



Steering Committee briefing:

Report from 'The Collective' discussions and the way forward

As reported previously to the TUSC steering committee, for the last five months Dave Nellist and I have been attending periodic meetings of 'The Collective', a self-defined network of 'those on the left who seek to build the foundations for a new left political party'.

The Collective group, which has included in its meetings prominent figures from the Peace and Justice Project (launched by Jeremy Corbyn in 2021), The Muslim Vote organisation, some of the Labour councillors who resigned over the war on Gaza, and a number of 'independents for Gaza' candidates who went on to stand in the general election, was established in late 2023. It first invited TUSC to attend its meetings on April 6th this year, after the close of nominations in the 2024 local elections the previous day had revealed TUSC to be the sixth-biggest presence on the ballot paper with 274 candidates across 54 local authorities.

In the meetings which we have attended since there have also been representatives present – if not consistently then on at least one occasion – from Aspire, the Workers Party, Transform, the For The Many campaign, Just Stop Oil/Assemble, OICSA, the Social Justice Party, the Socialist Party, Liverpool Community Independents, Jewish Voice for Labour, Oxford Community Independents, and the RCP. For the general election the Collective steering group – which does not include TUSC or any of the component parts of our coalition – publicised a list of 'recommended candidates' and produced a social media meme to promote them (which was included on the TUSC website at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/21030/02-07-2024/vote-for-no-to-cuts-stop-the-war-candidates-on-thursday/>).

Post-election strategy document

The general election saw a record 459 candidates appearing on ballot papers as 'Independent' which, as we have discussed previously in TUSC, does not sufficiently define a candidate's political position. But the election did include at least sixty independent candidates standing on an anti-war and anti-austerity platform including, of course, Jeremy Corbyn himself.

The results achieved by these candidates are tabulated on pages 19-20 of the TUSC *GE2024 Fact File*, available at <https://www.tusc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/2024-GE-The-TUSC-Fact-File.pdf> Not all of the sixty were on Collective's list of 'recommended candidates'; and not all of those who were promoted by Collective participate within its leading core or otherwise. But at least ten anti-war, anti-austerity independent candidates – from London (four), Leicester (one), Birmingham (two), Brighton (one) and Merseyside (two) – have attended post-election meetings

of the Collective, at which they all expressed their desire for a registered political party to be established for future elections.

Subsequently, at a meeting on August 12th, a strategy document was circulated from the core group entitled, *Beyond GE24: Rebuilding A Mass Socialist Movement As A Foundation For A New Left Political Party*.

As a very initial draft – it had only been sent out on the afternoon of the meeting – it was requested that it not be widely circulated to the point that it could become the subject of a ‘public debate over details’ at this early stage. For the purposes of consultation with the groups represented in the Collective discussions, however, it was accepted that summaries of the document and its proposals could be made, which I attempt to do below.

The objective of a new party

The document starts with the premise that “there is a need for a new class based and mass-membership political party of the left in the UK” and that “none of the existing left political forces within parliament, including the Greens, left independents and Labour’s Socialist Campaign Group, are sufficient to meet this challenge either independently or in unison. A new political vehicle is needed”.

“What is in demand is a new organised mass movement”, the document goes on, “capable of mobilising the disaffected and disenfranchised millions left out of a political and media system that serves only centre and far right incumbents, and ultimately the vested interests of the billionaire class. In equal measure the required components are: a strong grassroots community organising model; unity within the left; an inspirational leadership team; a national democratic structure; and a solid relationship with organised labour”.

The objective is set as being to “build a political party, the ultimate object of which is to gain representation at national parliamentary, regional and local government levels that will properly serve the aims and demands of the labour movement and the millions left disaffected and disenfranchised by Oligarch Britain”.

To move towards that goal, two ‘must-win battles’ are identified. One, to “become the credible, sustainable and pre-eminent party of the left that the UK needs. The go-to choice for members and affiliates, left candidates and voters”. And two, to “establish a growing base of party elected representatives across the UK, beginning with the 2025 local elections”.

To succeed in these ‘must-win battles’ four ‘strategic initiatives’ are proposed. One, to “register 100,000 members by 2025”. Two, to “establish a policy programme clearly differentiated from Labour, Greens and the Workers Party”. Three, “identify and stand candidates in all UK elections, starting with the 2025 local elections”. Four, to “have a minimum of 150 elected councillors in 2025 and a dozen MPs from the 2029 general election”.

Timeframe and founding principles

After an assessment of what the document terms “the left political landscape post the general election” – in which it locates Collective as “politically occupying the space between the Greens and the Workers Party” (without explaining why the Workers Party could not be part of the Collective) – there is a section entitled ‘Founding Principles’. In this, while leaving “the

development of detailed proposals for structure, governance and policy foundation” to further discussion, a guideline “set of founding principles” for organising a new party are listed as follows:

- “Membership should be built around two routes: individual and affiliated groups/unions”.
- The membership appeal “should make clear Collective’s ambition to establish a major new political party within the current parliament, and the importance of first building a mass membership base as a necessary foundation”.
- The aim should be for “an effective balance struck between affording autonomy and devolved power to members organising at constituency level and a leadership/executive that is both enabled and properly accountable”.
- “A ‘broad church’ philosophy should guide policy development, recognising the importance of both building consensus and unity around a set of defined political positions, as well as accommodating some margin of difference and debate around them”.
- “Values concerning democratic participation and healthy political debate both internally and externally should be enshrined in a governance constitution with an emphasis on tolerance, inclusivity and solidarity”.
- “A code of conduct governing members and MPs alike should place emphasis on political education over suspension or expulsion in dealing with code breaches, as well as a proper system of appeals and due process based on the principles of natural justice”.
- “Electoral alliances can be a positive response to an undemocratic voting system that favours the largest, established political parties... Collective will build and support electoral alliances with alternative left parties or groupings that share our core values, for a defined period or place, where the intent is to not compete or split the vote, to increase the chances of a left candidate being elected, and above all to properly respect the wishes of local members”.

This is then supplemented with an appendix on a possible ‘Timeframe To Establishing A New Party’, with suggestions to:

- Register a party with the Electoral Commission in early 2025, with an “interim party name, descriptors and emblems” and the legally required three registered officers.
- Create Working Groups, with interim officers to head them, including for Policy Development; Party Structure, Constitution and Internal Democracy; Local Organising; Disciplinary and Governance; Finance; Conferences and Events; Trade Union and Affiliated Groups Liaison; Communications; and Political Education.
- Organise a “public launch early in 2025” with “the ability of individuals to join the party” and its “principles and/or brief policy commitments” both “to be in place and visible on the day of the launch”.
- Send out “Trade Union and Affiliated Groups invitations” with “the detail of what affiliation will involve” made clear.
- Prepare a “local elections strategy” by early January with candidates “to contest local election seats” to be announced by mid-March.
- Hold a “special conference on party structure, constitution and internal democracy” in early July 2025.
- Convene an annual conference “to be held in late 2025” by the end of which “the party should have its policies, party structure, constitution, internal democracy and disciplinary

and governance all democratically decided upon”, with internal elections organised with “member voting to run online for two weeks”.

How to proceed?

In the Collective meetings Dave and I have always attempted to adopt a positive approach to all efforts to push forward the process of creating the new, mass vehicle of political representation that the working class needs as an alternative to the establishment parties. TUSC has never viewed itself as such an alternative but as a means to campaign for a new mass party to be created; and that it requires more authoritative forces to act than those presently participating in our coalition, above all left-led trade unions, to bring such a party into being. And while there may be different appraisals made of Jeremy Corbyn’s Labour leadership, there is also recognition of the catalyst role that could be played in the formation of a new party by such authoritative individuals.

It is in that context then, while also explaining that we have to report back to the TUSC steering committee before we could agree to any concrete proposal, that we voiced concerns in the 12th August meeting (and a follow-up on August 19th) about the *Beyond GE24* strategy document.

Firstly, Jeremy Corbyn has not attended the Collective meetings we have been present at nor given any other indication of his commitment to the strategy and timeframe proposed, as summarised above. Nor are any trade unions committed. Some important trade unionists have indicated their support but no more, for example, than the union executive members participating in TUSC. The Muslim Vote have not attended Collective meetings since July and are anyway committed to not back any particular party but to have “the Muslim voice heard across the political spectrum”. Not only Dave and myself but also representatives from Transform asked: how is the Collective initiative different to others that have gone before?

Many of the previous initiatives were launched with not insignificant forces involved, such as Respect in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq. Some of its candidates too were recommended for support by the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), a precursor organisation of today’s The Muslim Vote. Left Unity was launched with the authority of Ken Loach in 2013, signing up 8,000 people within weeks. Then there was the People’s Alliance of the Left (PAL), established in 2021 by the former Labour MP Thelma Walker, which also included in its meetings the Peace and Justice Project, the BFAWU president Ian Hodson, the Liverpool Community Independents and other ex-Labour councillors, a former assistant general secretary of Unite, and left social media figures from the Socialist Telly and the Not The Andrew Marr Show YouTube shows. But they all show that merely declaring that something will be ‘the pre-eminent party of the left’ or the ‘go-to choice’ for candidates and voters, does not make it so.

For these reasons Dave and I proposed that *Beyond GE24* should be presented as a discussion document to be taken into the movement to see what the response is, rather than as definitive proposals – particularly the timeframe action-points – to set up a new party in the next few months. Not least to organise a systematic campaign in the trade union movement as workers digest the experience of Starmer’s Mark II austerity agenda. But that was not the majority viewpoint at the August meetings and we now need guidance from the steering committee on how to proceed.

Clive Heemskerck
TUSC National Agent