

Trade unionists and socialists prepare for the May elections



Workers fighting austerity measures need a political voice photo Paul Mattsson

Sean Figg

Last Saturday, 28 January, over 50 prospective candidates and campaign organisers met to plan the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition's (TUSC) challenge in May's local elections in England and the London Assembly (GLA) elections.

Following the statements by Labour's Ed Miliband and Ed Balls, saying that they support the government coalition's cuts and that a Labour government would not reverse them, the question of building an anti-cuts working class political alternative is an idea that millions will be more open to than ever before.

This was reflected in the prominent trade unionists in attendance

and the proposed slate for the GLA elections announced at the meeting (see below).

Elsewhere there will be dozens of candidates challenging the idea that cuts are in any way necessary.

The conference endorsed a five-point minimum programme that all candidates wishing to stand for TUSC would have to agree with.

- Oppose all cuts to council jobs, services, pay and conditions - we reject the claim that 'some cuts' are necessary to our services.

- Reject increases in council tax, rent and service charges to compensate for government cuts.

- Vote against the privatisation of council jobs and services, or the transfer of council services to 'social enterprises' or 'arms-length' management organisations, which are first steps to privatisation.

- Use all the legal powers available to councils, including powers to refer local NHS decisions, initiate referenda and organise public commissions and consultations, to oppose both the cuts and government policies which centrally impose the transfer of public services to private bodies.

- When faced with government cuts to council funding, councils should refuse to implement the cuts. We will support councils which in the first instance use their reserves and prudential borrowing powers to avoid passing them on - while arguing that the best way to mobilise the mass campaign that is necessary to defeat the cuts is to set a budget that meets the needs of the local community and demands that the government makes up the shortfall.

TUSC challenge for London Assembly

TUSC is to stand candidates in the greater London election on 3 May to challenge the all-party support for the government's austerity cuts and pay freeze.

A list of candidates will challenge in the 'top up' section of the election and if it wins at least 5% of the vote across the whole of London it could win at least one place on the 25-seat Greater London Assembly.

The coalition has already selected prominent London trade union leaders such as Alex Gordon, the national president of the RMT rail and maritime union and Steve Hedley the RMT's London Transport regional organiser, Ian Leahair, the Fire Brigades Union executive committee member for the capital, Joe Simpson, assistant secretary of the Prison Officers' Association and Martin Powell-Davies, who is the London representative on the national committee of the NUT teachers' union.

Many public sector workers who participated in the 30 November pensions' strike may be moved to vote for this coalition because

of the failure of Labour leaders to support the walkout.

Labour leaders will also be worried that rank and file union members of Labour affiliated unions could press for their funds to go to TUSC candidates instead of to Labour.

Steve Hedley, whose RMT union was expelled from the Labour Party in 2004 for backing the Scottish Socialist Party, said: "We need candidates who support the ordinary man and woman. TUSC is the only

organisation that opposes all cuts, defends pensions and benefits for all working people. Labour just wants a compliant, silent union movement to hand over its money. TUSC will be a voice for all workers and will support trade unions in struggle."

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Candidates selected for the TUSC GLA list so far include:

April Ashley, Unison executive council
Alex Gordon, RMT president
Steve Hedley, RMT London regional organiser
Ian Leahair, FBU national executive committee
Martin Powell-Davies, NUT national executive
Joe Simpson, POA assistant general secretary
Jenny Sutton, UCU chair, London regional committee (FE)
Nick Wrack, TUSC national committee member

There will also be candidates from the CWU postal union and the PCS civil service workers' union.

(All standing in a personal capacity)

What is the point of Labour MPs?

Recently, one acerbic political TV commentator, noting the lack-lustre response of the Labour leadership to the current crisis, asked: "What is the point of Labour?" To that cutting remark we might add more specifically, "And what is the point of Labour MPs?"

On 28 January I attended a lively local protest about the sacking of 24 library workers and the consequent cutbacks to the service - all part of £65 million worth of cuts passed on from the coalition government via the local Labour majority councillors.

On my way home I came across the local Labour MP, Stella Creasy. I engaged her in conversation.

She had a stall and a table with some tins of food, called a food bank. The MP was inviting mostly poor people in this poor area to part with some of their meagre shopping, so that it could be donated to the even poorer!

What is this if not Victorian-style do-gooding? Don't address why people are poor and confront the system that makes them poor, just collect food and feel better.

This same MP was also highlighting pernicious loan sharks - the scourge of the working

poor. Fair enough. But her advice was to go to a credit union instead. And of course, while pursuing the relatively little fish in the money business, the truly greedy inner workings of speculators, bond traders and bankers are left unexposed and unchallenged by Labour.

She declared herself even unwilling to contemplate putting up any kind of fight against government cuts, saying if we did that, we would get Eric Pickles, the Tory minister, running council services - and did we want that?

Well, is there a difference to those 24 sacked workers that Labour is wielding the axe rather than Tories?

No, the problem is that this MP and all 37 local Labour councillors have Eric Pickles in their head. They have internalised defeat. They are doing exactly what Mr Pickles wants them to do.

There is no point to Labour MPs. Now is time to develop a mass electoral alternative whose representatives can both articulate workers' anger and lead a fight to stop even greater jobs slaughter.

Linda Taaffe

Coventry: Re-elect Dave Nellist

In the 3 May local elections Coventry Socialist Party councillor Dave Nellist will be seeking re-election.

Few people have won as much support and respect among working class people in Coventry than Dave and the Socialist Party. This respect arises from the decades of work and struggle both have conducted throughout the city; work and struggle that has intensified over the last 12 months as the temperature of class struggle has increased.

Dave is the sole voice on Coventry council for the ordinary people of Coventry and the only vote of opposition to the Con-Dem government and Labour council's draconian attacks on jobs and services.

At the 30 November pensions 3,000-strong Coventry strike rally, there were huge cheers for Dave's speech of support and solidarity but heckles from hundreds of council workers as the Labour council lead-

er attempted to convince workers he was on their side.

This year Dave has already forced the council back on a whole range of issues: forcing the council to drop and refund the doubled bill it had dumped on some town centre residents for their parking scheme, and forcing the council to host a meeting of city trade union youth, campaigns, and students to discuss a strategy to campaign against the tripling of students fees, axing of EMA and to fight for jobs for the city's young people.

- The battle to get Dave re-elected has started, with multiple weekly canvassing sessions taking place. There are mass canvasses of St Michael's ward organised on Sunday 19 February, 18 March, 1 April, 15 April, 29 April.

Contact lennyshailduffy@gmail.com if you would like to help.



Dave supporting the Youth Fight for Jobs Jarrow march photo S.Wrack