

A Convention to Organise a Working Class Challenge at the General Election, Saturday 3rd February 2024

Co-hosted by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition, with the Socialist Party, System Change (formerly Resist), the Campaign for a Mass Workers Party, TUSC Independent Socialists, and Socialist Students.

Convention agenda

11am:

Introduction to the Convention

By Dave Nellist, Convention Chair

11-10am to 1pm:

Do we want a common election challenge? Is it possible?

Seven minute introductions each from the Socialist Party, System Change, the Campaign for a Mass Workers Party, Socialist Students, the Workers Party of Britain, and the Social Justice Party, including their positions on the first Convention Proposition on the 'fair media coverage' target (see page two), that "*a joint election challenge should attempt to contest enough seats (98 candidates) to reach the broadcasting authorities 'fair media coverage' threshold*".

In the general discussion following the introductory speakers the 'delete all and insert' amendment to Proposition One presented by the Kegworth Parish councillor Ray Sutton (also on page two) will be moved.

1pm to 1-30pm: Lunch

1-30pm to 4-15pm:

The Convention propositions and amendments

The Convention propositions are self-explanatory will be moved formally. The movers of each amendment to a proposition or alternative proposal, and others contributing to the debate, will have three minutes to speak.

4-15pm to 4-30pm:

Convention summing-up

Speakers slips will be used for those attending in-person, to help the Convention chair gauge what propositions and amendments will have the most contributors. They are available at the registration desk. Delegates on Zoom will need to use the yellow hand to indicate they wish to speak.

The Convention propositions and amendments

The six propositions tabled for debate at the Convention were circulated in a pre-Convention questionnaire that gave organisations, and individuals participating in personal capacity, the opportunity to suggest amendments or alternative proposals to those made, which could then be moved and discussed at the Convention under the relevant agenda heading. The following amendments and/or alternative proposals were received by the deadline for them to be included in the Convention paperwork. ■

1. The 'fair media coverage' target

Proposition One: A joint election challenge should attempt to contest enough seats (98 candidates appearing on the ballot paper with a common name or variants of it) to reach the broadcasting authorities 'fair media coverage' threshold.

Amendments to the proposition or an alternative proposal received:

1. Delete all and insert:

"A common name on the ballot paper will not be achieved. A joint election challenge should effectively be a tactical voting umbrella. It should include pure and simple 'Independent' if that is not the selected umbrella name".

Proposed by Ray Sutton, Kegworth Parish councillor

2. The attitude to left-wing Labour candidates

Proposition Two: The joint election challenge will not in general seek to contest seats against left-wing Labour candidates or left MPs or ex-MPs standing as independents.

Amendments to the proposition or an alternative proposal received:

1. Oppose the proposal entirely

Proposed by Abeda Uddin, TUSC individual member and Luton SWP

2. Delete all and insert:

"TUSC should contest seats, wherever it is suitable to do so, with no regard to Labour".

Proposed by Michael Westcombe, TUSC individual member

3. Delete all and insert:

"Individual parties/candidates shall make the decision who they will stand against on a case-by-case basis".

Proposed by the Social Justice Party

4. After 'standing as independents' add:

"so long as they stand on a pro-working class programme and refuse to support a Starmer government".

Proposed by the Spartacist League

5. Add at the end:

"The Organise Corbyn Inspire Socialist Alliance (OCISA) campaign group and the For the Many campaign will be standing one left candidate as an independent in the Holborn & St Pancras constituency against Keir Starmer and the joint election challenge will not contest this seat".

Proposed by Diane Datson for the OCISA campaign

6. After 'standing as independents' add:

"encouraging local TUSC groups to send delegations to Labour Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (PPCs) to ask where they stand on Corbyn's 2019 manifesto".

Proposed by Socialist Students

7. Add at the end:

"This does not apply to Green Party candidates. When in office, both in Britain and internationally, the Green Party has demonstrated that it does not represent a step towards working-class political representation".

Proposed by the Socialist Party

3. A common name, or variants of it, on the ballot paper

Proposition Three: Candidates in the joint election challenge striving to reach the 'fair media coverage' threshold should appear on the ballot paper using the TUSC name or one of its registered variants, including joint descriptions.

Amendments to the proposition or an alternative proposal received:

1. Delete all and insert:

"That instead of the TUSC name being the central and unifying identity for the joint election challenge (for example 'Social Justice Party – TUSC' appearing on the ballot paper), that – by whatever method necessary – the central and unifying identity be a new name that shall also be the identity of the joint election campaign and that this name shall be decided by the General Election Co-ordination Committee. For example, the potential name could be 'Left Bloc' or 'Socialist Alliance'. In the case of the former, the joint description appearing on the ballot paper would be 'Social Justice Party – Left Bloc', and 'TUSC – Left Bloc', etc."

Proposed by the Social Justice Party

2. Delete all and insert:

"As TUSC and its variants have not won elections and another common name on the ballot paper will not be achieved, a joint election challenge should effectively be a tactical voting umbrella".

Proposed by Ray Sutton, Kegworth Parish councillor

4. Minimum policies for candidates to support

Proposition Four: The TUSC draft core policies platform for the general election (at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/TUSC-draft-GE-platform-for-2024.pdf>) shall be the minimum set of policies that candidates need to support to be part of the joint election challenge.

Amendments to the proposition or an alternative proposal received:

1. Amend the wording "Reverse all the cuts, kick out the privateers" in the first policy bulletin point in Section B, No Cuts – For Quality Public Services, so that it reads:

- "Oppose privatisation and cuts to public services, and campaign to reverse cuts and privatisation".

Proposed by Lee Barham, PCS HMRC London HQ Branch Chair, PCS London & SE Regional Vice-Chair (pc)

2. Delete the following policy bulletin point in Section C, Deepening Democracy:

- Proportional representation, for local, regional and national elections.

Proposed by the Social Justice Party; and Michael Westcombe, TUSC individual member

3. Delete the following policy bulletin point in Section C, Deepening Democracy:

- Annual elections for local councils.

Proposed by the Social Justice Party

4. Delete the following wording in the fifth policy bulletin point in Section D, Employment and Trade Union Rights:

- Reinstate full trade union rights to prison officers.

Proposed by the Spartacist League

5. Re-word to recognise that the idea that such statements can be called policies and not policy directions is going to put voters off. Competence, and being seen to be competent means spelling out how things would be implemented and achieved. As neither a Party nor an Opposition with national experience we are scarcely in a position to say these are actual policies. For example the NHS reversals and implementation needed to get back to a point where our own Treasury and voters could say that the NHS 'policy' had been achieved would not be immediate and would require detailed practical management steer on the fast changing environment in which healthcare and medicine operate.

Proposed by Ray Sutton, Kegworth Parish councillor

5. The right to campaign independently

Proposition Five: Individual candidates and organisations participating in the joint election challenge shall retain at all times responsibility for their own campaigns, including the right to promote their own organisation and policies that go beyond the core platform.

Amendments to the proposition or an alternative proposal received:

1. Provided that at all times, socialism is to the fore, not just taken for granted.

Proposed by Michael Westcombe, TUSC individual member

6. Decision-making going forward

Proposition Six: The Convention Arrangements Committee shall continue as the General Election Co-ordination Committee, with places guaranteed for organisations which subsequently wish to join the joint election challenge. On matters that require decisions to be collectively made by the joint election challenge, decision-making shall be done on a consensus basis.

Amendments to the proposition or an alternative proposal received:

1. There are only four organisations worth making an accommodation with: TUSC, WPB, SP and the CPB.

Proposed by Michael Westcombe, TUSC individual member

2. Add at the beginning of the first sentence:

“Unless all organisations involved in the joint challenge participate in the TUSC steering committee for the duration of the election,”.

Proposed by the Socialist Party

Pre-Convention Questionnaire

Comments from Pat Byrne, Socialist Network (received after the deadline for amendments and the final meeting of the Conference Arrangements Committee, but distributed for information).

Attitude to left-wing Labour candidates

Importance of Jeremy Corbyn

Jeremy Corbyn obviously remains an important figure on the left with hundreds of thousands of followers. Although, for procedural reasons and those of solidarity with his comrades in Islington North Labour Party, Jeremy has not yet been able to declare as an independent candidate, we should keep a welcoming open door for him to come on board with us whenever he is able to do so. Even if Jeremy was only to join our Coalition in the Summer for example, it would add considerable momentum in the run up to the election.

To this end, we should consciously fashion our coalition in terms of name and programme that would be make it easy for Jeremy to join us when he is ready.

A common name, or variants of it, on the ballot paper

Having a common core name and image on the ballot paper is important. I think that it is also important to have the same name and image for the media and campaign material.

Three Components for our name on the ballot paper

As I understand it, the name on the ballot paper has a limit of six words to which we can then add 12 different subheads which can be used for the various groups in our coalition.

I also understand that we can use a logo on the ballot paper. Why not use the excellent 'Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition' logo on both the ballot paper and in front of our campaign material? This would then leave us the six words for our core title. Below is an example image of how the Coalition might look with the logo and the title.



**Peace Justice and
Prosperity for all**

Title for the Whole Campaign

While the 'Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition' is very helpful in describing who the main forces are behind the electoral campaign and is great for the logo, I think that we need a short campaign name (max six words to fit in with the ballot paper restriction) that says what we are proposing to do in the UK. Given current circumstances in Gaza this should incorporate the call for peace against the warmongering by the neo-imperialists around the world. We also need a word in the title for the economic issues pressing our class. There are two main approaches we can take – a negative slogan ('against war etc.) or a positive approach (for peace etc.). The negative slogan can have more bite but the positive one is probably better (such as Peace, Land and Bread' in an earlier struggle!). In the above example title, the addition of "for all" allows us to bring in the inequality that affects every aspect of society.

The Need for a New Campaign Title

The current situation is obviously full of new opportunities for a mass left alternative in the coming election. Millions of people are unsatisfied with Labour whether it is over economic

issues, foreign policy, honesty in politics and so on. To match these opportunities, we need a new and fresh title for our campaign. One that will be welcoming for the new forces being generated by industrial action and the Gaza protests, while remaining open and attractive for the Corbyn forces when they finally separate from Labour.

Minimum policies for candidates to support

The draft manifesto has a lot of good content but it could be greatly improved in language and impact. For example, each heading could be in the form of a slogan 'Nobody Hungry', Nobody Homeless, Nobody Cold, etc.. rather than a boring subject title, Some important issues need separating out such on housing. While some sections need boosting sections as on democracy – 'Transforming our Democracy'. Similarly, we could use class slogans like '*Reward the wealth makers not the weath takers*' to introduce the section on inequality. In this way we can liven up the text and increase its impact and memorability. To this end we should create an online manifesto text drafting working group.

Gaza

At present the many individual activists and organisations opposing the genocide in Gaza such as in the muslim communities, other ethnic minorities, youth groups etc. are mainly organised in their localities or in ethnic organisations. It is vital if we are to maximise our impact in the election to find a way to bring these groups into a united electoral front with us. To this end, this conference should agree to draft:

A Special Gaza Appeal.

It would make sense for our new united left electoral coalition to issue a special appeal on Gaza through which to approach all of the groups supporting the Palestine Solidarity. On this basis we can approach individuals on all of the pro Palestine events to support the electoral coalition, volunteer their time as activists, and ask their organisations to join our Coalition. A Special Gaza Appeal would also form a good basis for a public relations campaign aimed at social media.

In the process, we should approach the new leadership figures that have emerged in the PSC campaign – if they were to participate in a united left coalition it would add a fresh impetus and could attract millions of votes from young people and ethnic minorities.

The right to campaign independently

Perhaps we could draw up some sensitive advice to local groups on the kind of criteria they could use when they are considering which candidates to support locally – such as local record in the community; proved record of commitment to radical causes etc.

Decision-making going forward

We have a lot of talent in our ranks and we should share out the work by creating online working groups open to campaign supporters with experience and enthusiasm to help. Specifically, among such groups we could form:

- 1) An online manifesto text working group open to those who want to help in order to prepare a better draft for the main campaign committee to look at.
- 2) An online media/pr working group open to anyone with expertise and contacts in this field.