition which was initially founded in 2010 with the involvement of the late Bob Crow, then general secretary of the RMT transport workers' union, to fight for a new vehicle to politically represent the working class, which had been abandoned by New Labour.

Today TUSC involves constituent organisations – including the RMT, the Socialist Party and Resist (founded by the former Labour MP, Chris Williamson) – plus members of trade union national

executives including Unison, the NEU, NAPO, BFAWU, POA, UCU and Unite, and individual socialists. The Workers Party of Britain currently attends the TUSC steering committee with observer status. When there have been supportive councillors in first or second tier authorities – as there have been at different times in Southampton, Leicester, Preston, Hull, Harrow, Walsall and Warrington – they too have had representation on the all-Britain committee, which operates on a consensus basis (see *How TUSC Functions* at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/449.pdf>).

TUSC is not, and does not see itself as, a ready-made national alternative. We also do not think that the debate on how to build a new political voice for the working class will be resolved overnight. We see steps forward towards a new working class party coming from various sources, particularly from the trade unions or potentially around Jeremy Corbyn himself if he does stand independently of Labour in the next general election. But also, we would expect, the Liverpool Community Independents Councillors Group and its supporters.

That is why we would like to open a discussion with you (although obviously after the Fazakerley campaign!). We understand that you have already begun initial discussions with local representatives of some of the component organisations of TUSC in Liverpool about the 2023 city council elections. But we are also keen to discuss with you more broadly, including any thoughts you may have about the general election – which must be called by December 2024 but is very likely to take place before – as well as giving you an opportunity to ask any questions you may have about TUSC as an all-Britain organisation and how it operates.

We look forward to your response.

In solidarity,

Dave Nellist

TUSC National Chairperson
Former Labour MP 1983-1992

Clive Heemskerk

TUSC National Election Agent

2. Letter from councillor Alan Gibbons to TUSC

From: **Gibbons, Alan** <Alan.Gibbons4@liverpool.gov.uk>

Date: Fri, 17 Jun 2022, 21:07

Subject: RE: An invitation from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Thanks for contacting us, both of you.

A couple of TUSC members were out campaigning with us this evening, which is really welcome.

I will raise your letter with our group leader Anna and the rest of our group and we will give you a considered response once the Fazakerley by-election campaign is over and we have had a chance to have a full group discussion.

Best wishes,

Alan Gibbons

Councillor Alan Gibbons

Independent Councillor for Warbreck Ward

An offer to speak at open forums on election plans

Autumn 2022 saw a series of open forum public meetings hosted by TUSC under the heading, 'Enough is Enough! But what do we do at the ballot box?'. Twenty-three in-person meetings were organised from October to December, attended by just under 600 people. Participating were representatives of the constituent organisations of TUSC but also a wide range of trade unionists, community campaigners and social movement activists not previously in contact with TUSC.

Accompanying this initiative to try and get a serious discussion on what should be done to prepare for the next general election, the TUSC all-Britain steering committee sent an appeal to over twenty campaign groups and socialist organisations (printed below), including the Breakthrough Party, Left Unity, and the Liverpool Community Independents.



13th October 2022

An appeal to discuss preparing a workers' alternative for the next general election

Dear comrade,

The Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) is writing to invite your organisation to participate in drawing up plans for the next general election – with the aim of bringing together the widest range of trade unionists, socialists and working class community and social movement candidates prepared to stand up to the establishment politicians.

TUSC believes that what will be on offer at the next election from a Labour Party under Sir Keir Starmer will be a significant retreat from the radical policies that were presented in the 2017 and 2019 manifestoes under Jeremy Corbyn. The current leadership have been quite open about this, as they seek to reassure the ruling establishment that they will be a safe pair of hands by reviving Tony Blair-style 'New Labour' politics. There is no prospect that a Starmer-led Labour government would even begin to fight for the fundamental system change needed to end the cost of living and other crises that working class people face.

To meet this situation TUSC strongly hopes that, before the election, a new vehicle for working class political representation 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 between all those who might be considering standing in the general election against the establishment parties.

Organising an election challenge

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. Agreeing that there should be an election challenge is only the first step.

In June the TUSC all-Britain steering committee discussed a briefing paper on some of the different issues involved, including questions of electoral law and the regulations for party election broadcasts, which is available on our website at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/txt/475.pdf>. Now we are writing to your organisation and others to hear your views on the matter.

In particular we would like to discuss with you:

- Is your organisation considering standing candidates, or supporting candidates standing against establishment politicians, in the next general election?
- If you are thinking of standing are you realistically planning to meet the threshold set by the broadcasting authorities for 'fair media coverage' – including a party election broadcast – of contesting 15% of the seats? (This is 98 for the UK as a whole which, at £500 per election deposit for each seat, means a minimum expenditure of £48,000).
- Would your organisation be prepared in principle – subject to discussion of course – for its candidates to use on the ballot paper one of the TUSC descriptions registered with the Electoral Commission, as a contribution to reaching the 'fair media coverage' threshold?
- TUSC is 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). We are in the process of formulating the policy platform for the next general election. Would your organisation wish to be formally involved in that discussion?

Join the discussion

To step up preparations for the general election the TUSC steering committee is hosting a series of public meetings this autumn under the heading, 'Enough is Enough! But what do we do at the ballot box?'. A copy of the standard flyer for these meetings is attached.

As well as discussing your plans with the TUSC steering committee, we would welcome the participation of your organisation in these local meetings.

None of us can be sure of the date of the next general election. But 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 look forward to your response.

In solidarity,

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

Clive Heemskerk, TUSC National Election Agent

The response from Left Unity

The first of what are now the Transform Politics core organisations to respond to the TUSC appeal was Left Unity. Printed below is the initial correspondence from the National Secretary, Doug Thorpe; a letter in response agreed by the November 2022 meeting of the TUSC All-Britain steering committee; and a further note concluding the exchange from Left Unity.

1. Letter from Left Unity to TUSC

From: **Doug Thorpe** <doughthorpe@btinternet.com>

Date: Mon, 31 Oct 2022, 16:02

Subject: RE: The next election: an appeal from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

To: Clive Heemskerk <cliveheemskerk@gmail.com>

Clive

Sorry for the slow reply. Left Unity is currently discussing our position with regards to standing candidates at the next General Election and has not yet taken any decisions. Should we stand any candidates we will discuss avoiding clashes with you but it is unlikely, after our negative evaluation of doing so in 2015, that we would stand using any of the TUSC descriptions registered with the Electoral Commission.

Yours sincerely

Doug Thorpe

National Secretary, Left Unity

2. Letter from TUSC to Left Unity

12th November 2022



To: Doug Thorpe,
Left Unity National Secretary

Dear Doug,

Thank you for your reply to the appeal from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) to campaign groups and socialist organisations to join a dialogue on how to bring together the widest range of trade unionists, socialists and working class community and social movement candidates to stand against the establishment politicians at the next general election.

Your response was discussed at the TUSC steering committee meeting on November 9th. While understanding that Left Unity has not yet decided whether it will stand candidates the committee welcomed your commitment that, if you do decide to do so, Left Unity would discuss avoiding clashes with TUSC. However it was also felt that 'clash avoidance' is a bare minimum of what

could be achieved compared to the possibility there is for a significant challenge to be made at the next election even if trade unions or left MPs forced out by Starmer – including, of course, Jeremy Corbyn himself – do not take the lead in organising this.

The fair coverage threshold

This was why we raised in our letter the issue of the threshold set by the broadcasting authorities for ‘fair media coverage’ in a general election of contesting 15% of the seats (which, as we said, on the current boundaries is 98 for the UK as a whole).

Not only Left Unity but all the socialist organisations we sent our appeal to – the Breakthrough Party, the Socialist Labour Network (the ‘Labour-in-exile’ group), the Northern Independence Party, the People’s Alliance of the Left (PAL), Socialist Alternative UK, the Socialist Labour Party, the Communist Party of Britain and the Socialist Workers Party, as well as the component parts of TUSC – have to seriously address the question. Would half-a-dozen or so separate lists of tens of candidates without any guaranteed media access have more impact than one list of 100 or so candidates with ‘fair media coverage’ rights?

Meeting the ‘fair coverage’ threshold to ensure a party election broadcast (PEB), coverage of the manifesto launch etc does not, of course, mean genuinely fair coverage. But without doubt it gives an electoral list that achieves the threshold an important lever in negotiations at each stage with individual programme editors, local radio and TV and so on.

So we do feel it necessary to ask again: would Left Unity realistically expect to meet the 98 seat threshold if it stood under its own registered name? If not, what do you propose? That all of the organisations mentioned above (and others), should stand under the Left Unity name in order to get at least one list to the threshold?

What model can maximise unity?

That is not an illegitimate aspiration to hold but what are the arguments for it? TUSC has set out its model to maximise electoral unity which meant, in 2015, that there was a list of 135 candidates appearing on the ballot paper with one or other of the TUSC registered descriptions next to their name. TUSC is constituted so that members of different organisations who use a TUSC description have the guaranteed right to run their own election campaign, including promoting their own organisation as they so wish in election material, social media campaigning etc. The only provision is that the candidate accepts a minimum core policy platform for the relevant election – which for the next general election, as we explained in our letter, you are invited to be formally involved in drawing up. So what is Left Unity’s alternative approach?

In this context we would also like to know what was the ‘negative evaluation’ made of the 2015 experience by Left Unity? There were seven Left Unity members who stood as parliamentary candidates in 2015 using the joint Left Unity-TUSC registered description, thus contributing towards the ‘fair coverage’ threshold. As the registered officers of TUSC we cannot recall a single complaint made to us at the time or since – about the PEB (which included one of the Left Unity candidates), any perceived restrictions on the ability of the candidates to promote Left Unity or its policies where they went beyond the TUSC minimum platform, or anything.

On this basis we do not know what more we could have done then to make the TUSC coalition model as inclusive as possible – or, more importantly now, for any lessons there may be for how to get a 100-seat challenge in the general election ahead.

It is for this latter reason only that we raise these issues with you and look forward to your response.

In solidarity,

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

Clive Heemskerk, TUSC National Election Agent

3. Concluding letter from Left Unity to TUSC

From: **Doug Thorpe** <doughthorpe@btinternet.com>

Date: Fri, Nov 18, 2022 at 12:20 PM

Subject: RE: Further letter to Left Unity

Clive

Thank you for the invitation. At present Left Unity is not interested in aligning itself under the TUSC brand. In so far as we are pursuing electoral alliances we are putting our efforts into strengthening the People's Alliance of the Left (PAL).

We will keep the matter under review and, should our position change, I will contact you.

Best wishes

Doug Thorpe

An exchange with the Breakthrough Party

The TUSC appeal (see page 11) also led to an exchange of views with the Breakthrough Party, in letters from Alex Mays, the registered leader of Breakthrough, and a response agreed by the TUSC All-Britain steering committee, reprinted below.

1. Letter from Breakthrough to TUSC

From: **General Enquiries** <info@breakthroughparty.org.uk>

Date: Fri, Dec 9, 2022 at 9:42 AM

Subject: Re: The next election: an appeal from the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

To: Clive Heemskerk <cliveheemskerk@gmail.com>

Morning Clive,

I hope you're well?

First of all, I just wanted to apologise for such a late response. We've been doing a lot of work internally to get our organisation to the point where we needed to be and it's taken up a lot of my time, meaning other things have been dropped.

To answer the questions raised, yes, Breakthrough will be standing candidates and also supporting other socialist candidates in the next general election.

At this stage it's very difficult to predict whether we will meet the threshold of contesting 15% of seats, I'd love us to be able to, but it entirely depends on our growth as an organisation.

We would be using our own descriptions on the ballot paper, but we're more than happy to work with TUSC to ensure we don't stand candidates against one another and split the left vote as it were.

I'm not sure how far you are into the process yet in terms of deciding where TUSC would like to stand in a general election, but it would be handy to know if you have target seats in mind so we can work together early on to identify conflicts and resolve them as quickly as possible.

For the local elections in May also, we will be approving most of our candidates (if not all) by the end of this year, which I'll happily send the details across for (just so you know where we plan to stand).

If you would like to set up a chat with me and whoever else you'd like to have involved please let me know and we'll get something booked in!

In solidarity,

Alex

2. Letter from TUSC to the Breakthrough Party



3rd February 2023

Thank you for your reply to the appeal from TUSC to campaign groups and socialist organisations (<https://www.tusc.org.uk/17710/17-10-2022/tusc-appeal-to-left-wing-campaigners-letsquos-get-serious-about-the-next-election>) to join a dialogue on how to bring together the widest range of trade

unionists, socialists and working class community and social movement candidates to stand against the establishment politicians at the next general election.

Your response was discussed at the TUSC steering committee meeting on February 2nd, the first since we received your letter in December, and we very much welcomed your commitment to “work with TUSC to ensure we don’t stand candidates against one another”. However it was also felt that ‘clash avoidance’ is a bare minimum of what could be achieved compared to the possibility there is for a significant challenge to be made at the next election, even if trade unions or left Labour MPs forced out by Starmer do not take the lead in organising this.

This was why we raised in our letter the issue of the threshold set by the broadcasting authorities for ‘fair media coverage’ in a general election of contesting 15% of the seats. We accept that Breakthrough aspires to meet the threshold itself but we do think it is right to ask what you propose to do if it turns out that your candidate numbers – and finances – fall short?

Not only Breakthrough but all the socialist organisations we sent our appeal to have to seriously address this question. Would half-a-dozen or so separate lists of tens of candidates without any guaranteed media access have more impact than one list of 100 or so candidates with ‘fair media coverage’ rights? And if your answer is no – which we are sure it would be, given your seriousness about achieving socialist unity – what do you propose should be done to get at least one list to the threshold?

What model can maximise unity?

Your letter suggests that Breakthrough is concerned that using a common description on the ballot paper would unacceptably restrict your ability to promote your own party, which Breakthrough members are obviously very proud of.

But TUSC is so constituted that members of different organisations who use a TUSC description have the guaranteed right to run their own election campaign, including promoting their own organisation as they so wish in election material, social media campaigning etc.

This model meant that, in 2015, there was one list of candidates from seven different parties or none using one of the TUSC descriptions on the ballot paper, all thereby contributing towards the ‘fair coverage’ threshold. (The 2015 TUSC election broadcast can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pcEMrCTVRdg>). There was not a single complaint made at the time or since about any perceived restrictions on the ability of the candidates to promote their own organisations, or their policies where they went beyond the TUSC minimum platform. Why couldn’t something like this be achieved again but actually, after the glimpse that Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour leadership gave of the alternatives that are possible, on an even higher plane?

One issue to consider is the provision under electoral law that allows joint descriptions between registered parties to be used on the ballot paper. As you know, each party can have twelve registered descriptions in addition to the party name, and these can include a joint description. 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 then (there were two other Left Unity members who were happy to use the TUSC description alone). Would a joint description be something Breakthrough would be prepared to explore?

Whatever you decide we are very pleased that you are seeking dialogue with other socialists and on our part we confirm that the arrangement we reached last year of mutual early notification of local election candidates will be continued for this May's contests, with our first prospective candidates report sent to you earlier this week.

In solidarity,

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

Clive Heemskerk, TUSC National Election Agent

3. Letter from Breakthrough to TUSC

From: Alex Mays <alex.mays@breakthroughparty.org.uk>

Sent: 20 February 2023 16:02

To: Clive Heemskerk

Cc: Dave Nellist

Subject: Re: Response to letter from Breakthrough

Hi Clive,

Thanks for getting back to me about my contribution in regards to how the left can come together to work in unity.

While we appreciate TUSC's offer of being on a joint description for the next general election, after a lengthy discussion in our last National Committee meeting last week, it was decided that this isn't something we'd be looking to explore at this time.

While this may not be the news you wanted to hear, we do want to continue working constructively with TUSC where we can at a local level to build relationships between our members and we have found the co-ordination between our groups on local elections to be a really positive experience - so thank you for working with us on this.

With that, I wanted to provide you a final list of our candidates for the local elections, as we've unfortunately had a few candidates drop out for various personal reasons...

In solidarity,

Alex

Further solidarity with the Liverpool independents

TUSC has established a tradition of promoting not only its own candidates in the annual local elections but also publishing on our website before polling day a list of all the left-of-Labour candidates standing that we are aware of. The correspondence below between TUSC and the Liverpool Community Independents is an example of this approach.

1. Letter from TUSC to the Liverpool Community Independents



3rd April 2023

To: alan.gibbons4@liverpool.gov.uk; sam.gorst@liverpool.gov.uk; Alfie.hincks@liverpool.gov.uk;

Dear comrades,

This is just a quick note to say that the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC) all-Britain steering committee has agreed once again to publish on our website a list of all left-of-Labour candidates standing in May's local elections that we are aware of, which I am planning to do this week after nominations have closed.

I have listed below the candidates that I know are standing from the Liverpool Community Independents but have I missed any out? Please let me know.

Finally, if there are any election-related meetings that you might wish to advertise on the TUSC website Events page please also let me know as soon as possible.

Liverpool Community Independents

Ward

City Centre North
Fazakerley East
Garston
Old Swan West
Orrell Park
Speke

Candidate's name

Cllr Maria Toolan
Cllr Alfie Hincks
Cllr Sam Gorst
Craig Pearson
Cllr Alan Gibbons
Paul Theobald

In solidarity,

Clive Heemskerck

TUSC National Agent
020-8988-8773 (daytime)
07988-109-980 (mobile)

2. Letter from councillor Sam Gorst to TUSC

From: **Gorst, Sam Councillor** <Sam.Gorst@liverpool.gov.uk>

Date: Mon, Apr 3, 2023 at 2:56 PM

Subject: Re: Letter from TUSC about candidates in the May 4th elections

To: Clive Heemskerk <cliveheemskerk@gmail.com>, Gibbons, Alan

<Alan.Gibbons4@liverpool.gov.uk>, Hincks, Alfie <Alfie.Hincks@liverpool.gov.uk>

Cc: Dave Nellist <dave@nellist.net>

Hi Clive,

We really appreciate the support and promoting of our candidates. There's a few additions and amendments.

City Centre North – Cllr Maria Toolan

Fazakerley East – Cllr Alfie Hincks

Garston – Cllr Sam Gorst and Lucy Williams (2 person ward)

Old Swan West – Craig Pearson

Orrell Park – Cllr Alan Gibbons

Speke – Paul Theobald

Kensington – Stephen Faragher

Croxteth Country Park – Michael Williams

Serving you & fellow Garstonians

Councillor Sam Gorst

Independent Councillor for Cressington

I represent L19 as a Community Independent

After the May 2023 elections – a new TUSC appeal

Following the May 2023 local elections, with results of all left-of-Labour candidates listed in a comprehensive report on the TUSC website (see <https://www.tusc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Results-Report.pdf>), the TUSC all-Britain steering committee sent a further appeal (below) to the campaign groups and socialist organisations contacted in October 2022, including the Transform founder groups.



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 co-ordinate 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 Heemskerk, TUSC National Election Agent