

Unions in the community

A guide to trades union councils

2004

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Trades union councils bring together unions to campaign around issues affecting working people in their workplaces and local communities. Trades union councils aim to:

- raise public awareness of rights at work and the union role in enforcing those rights.
- promote organising and recruitment drives to build union membership.
- support union and community campaigns for dignity and respect in the workplace and beyond.

With threats of racism and fascism, changes in the labour market and debates over the future of public services, the trade union voice in the community is as important as ever. The capacity of trades union councils to provide a local response and to organise trade unionists into coalitions with other progressive forces is crucial.

TRADES UNION COUNCILS

They do this by providing services which keep local trade unionists up to date with developments within the wider trade union movement, and by taking up relevant local industrial and community issues. This guide provides a brief introduction to trades union councils and how they work.

COUNTY TRADES UNION COUNCILS

Most trades union councils operate at borough or district level. However, counties which have unitary authorities usually have county trades union councils. These are not county associations (see page 4), but trades union councils which represent union branches throughout the county.

Although this is usually the case in Wales, there are also a few in England as well. County trades union councils operate as normal trades union councils, but they have the right to send up to three delegates to the Annual Conference, following the same

rules as county associations. County trades union councils may submit one motion for the agenda of the Annual Conference and one amendment. As with trades union councils, county trades union councils also have the right to nominate and vote for candidates for election to the Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee to represent their region (see page 5).

How do trades union councils operate?

In this section we describe the basic operation of trades union councils.

Affiliation

Trades union councils consist of representatives of trade unions or branches of trade unions which meet within the area covered by that council, or which have members working or living in the area.

A union branch will normally affiliate to the trades union council in the area in which it meets. Where branch membership is spread over two or

more trades union council areas, the branch can affiliate to more than one trades union council, with the agreement of the relevant councils.

An application from a union branch to affiliate to a trades union council will usually be put before the next full meeting of the council. If the meeting agrees to the application, then the branch will be taken in to membership.

Representation

Union branches usually appoint their delegates to trades union councils at their annual meeting. The number of delegates that the branch is entitled to send to the council is determined by the scale of representation set out in each trades union council's rules. For example, branch representation could be as follows:

- 100 members or under: 1 delegate
- 101 members to 250: 2 delegates
- 251 members to 300: 3 delegates
- One delegate for every

additional 250 members
(maximum of 8 delegates)

The above scale is merely an example and trades union councils will vary the scale depending on the number and size of their branches.

Most trades union councils put a maximum limit on the number of delegates from any one branch, so that bigger branches do not dominate all of the work of the trades union council.

Affiliation Fees

The funds of trades union councils are drawn mainly from affiliation fees paid by trade union branches out of their general funds, based on their local membership. The amount of the affiliation fees is a matter for each trades union council to decide. Although they decide the level of the affiliation fee, trades union councils also have to bear in mind that some unions have rules which specify how affiliation fees shall be paid and, in some cases, stipulate a maximum payment.

Responsibilities

Branches elect delegates to attend their local trades union council. That delegate then has the responsibility to represent the collective view of the branch within the trades union council.

Similarly, the officers of trades union councils are elected by the delegates to the council and are responsible to the delegates. As officers of a trades union council registered with the TUC, they also accept a responsibility to the TUC. This includes upholding the objects of the trades union council to work for and support the policy of Congress and the General Council of the TUC.

Trades union councils operate under the model rules approved by the General Council of the TUC. It is not expected that every trades union council will have rules which exactly replicate the model rules. However, there are certain rules which must be included and followed by all registered trades union councils. Any changes to a trades union council's rules must be notified to the TUC. The date of

adoption and dates of revisions should be clearly stated.

Objects

The objects of the a trades union council, as set out in the model rules, are:

- a) to provide services to affiliated branches on a wide range of industrial, social and community issues;
- b) to promote the interests of all its affiliated organisations and to secure united action on all questions affecting or likely to affect those interests, including making representations to local authorities about matters of common concern to trade unionists within the district and nominating representatives to a number of statutory committees;
- c) to act as the local body of the TUC, and to support and work for the application of such objects as the TUC may from time to time determine, including making more

widely known in its area national policy declared by the TUC;

- d) to improve generally the economic and social conditions of working people, including seeking improvements to the social services, public education, housing and health;
- e) to help promote suitable cultural, educational, social and sports facilities for all working people;
- f) to affiliate and to play an active part in the work of its appropriate county association (this rule applies in England only).

In addition, each trades union council in England is required to affiliate to its appropriate county association and its appropriate TUC Regional Council. Each trades union council in Wales is required to affiliate to the Wales TUC. Each trades union council in England and Wales is also required to register with the

General Council. Such registration may be made at any time and will remain current and operative from the date it is received by the TUC until May 31 in the following year.

In no circumstances shall the Council co-operate with or subscribe to: the funds of fascist parties or any subsidiary organisation of these parties; any organisations whose policies or activities are contrary to those of the Trades Union Congress; or any industrial organisation which has been proscribed by the General Council. Nor shall the Council subscribe to the funds of any political party. The Council may cooperate with the local Labour Party, providing that no part of the funds of the Council derived from the general funds of affiliated trade unions shall be applied directly or indirectly in the furtherance of the political objects specified in Section 72 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act, 1992.

COUNTY ASSOCIATIONS

In England, all trades union councils registered with the TUC must also affiliate to the appropriate county association, unless the trades union council has been allowed by the Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee to operate as a county trades union council. The association is made up of elected representatives of affiliated trades union councils.

Objects

The objects of the association are set out in the model rules and fall within the following four categories:

- a) to act as a representative body of the TUC for the county in helping to publicise and administer TUC policy, including liaison on matters of joint concern with the TUC Regional Council.
- b) to act as an electoral body for trades union councils' representatives on the TUC Regional Council.

- c) to promote the effective working of trades union councils in the county and to co-ordinate their activities, particularly by making representations to the county council and to other bodies at county level about matters of common concern to Trades Councils within the county.

- d) to assist, in conjunction with the Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee, the development of trades union councils in the county by helping them to obtain affiliations on full membership from all trade union branches in their areas and promoting the establishment of new Councils in particular local authority areas where none currently exist.

Representation

Representation of trades union councils is based on affiliation fees paid to the county association. For example, trades

union council representation could be as follows:

- Up to 5,000 members:
1 representative
- 5,000 to 10,000 members:
2 representatives
- 10,000 to 20,000 members:
3 representatives
- Over 20,000 members:
4 representatives

This scale is shown as an example. County associations will usually adopt a suitable scale depending on the number and size of trades union councils in the county.

TRADES UNION COUNCILS' JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

The Trades Union Councils' Joint Consultative Committee (TUCJCC) is TUC committee which meets five times a year and consist of representatives of trades union councils and members of the General Council. The trades union council representatives are elected regionally by registered

trades union councils in an annual postal ballot.

The TUCJCC was established in 1925 and acts as an advisory and consultative committee on all matters concerning trades union councils. This enables the General Council on issues affecting trades union councils to consider their perspective before taking a final decision.

CAMPAIGNING

Here are some examples of trades union councils' activities over last few years:

Supporting local union campaigns

- Salford Trades Union Council leafleted and organised a public meeting as part of the local union campaign against privatisation.
- Wirral Trades Union Council took part in the campaign to stop the privatisation of the Mersey Tunnels. Wirral also campaigned against the placing of mobile phone masts.

- Swindon Trades Union Council campaigned against the selling off of council housing. The trades union council set up a Defend Council Housing Campaign involving local government unions and tenants. The campaign leafleted all of the meetings of tenants involved in the consultation process. The result was that nearly 90 per cent of tenants indicated a preference to stay with the Council.

Workers' Memorial Day

- in Bradford the trades union council held a remembrance event in Centenary Square. In London, Haringey Trades Union Council held a vigil after a short walk to the site of a building which collapsed two years ago, and where several workers narrowly escaped with their lives.
- The trades union council in Keighley worked with Keighley Worksafe to organise an event where they gathered 300

signatures on a petition calling for greater corporate accountability. Other trades union councils held wreath laying ceremonies. And in Wolverhampton the trades union council released 249 black and purple balloons, each one representing somebody killed at work last year.

Public events

- Trades union councils are involved in organising May Day events every year, including those in Bristol, Norwich, Ipswich, London and Merseyside.

Meetings and conferences

- Several trades union councils and county associations have organised themed conferences in their local areas. For example, Chelmsford and District Trades Union Council held a conference entitled 'Trade Unions after the General Election'. Speakers included Labour MPs Gareth Thomas and Andy Love, and ASLEF

General Secretary Mick Rix. The conference included workshops on globalisation, outsourcing and community unionism.

Publishing newsletters

- Blackburn and South West Lancashire Trades Union Councils both publish a regular newsletter and have established their own websites. This can help to boost the profile of county associations and individual trades union councils.

Re-establishing trades union councils

- Oldham Trades Union Council was re-established with a development grant (see below), helping in the fight against racism and fascism.
- A development grant was also used to re-establish Sefton Trades union Council.

Challenging racism

- Greater Manchester used its development grant to carry

out work in support of Asylum Seekers, as did Liverpool, and Blackburn put its grant to use in the local fight against racism.

- Four North West county associations held a residential conference on tackling racism in Blackpool. The seminar included speakers from Searchlight, TUC Education and Oldham and Burnley Councils.

ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference of Trades Union Councils is usually held on a weekend in May. Each trades union council is entitled to be represented at the conference by one delegate. Each county association is entitled to be represented by two delegates, at least one of whom must be a woman. In addition, county associations may send third delegate provided that they are either young trades unionists or black trade unionists.

The principal objects of the conference are:

- a) to discuss the work of the TUCJCC
- b) to receive reports on resolutions which were carried by the previous year's conference
- c) to discuss ways of strengthening the organisation of trades union councils and county associations
- d) to receive the report of scrutineers on the ballot for membership of the TUCJCC.

Trades union councils can submit motions for discussion at the conference through their county association. Motions must be concerned with the organisation or work of trades union councils, or with implementing some aspect of Congress policy. County associations are then able to select up to two motions to be submitted for the conference agenda. In addition, county associations can submit one amendment to any of the motions on the agenda.

DEVELOPMENT GRANT

Every year the TUCJCC draws up a programme of work which outlines key priorities and campaigning objects for trades union councils. To support trades union councils in locally implementing the campaigns outlined in the programme of work, the General Council has established a development grant. Grants of up to £250 are distributed by TUC Regional Secretaries for activities developed in line with this programme. An application form is available from the TUC Regional Office. Trades union councils are encouraged to make joint bids for grants in order to fund collaborative projects.

County associations of trades union councils can also access the Development Grant to run campaigns with the specific goal of :

- establishing new trades union councils;
- revitalising existing trades union councils
- boosting branch affiliations to trades union councils.

As part of their activity to rebuild trades union councils campaign bids may also include applications to cover administrative costs, including travel costs associated with participation in wider TUC structures and organisation. Those county associations submitting bids should identify clear goals with measurable outcomes, such as boosting the number of branches affiliating to trades councils or establishing new trades councils.

OTHER USEFUL PUBLICATIONS FOR TRADES UNION COUNCILS

To support the work of trades union councils, the following publications can be ordered from the TUC:

- *The Model Rules and Guidance for Trades Union Councils and County Associations*
- *Trades union councils: unions organising in the community* – a leaflet to help promote trades union councils
- *The Directory of Trades Union Councils* – this lists the contact details of all registered trades

union councils and county associations. Many unions use this to affiliate their branches to the appropriate trades union council.

- *The Programme of Work* – this is distributed every year following the Annual Conference.

For more information about trades union councils or to order a copy of any of these publications contact the Organisation and Services Department on 020 7467 1250.