

The political fraud of Britain's Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition

Chris Marsden
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Workers in Britain will have the opportunity today to see a televised election broadcast by the Trade Unionist and Socialist Coalition (TUSC). They can do so because TUSC is standing 135 parliamentary candidates and 619 candidates contesting seats in the local council elections on May 7—thus passing the legal threshold to be granted airtime.

Its leaders have described this as the “largest left of labour” challenge for 60 years. But TUSC offers no answer for anyone seeking such a left alternative to the Labour Party.

Two events immediately prior to the launching of TUSC's general election campaign say far more about the organisation's real politics than anything that will be advanced in its election broadcast.

In February, the Prison Officers Association (POA) in Scotland signed a no strike deal with the Scottish National Party (SNP) government in Edinburgh. In exchange for a one-off bonus payment of £2,000 to each worker, the POA committed itself not to call any strike in the next two years over pay, and suspended a strike ballot.

The POA was one of the first trade unions to join TUSC, after it was formed in 2010 by the Stalinist leadership of the Rail Maritime and Transport Union (RMT), the Socialist Party (SP) and Socialist Workers Party (SWP) to contest that year's general election. POA General Secretary Steve Gillan and Assistant General Secretary Joe Simpson are both members of TUSC's national steering committee.

One month after the POA deal, Tommy Sheridan succeeded in his long campaign for his organisation, Solidarity Scotland, to call for a vote for the SNP in the May 7 General Election. In 2010, Sheridan headed the TUSC list in Scotland, and Solidarity Scotland included both the SP and SWP in its ranks. Sheridan was, in

effect, calling for a vote against his own members, forcing the SP into a very reluctant and amicable break. The SWP is still a member of Solidarity and TUSC.

These are not isolated incidents, but pointers to the thoroughly rotten politics of TUSC.

The number of candidates TUSC is standing does not represent a genuine growth of a left-wing challenge to Labour throughout the UK, nor to the SNP in Scotland. TUSC is an unprincipled marriage of convenience between sections of the trade union bureaucracy, a smattering of former Labourites, the SP and SWP—with leadership handed from the outset to the RMT, led by the late Bob Crow.

In the late 1980s, the SP had finally begun to abandon entry work in the Labour Party, conducted for decades as the Militant Tendency, and, in the mid-1990s, declared itself for a “new workers' party”. However, it insisted that such a party would not be a revolutionary organisation but a new, reformist party formed thanks to a rebellion by “left” trade union leaders and Labourites against Labour's right-wing trajectory. The SP and SWP offered themselves as advisers, apologists and political dogsbodies—willing to do whatever heavy lifting the trade union leaders might require to secure support among workers.

The “rebellion” when it came was limited to the RMT—which was disaffiliated from Labour in 2004, after five Scottish branches voted to donate some of their political funds to the Scottish Socialist Party in 2003.

Prior to TUSC, Crow was the figurehead of the No2EU electoral coalition, this time made up of the SP and the Communist Party of Britain (CPB), which stood candidates in the 2009 European elections. It advanced a nationalist opposition to the European Union, insisting that “Nation states with the right to self-

determination and their governments are the only institutions that can control the movement of big capital and clip the wings of the trans-national corporations and banks.”

Almost a year later, the RMT leadership was reluctantly persuaded to back the creation of TUSC. However, Crow made clear that he saw the electoral coalition only as a means of exerting pressure on Labour, while maintaining his backing for Labour members of the RMT parliamentary group. Under TUSC’s statutes, it cannot stand candidates against supposedly “left” Labour MPs.

The SP and SWP both endorsed this position. They ensured that the RMT and a handful of other individual trade union leaders from the Fire Brigades Union, the Public and Commercial Services civil servants union and the POA dominate the TUSC steering committee and dictate its policies. The latest version of TUSC’s “core policy platform for the 2015 general election” states, for example, “TUSC has accepted from its start that there will be some Labour candidates who share our socialist aspirations and will be prepared to support measures that challenge the austerity consensus of the establishment politicians.”

The size of the latest electoral campaign by TUSC has not come about as a result of greater determination on the part of the RMT, et al, to oppose Labour. In fact they are less involved than ever.

TUSC’s conference in January was attended by 300 people—less than half the total number of candidates being stood on May 7. The first session was given over to “leading trade unionists,” supposedly to explain how the crisis of working class political representation could be solved. Very few were in attendance. The RMT was only represented by John Reid, who is a member of the Socialist Party. He stated that last year his union had decided to give £10,000 to TUSC candidates—which is pocket change—while the RMT would also continue to support Labour MPs in their parliamentary group.

Other unions made no such commitment to TUSC and were also only present because members or supporters of the Socialist Party, such as the previously mentioned Joe Simpson of the Prison Officers Association, and Stefan Simms, a member of the National Union of Teachers executive and of the Socialist Workers Party, were roped in.

The only reason TUSC has been able to stand such a

broad slate of candidates is that a bequest was made to the Socialist Alliance—a now defunct coalition of various pseudo-left groups, the rump of which is controlled by the Socialist Party. The bequest was duly given over to TUSC. It guaranteed a minimum of £500 per local TUSC group from an inheritance received last June—funding at least 100 general election candidates (i.e., over £50,000), “enough to guarantee national media coverage.” An additional £5,000 was given towards the “cost of a fully-professional Party Election Broadcast.”

The SP has, in effect, gifted this money to a political project dominated by the trade union bureaucracy—or more correctly the shadow of the union bureaucracy as represented by its own members on various national executives, and the RMT—to the extent that it has not yet succeeded in making its peace with Labour.

Nothing true or lasting can come from such an opportunist manoeuvre. Instead, TUSC will be utilised to dissipate social and political protest along harmless channels that will continue to be jointly policed by the trade union bureaucracy and its flunkys in the SP and SWP.

Building a new workers’ party means building the Socialist Equality Party.

Our candidates, Katie Rhodes in Glasgow Central and David O’Sullivan in Holborn and St. Pancras, aim to mobilise working people in a political struggle against austerity and war through the fight for a workers’ government based on socialist policies.

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