



# Trade Unionists for a New Party campaign progress report: a union-by-union round up

Collated below is a report of the state of play to the start of June on the debate on working-class political representation in the various trade unions in which supporters of the 'Trade Unionists for a New Party' have been organising in the past year. The campaign was launched at a 1,000-plus meeting hosted by the national chair of the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC), the former Labour MP Dave Nellist (watch the video [here](#)).

A round-up of model motions agreed at follow-up meetings was produced towards the end of last year (see [here](#)) and this report concentrates on what has happened in the first months of this year.

The report documents the debates at the union conferences that have taken place to the end of May, with extracts from the various motions and statements that were tabled. In addition there is an update on the situation in Unite, which while it does not have a conference this year, has seen a significant shift in the composition of its executive council following elections that were concluded on April 27th. And, while it is not an individual union but a cross-union gathering, there is a report too from the Trades Councils conference on 30th-31st May.

The conference reports are listed chronologically in the order that they were held. There are important conferences coming up in June obviously not covered here – in the GMB, the BFAWU bakers union, UNISON, the RMT and, in October, NAPO – and an update will be produced later in the year.

## The National Education Union (NEU)

The National Education Union (NEU) was the first to kick-off the 2026 union conference season, meeting in Brighton from **30th March-2nd April**.

A model motion on working-class political representation had been agreed at a 70-strong NEU Trade Unionists for a New Party meeting last year (see the report [here](#)) and a number of district associations had subsequently adopted it. However, the calls in the motion for the national executive committee (NEC) to “approach the Unite Executive Council, the UCU NEC, and the Bakers’ union executive and other relevant trade unions, to discuss trade union involvement in the founding of a new workers’ party” and to “encourage local NEU districts to elect representatives to attend local meetings about a new workers’ party and share the needs of education workers” had been ruled out as contrary to the objects of the union’s political fund.

This, to say the least, is a debatable interpretation. The relevant rule, clause 18.2, only says that the Political Fund shall be used on:

“The production, publication or distribution of any literature, documents, film, sound recording or advertisement, or any event, festival or campaign, the main purpose of which is to persuade people not to vote for political parties and their candidates who promote racist, fascist or similar views” or;

“To encourage our members or identified groups within our membership, or to encourage people generally or specific groups of people, to register to vote” or;

“On the provision of expenses incurred by officials or officers of the NEU at the annual conferences or other meetings of political parties”.

Clearly then, going ahead from discussions to actually establishing a new political party with other trade unions, or affiliating the NEU to a new political party, would be outside the rules and would require a rule change agreed in accord with the democratic procedures of the union.

But talking to other trade unions about working-class political representation? Including discussing with them about how to get to a politics where the cuts to schools, jobs, homes and services which racists and fascists use to try and divide working-class communities are not being made? That surely must be debatable, especially after the outcome of May’s elections.

But not debatable at this year’s conference at least, which took place before the wake-up call of May 7th. ■

## **Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW)**

The next conference of a union in which supporters of the Trade Unionists for A New Party campaign are organising was that of the Union of Shop, Distributive and Allied Workers (USDAW), also held before the May elections, from **26th-29th April**, in Blackpool.

USDAW remains affiliated to Labour, making donations and affiliation payments of roughly £1.9m a year, and none of the proposals previously discussed by the Trade Unionists for A New Party campaign supporters (see [here](#)) had made it onto the conference agenda. A motion from a Tesco branch in Northern Ireland – where the Labour Party isn’t organised for electoral purposes – calling for the union “to liaise with other trade unions active in Northern Ireland to discuss the backing of cross-community trade union based candidates in future elections” (the Assembly elections take place next May) was ruled out by the NEC, showing the fear of discussing anything that might question what the union is doing politically.

Instead the leadership tried to burnish Labour’s credentials ahead of the May elections, with most of the Monday morning of conference filled with a politics session, including a speech by Keir Starmer and a ‘chat’ with Kate Dearden, under-secretary for employment rights. But it was also clear that, unlike the more enthusiastic response Starmer received in 2024 when USDAW members were desperate to see the back of the Tories, this year was far more muted, with sections of the audience remaining in their seats and not applauding. Next time...? ■

## **Unite the Union**

But even as the USDAW conference was meeting, news came in on **April 28th** of a significant development in one of the largest Labour-affiliated unions, Unite, with 1.2 million members. The left-wing ‘Workers’ Unite/Back to the Workplace’ slate of candidates had won a convincing victory

in elections for the union's Executive Council (EC), including seven signatories of the Trade Unionists for A New Party [founding petition](#) calling for the trade unions to take the lead in forming a new working-class party.

One of the new EC members is Danny Taylor, one of the lead reps in the heroic Birmingham bin strike – where workers have been on indefinite strike since March 2025 against the Labour council's vicious £8,000 a year fire-and-rehire. This was the background to the 2025 Unite policy conference voting, with just a handful of the 800 delegates opposed, to suspend the Unite membership of the then-Labour deputy leader Angela Rayner and to open up a discussion on “our relationship with Labour”.

Since then a number of union branches have had those discussions, and two resolutions have gone through the regional committee stage – in the South West and North West regions – to be on the table for the new executive council to consider.

The resolutions welcome “the emergency motion that was passed at the Unite Policy Conference in support of the striking Birmingham bin workers. We support the demand in the motion that ‘Unite should discuss our relationship with Labour’ in response to the brutal attack on our members on the bins by the Labour Birmingham City Council and backed up by Keir Starmer's government”.

On that basis, the regional committees call for the Executive Council to:

“1. Continue to back those Unite-supported MPs who have so far had the whip removed for opposing New Labour austerity, and others that are similarly disciplined”.

“2. Launch the discussion at all levels of Unite about our relationship with Labour and the need for a political strategy that supports our members taking political action on the basis of agreed Unite policies”.

“3. This discussion should lead to the convening of special policy and rules conferences [of the union] to draw political and organisational conclusions, potentially including the building of a new workers' party, standing and supporting workers' candidates, calling for a conference across unions to build a political alternative for workers on a pro-worker, socialist programme”.

“4. Unite should send delegations to meetings and conferences organised by trade unionists on political representation for workers”.

The new Executive Council majority supported the manifesto that Sharon Graham stood on when she won the union's general secretary election in 2021 and will be working to secure her re-election in the contest in the union currently under way. To continue and deepen its militant industrial strategy and make sure it faces up urgently – before next May's bigger-than-this year's council election contests – to the political challenge posed by Starmer's Labour government. ■

## Equity

Just two days after the historic drubbing suffered by Starmer's Labour Party in the May elections the performing arts workers' union Equity, meeting in conference in Durham from **9th-11th May**, voted to start a process which could establish a political fund for the union for the first time in its 96-year history.

The motion on workers' political representation, proposed by Jay Coward, a TUSC candidate in May's elections, was tabled on the final day. The evening before, the union general secretary Paul Fleming had agreed that Equity's long tradition of apolitical trade unionism had failed, which set up the debate.

The key question was: political trade unionism on whose terms? The motion recognised that "our rulebook lets us 'work with others whose aims are the same or similar to the union's... providing that the union does not affiliate to any political party'" and Jay was clear that in no way was it a call for Equity to 'become a timid lapdog to unaccountable political parties', 'pumping money into a black hole that offers us nothing but cuts'.

But the motion paved the way for the union to "invite party leaders favourable to unions – such as leaders from Your Party, Greens, and others who are aligned with Equity's aims and objectives – to a union Council meeting to explore ways they could adopt our policies and demands at local and national levels, through Equity's democratic structures and without affiliation". And further, to approach "the executives of other unions examining these issues – which include Unite, UCU, RMT and BFAWU – to open discussion on a political voice accountable to trade unionists".

This was the most contentious motion of the weekend and produced the longest discussion by far. But at the end it was passed overwhelmingly, with just two votes against and two abstentions, and now Equity Council, the union's executive, is charged with beginning "a process of discussion at all levels of Equity" including on "establishing a dedicated political fund... that could selectively support political candidates fighting for Equity policy".

This historic decision must be the start of real efforts by Equity to help bring together a working-class political alternative to Labour, Reform, and all the bosses' politicians. ■

## **Communications Workers Union (CWU)**

The Communications Workers Union (CWU) was the next conference up, meeting in Bournemouth from **May 10th-14th**.

In the run-up to the conference, after multiple branches had submitted motions questioning the union's link with Labour, the union's national executive committee (NEC) tabled a Special Report (LTB 058/26, 26th February 2026) which displaced the original disaffiliation propositions, with branches given a few weeks to submit amendments to that.

The Special Report started by recognising that "the CWU's affiliation to Labour has been subject to an increase in scrutiny and debate in recent months", given what it rather understatingly called "the issues with the current Labour government". With the rise of Reform it was "a crucial time" to ensure that the CWU is "able to create an effective political strategy that reaches out to our members who have become disillusioned with politics and one that can fully exert our influence on the government to ensure it is working in the true interests of working-class people".

This included "acknowledging the need for a clear change of direction, given the failure of the current Labour leadership, and a comprehensive, class-focused approach to resolving the political division that has spread across our society" – but, the Report concluded, based on "the CWU's continued affiliation to the Labour Party".

The principal amendments to the Special Report were from the Midland No.1 branch, the United Tech and Allied Workers (UTAW) national branch of the CWU, and South Central Postal.

The Midland No.1 motion argued that “continued affiliation to the Labour Party, in the absence of demonstrable and material change aligned with CWU policy, weakens the political leverage and independence of the Communication Workers Union” and therefore instructed the NEC to “take the necessary steps, in accordance with CWU Rules and statutory requirements, to terminate the union's affiliation to the Labour Party”. The Political Fund should be retained, the motion was clear, but “deployed in line with Rule to advance the industrial and economic interests of CWU members”.

The South Central Postal motion argued to reaffirm the union’s “2021 policy to abstain from paying any donations to the central Labour Party” but also to “go further and end our affiliation and only support politicians, in and out of the Labour Party, who support our members and trade unionism”.

The UTAW branch, which last October had voted to support disaffiliation and appealed to the NEC to “organise an all-member union-wide consultation, including meetings, about the best use of the union's political fund, including the question of funding candidates outside the Labour Party who support CWU-agreed policy”, submitted an amendment on these lines, but specifically “to increase member level engagement and democratic control of our political strategy and spending, starting with organising regular open political meetings for members”.

Before the debate on the union's relationship with the Labour Party began, Angela Rayner gave a guest speech to the conference, arguing that ‘Labour should be judged by its actions not words’. The UTAW delegate who seconded the disaffiliation motion, a local election TUSC candidate Deji Olayinka, reminded the conference that the 2025 Unite union conference overwhelmingly voted to suspend her Unite membership for her ‘actions not words’ in the Birmingham bin dispute, where a Labour council, backed by Labour MPs, threatened fire and rehire on striking bin workers.

But still the CWU general secretary Dave Ward and several CWU members who were Labour councillors came in to defend affiliation and the votes for the amendments were lost.

The UTAW tech workers' branch hosted a fringe meeting entitled 'Labour disaffiliation: What might the future look like?'. Despite a long day of conference, the fringe was packed with over 50 attendees, with the mood being that, whatever decision was reached in a conference in Bournemouth, events will make sure that the debate on how the working class can find its political voice will not go away. ■

## **POA**

The central political issue at the conference of the Prison Officers Association (POA), held in Eastbourne from **12th-14th May**, was the union’s ongoing campaign to restore its members right to strike.

The union’s national chair, Mark Fairhurst, said the union would ‘wage a war against this government to restore our right to strike’, to repeal Section 127 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which bans industrial action by prison officer grades.

The deputy prime minister and justice secretary David Lammy has rejected the union's request to repeal the 1994 ban and general secretary Steve Gillan said the Labour government had reached 'a new low' in its relationship with unions.

Over the years a number of POA members have participated at a leadership level in the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (see the 2024 [obituary tribute](#) to the then deputy general secretary, Joe Simpson) but it will be next year before there is another chance at conference – if not in the branches – to discuss the important role the union could play once again in fighting for an independent working-class party. ■

## Fire Brigades Union (FBU)

The 2026 Fire Brigades Union (FBU) conference met in Warwick from **May 13th-15th**. Three motions were tabled discussing the union's affiliation to the Labour Party, from the West Midlands, Merseyside, and Greater Manchester, while a motion from the Devon & Somerset brigade called for opening discussions with the Greens "on a formal relationship with the FBU".

The motions showed the impact the actual experience of Labour in power has had – actions, again, being more powerful than words. Recognising that the FBU "affiliating to the Labour Party under the leadership of Jeremy Corbyn was a step intended to align with a party which, at the time, had the best interest of our members, trade unions, and working people more widely, at heart", the motion from West Midlands FBU went on to point to the "appalling way that striking bin workers in Birmingham have been treated by Birmingham Labour councillors and believes that the Labour Party no longer holds the values which led to our affiliation in 2015" – after the union had disaffiliated in 2004 under Tony Blair's government – to back its call for immediate disaffiliation now. Meanwhile the Greater Manchester brigade, pointing to the clamping down on members' democratic rights in the Labour Party's candidate selection processes in February's Gorton and Denton by-election – including the rights of affiliated unions, limited even though they are – demanded the FBU's disaffiliation "from the Labour Party until such time that democracy is restored".

Significantly, in these discussions on working-class political representation, the motion from Devon & Somerset FBU calling on the union "to build closer ties with the Green Party of England and Wales and open discussions on a formal relationship" did so from the starting point of the union's core commitment to socialism. Quoting from the FBU rulebook that the union "is part of the working-class movement and, linking itself with the international trade union and labour movement, has as its ultimate aim the bringing about of the socialist system of society", it went on to argue that "although not explicitly calling itself a socialist party, under the leadership of Zack Polanski, the Green Party of England and Wales has many of the same values and policies as if it were one".

How the FBU could hold Green representatives to account in a party that has no place for unions within its governance structures wasn't addressed but the fact alone that the motion was tabled shows how every option will be considered by trade unionists looking for an alternative – and will need to be debated at every level of the movement.

Extending the opportunities for debate was, in fact, the main outcome of the conference regarding political representation. Separately from the affiliation motions, the FBU Executive Council had brought a policy statement to the conference – *Fire Brigades Union: Independent, United and*

*Strong* – which was the product of a nine-month review of the union’s processes and practices. It included a change to how the union’s political donations are decided – to ensure that “local views are at the heart of decisions” it said – so that “for the first time, no financial support will be given to any Labour Party politician without a recommendation being considered by brigade or regional committees”.

The Merseyside FBU had proposed the more fundamental step of a “ballot of all FBU members to decide if the FBU should remain affiliated to the Labour Party”, to start “no later than 1st September 2026 and for the ballot to run for a minimum of four weeks”.

“This will give officials the opportunity to engage with members through the structures of this union and engage in full and frank debate on this issue”, the motion said. This however, along with the West Midlands, Greater Manchester and Devon & Somerset motions, was defeated this time.

But, as the Merseyside motion itself says, the link with the Labour Party “has been the subject of resolutions and/or emergency resolutions at every FBU conference since 2022”. There is almost no reason imaginable to believe that it won’t be on the agenda again. ■

## **ASLEF**

Several motions on political representation and Labour Party affiliation reached the floor of the 2026 conference of the Associated Society of Locomotive Engineers and Firemen (ASLEF), held in Birmingham from **18th-22nd May**.

The motions that had been tabled on political representation were clear that “trade unionism is always political”, as the Edinburgh No.1 branch motions said, that the union’s political fund must be used to actively fight “for workers’ rights, public ownership, peace and social justice” and that “no organisational structure or representative body within ASLEF shall fund or support parties or organisations which are diametrically opposed to the objects of the union, such as a fascist organisation”.

But the union should no longer affiliate to the Labour Party, the Edinburgh No.1 branch said, while still being able to “fund and support candidates or parties to achieve our policies, aims or campaign objectives”; a point also made in the motion from the Gateshead & Newcastle branch, arguing for disaffiliation “at all levels” while “ensuring the union retains the democratic flexibility to support candidates, campaigns, or movements whose values and aims align with those of ASLEF”.

Meanwhile the Stirling Caley branch called simply for the union “to seek a mandate from its members through a simple vote, whether to continue or to end its affiliation to the Labour Party”.

In the end a majority of the 89 delegates at the conference voted to keep the union’s affiliation to Labour, although several said that this was ‘not with enthusiasm’, but from concern about the rise of Reform and the absence of a viable alternative. General secretary Dave Calfe argued for maintaining affiliation while saying Labour ‘needs to be put on notice and something needs to change’. On the other hand, the union president, Andy Hudd, argued in favour of disaffiliation, stating that the party has abandoned all socialist principles, and that ASLEF as a union and the movement as a whole need to look at a new independent political strategy, ‘to review our potential support for other political parties that reflect our principles and attitudes more accurately’. ■

*A conference delegate who has stood as a TUSC local election candidate, Kris O'Sullivan, a supporter of the Trade Unionists for A New Party campaign, spoke in the debate. His contribution is recorded below:*

"This is not a debate about should we be political – this is a debate about what kind of politics do we want to be a part of, to help build".

"The rot didn't start with Starmer – we have heard the same arguments for years, pointing to the bare minimum crumbs, and told 'this isn't the right time to debate these issues'."

"An acid test should be the record of the Labour Party as an employer. Please comrades, tell me when it is the right time to blacklist, to use fire and rehire, to bus in scabs, to cut wages, to attack reps, to use High Court injunctions, to use the police to break up and intimidate picket lines? I've seen that with my own eyes against the bin workers here in my home city – and when the bin reps are here on Thursday, can someone please ask them how much 'influence' they felt they had being affiliated to the Labour Party?"

"We can engage in political work, inside or outside of any party structure".

"But we could have the freedom and flexibility to support only the best of our Labour allies, and also to engage and work alongside other genuine supporters. The second biggest financial supporter of Corbyn during his Labour leadership campaign was the RMT union – they had control over where their resources went, not disappearing into the campaign pockets of the worst right-wingers".

"That could lay the groundwork for a situation of building a new workers' party like our forerunners did – all would be options and choices opened to us".

"This is not a purity test, this is having some working-class self-respect. I don't believe it's an accident that it wasn't a West Midlands Labour MP that opened this conference up, as would have been the normal tradition. I asked Jess Phillips MP, when she passed our Snow Hill picket line, if she could join us, and she told me she can't speak to us".

"Over 100 years ago our forerunners made the decision to help found the Labour Party. They rejected the arguments of 'lesser evilism'. They were also accused of splitting the vote, letting the worse lot in, 'this isn't the right time!' This is the right time. Reject the dead end of lesser evilism like our founders did, to pick up that torch and fight for a political strategy that we deserve".

## **Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS)**

The Annual Delegate Conference of the PCS union, meeting in Brighton from **18th-21st May**, had also been preceded, as in Unite, with a significant shift in the composition of the union's ruling national executive committee. The left 'Coalition for Change' group won a 21:14 majority, amongst whom are seven signatories of the Trade Unionists for A New Party [founding petition](#), including the new deputy president Dave Semple.

The outgoing leadership's political strategy was summed up in their motion (A4) to the conference talking of continuing "to build relationships across government" and approvingly noting that the union "has been in weekly meetings with the Cabinet Office increasing its communications with Downing Street and ministers, [and] providing the union with a seat at the negotiating table". But

isn't speaking to management the whole basis of trade unionism? And is it all that a 'political strategy' can hope to achieve?

The new NEC majority does include some who would probably agree with the CWU, FBU and ASLEF conference decisions to continue to fight to change the character of the Labour Party rather than the unions taking matters into their own hands and establishing their own party. But at least they want a fight not a chat. So a motion (A345) tabled at the conference "to take forward the agreed PCS political strategy of supporting candidates for election who support our union policies and priorities" – and "to take a lead in discussions with other unions" for a new, working class party – was agreed to be remitted to the incoming NEC so that a fuller appraisal of what needs to be done can take place.

This will be guided by another motion (A111) that was passed, with a big majority, in the conference debate on fighting the far right.

It is unambiguous: "Conference believes that it is essential that the trade union movement plays the leading role in building a united movement against the far-right... With 6.5 million members, across all working-class communities, the unions can unite workers against racist division which weakens our movement and only assists the bosses... [and] a party based on the organised working class, that fights for anti-racist, anti-war, socialist policies, is vital to prevent the far right harnessing the growing anger of working-class people with Starmer's Labour".

The motion instructed the incoming NEC to pick up the banner, long the official policy of PCS and the TUC but not implemented, of 'Workers' unity, not division – jobs and homes, not racism'. And, should Labour not move to implement pro-worker policies, to convene a conference with other unions "to discuss the building of a political vehicle for workers". This will be a major task for the new NEC in the year ahead. ■

## **University and College Union (UCU)**

One of the highlights of the 2025 conference season was the decision of the University and College Union (UCU) delegates to overwhelmingly agree a motion from West London College, moved by the union NEC member and a founding signatory of the Trade Unionists for A New Party petition, Marco Tesei. This year, unfortunately, the conference, meeting in Harrogate from **27th-29th May**, didn't reach the tabled motion to follow-up the decisions made last year.

The 2025 motion, titled 'Enough is enough! Post-16 education needs new political representation', argued that it was "time for UCU and the broader trade union movement to look for an alternative political voice to Labour". It resolved that the union should encourage "members to stand in elections, linking up with other trade unionists, to fight for our union's policies" and invite Jeremy Corbyn and "other pro-worker MPs to attend our national executive for discussion about how they can support our union's fight for post-16 education funding in parliament".

Since then the union has established a cross-party parliamentary group – a first for the UCU – but with unresolved issues about its accountability and, consequently, its effectiveness in "proactively campaigning for our union's policies, including for fully funded, free education", as the motion that wasn't discussed this year put it. It went on to call for "mechanisms for UCU member oversight of the parliamentary group, including: A. Conditions of membership; B. Regular meetings between the NEC and parliamentary group members; C. Input on the agenda of parliamentary group

meetings/communications". And, most importantly after the May elections, for UCU to "support a cross-union conference to discuss political representation for the working class and trade unionists".

As the UCU general secretary Jo Grady said, speaking on BBC Question Time last May, "not a single political party in the UK is offering solutions to the issues that we face". It's time for the unions to take a lead.

## **Trades Councils conference**

The 2026 Trades Councils' conference, meeting in Leeds from **30th-31st May**, got to the point when it debated and agreed an emergency motion from Coventry Trades Union Council, moved by one of the founding signatories of the Trade Unionists for A New Party petition, the former NEU NEC member Jane Nellist.

Under the title 'A New Political Direction for the Trade Union Movement', the resolution read:

"This conference notes that the 7th May 2026 election results showed a sharp fall in support and seats for the Labour Party, alongside a commensurate rise in seats for Reform UK".

"Conference believes that right-wing populism thrives when the capitalist market economy fails to deliver good wages, jobs, housing for all, and decent public services. Rather than addressing a system run for corporate profit and the wealth of billionaires, right-wing scapegoating falsely blames the most recent arrivals to these shores for these systemic failings".

"Conference further believes that the spread of these ideas is not inevitable. Conference therefore calls on affiliated trade unions to question their support for the status quo and to urgently discuss – both within and across unions – a new political direction based on an economy run for the needs of all working people and a serious drive to achieve that. A message of 'Pay, Jobs and Homes, not Racism' must be actively promoted during 2026 and ahead of the May 2027 local elections to prevent Reform UK from cementing its position".

"To assist this, conference calls for a TUC-led national Saturday demonstration in London, with full mobilisation across the movement to maximise participation".

"Conference urges trade union councils to play a leading role in this response by hosting the vital public discussions on a new political direction at the local level".

It was a resolution from last year's Trades Council conference to the full TUC Congress that became part of the composite committing the TUC to organise a national demonstration against Starmer's austerity. The general council has sat on its hands for a year, missing an opportunity to harness working-class frustration in a positive direction, with the results of that seen on May 7th.

The movement must not make the same mistake in the year ahead, industrially and politically, on the streets and at the ballot box. ■