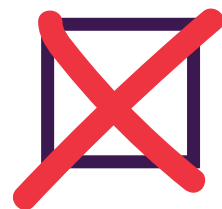


GENERAL ELECTION 2015

A UNISON ACTIVISTS **CAMPAIGN GUIDE**



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INTRODUCTION

Without question, the general election in 2015 is the most important since the formation of UNISON. This campaign guide sets out why and provides information to help activists and members to get involved.

In terms of public services, the jobs of UNISON members and the ability of all working people to organise to protect and advance their living standards, there could not be more at stake. So we all need to do our bit to kick out the Tory-led coalition.

The Conservative Party's commitment to further cuts spells disaster for the most vulnerable in our society. The plans set out by George Osborne in the 2014 autumn statement propose reducing the share of our nation's wealth spent on public services and the welfare state back to levels last seen in the 1930s. This will result in:

- a further one million job losses across public services
- deterioration in the public services that we all depend upon
- a continuation of the draconian squeeze on pay that has already cut average public service employee pay by more than £2,000 a year since 2010
- even more outsourcing and privatisation, including in the NHS.

Alongside a further lethal dose of austerity, the Conservative Party want to make life harder for UNISON and other trade unions to stand up for people at work. Plans are being drawn up that would result in the introduction of a 40% minimum support threshold in industrial action ballots in the public sector and new anti-strike laws preventing rolling action. Attempts are also being made to prevent union subs being paid through check-off/DOCAS.

WHAT DIFFERENCE CAN WE MAKE?

Public opinion polls suggest 2015 will be one of the closest elections in recent history. This means that everything is still very much to play for. The future is in our own hands.

At the same time it is increasingly clear that austerity doesn't work – and that people want a change. Despite the pain caused to millions who have seen services cut, the deficit is now higher than the government said it would be. This is precisely because austerity leaves people poorer and therefore less likely to spend their pay. This in turn reduces demand in the wider economy and damages the economic recovery.

It's in this context that UNISON activists and members have a key role as campaigners in the election: highlighting the impact of cuts and austerity on the public services in which we work; impressing upon our work colleagues and communities the case for a change; and engaging with candidates for political office on the need for an alternative agenda – including the ideas set out by UNISON in our public services manifesto *Securing the future of our public services*.

UNISON'S ALTERNATIVE TO AUSTERITY

Public services

A new deal to pay for public services, including higher taxes on those at the top, writing off some of the debts created by the financial crisis and more freedom for local authorities to set council tax and borrow.

NHS

Co-operation and collaboration in place of competition, repeal the damaging Health and Social Care act.

Housing

Recognition of the role of increased public investment in decent affordable homes in securing economic recovery.

Decent jobs with decent pay

Ending the job cuts in public services and tackling the squeeze on pay that has left most of us worse off.

A fairer society

An end to the politics of division that scapegoats economic migrants and the most vulnerable for the economy's ills.

For more information see *Securing the future of our public services*.

THE LOBBYING ACT – WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

Because of the Lobbying Act, which came into law in 2014, we do need to change the way we campaign. Introduced by the coalition government, the Act places restrictions on the amount that UNISON (and other campaigning organisations) can spend on public-facing campaigning and requires us to include staffing and other resources when calculating campaign costs.

In short, everything the union does that can be seen as seeking to influence how the general public votes at the election will have to be accounted for.

However, there is still a lot that we can do to in the coming months to ensure that there is a change of government.

The cost of communications with UNISON members is not counted as something we have to declare. This means that we can highlight to our members what's at stake at the election – and where the different parties stand on the key issues that face public services. Most Labour Link activities won't be covered by the Lobbying Act either, so the contributions of members who opt into the Affiliated Political Fund can continue to be used to support Labour in the key marginal seats.

Finally, activism and volunteering by our members, as long as it does not involve the union's resources, does not count under the Lobbying Act. Clearly it is this activism that is the key ingredient in any successful campaign. As such it's crucial that we all spend the coming months getting out and talking to UNISON members, listening to their concerns, discussing what's at stake, explaining the union's approach, providing information to members about how to get involved in campaign activity, either through the branch, the Labour Party, Hope not Hate or local community anti-cuts campaigns.

UNISON'S ELECTION STRATEGY – THE FIVE KEY PRINCIPLES

1. Make the election the Number One campaign priority for the union in 2015.
2. Focus on the political communications and campaign techniques that are likely to be the most effective.
3. Target key election battlegrounds.
4. Continue with existing campaigning that has a relevant political angle, but also help develop new capacity where it's needed.
5. Ensure our campaign messages are reflective of who we are and what our campaign priorities are (as set out in *Securing the future of our public services*).

HOW TO PREVENT ANOTHER TORY-LED GOVERNMENT

There are lots of ways members, activists and branches can get involved in the general election campaign. Set out below are four options. It is not an exhaustive list. You can also do more than one at a time. Your branch or perhaps self-organised group might have its own ideas about what might work best where you live and work.

Whatever you do you should keep in mind UNISON's key election campaign principles (see left). You can discuss the options with your colleagues at a planning session (see page 6). You can also get help from your UNISON regional officer.

1. Discussing the issues at work and in our communities

Don't underestimate the importance of simply raising political issues in conversation with work colleagues friends and neighbours.

Polling shows that many are still to make up their minds and that face-to-face communication is the most likely form of communication to actually change someone's mind or encourage them to vote or act in a particular way. It is much more effective than a leaflet (though they have their place, along with emails and posters etc). Putting together a plan for speaking to our own members at this time, and encouraging them in turn to speak to others, should be a key part of any activity. It should also be noted that evidence shows that you, the representatives of the union have a very high trust rating among the wider membership. They will listen to us!

We need to listen to their concerns and talk about the impact on public services and jobs of a further term of Conservative-led government.

UNISON's education team (Learning and Organising Services) has designed some short courses to help you start political conversations and hold meetings on the issues at stake

at the election. Your regional organiser can help you set one of these up – maybe at a special branch meeting or in a lunch break. You can also think about how we take our political talking points out into our wider communities. As suggested above these might be where we live. Or they might be groups or clubs that we are members of, including self-organised groups.

2. Volunteering to help the Labour Party

The only way to get rid of the coalition is for Labour to win seats and gain power. So any help UNISON members can give locally would really make a difference.

Labour has targeted **106 seats** across the country to try and win back and form a majority government.

UNISON is affiliated to the Labour Party and through this affiliation has campaigned for a number of policy commitments that would directly benefit UNISON members.

A Labour victory would result in a significant number of policies being introduced that would improve the lives of UNISON members across the UK.

These include:

- repeal of the Health and Social Care Act plus extra NHS funding and staff
- a commitment to raise the minimum wage to at least £8 during the next parliament
- an increase the number of living wage employers including the use of public sector procurement
- tackling zero hours contracts
- an end to 15-minute social care visits and payment for travelling time for care staff
- build 200,000 new homes a year by 2020
- tackling energy prices

- reversing the cut in the top band of tax, putting it back to 50% and introducing a new 10p starting rate
- a review of TUPE to strengthen protections when workers transfer between employers
- a reaffirmation of collective agreements and equal pay
- fairer funding for local government
- establish the Education Support Staff Negotiating Body.

Further details can be found on **Labour's website**

How to find out more

Labour will be fighting every seat in England, Wales and Scotland so it is easy to volunteer locally via your Constituency Labour Party. You can also **volunteer online** and the Labour Party will get back to you. This can sometimes feel a big step for people who haven't been involved previously. But our members will be made to feel very welcome. Everything will be done to help and support volunteers who have not been involved in political campaigning previously. Alternatively your UNISON regional organiser will help put you in touch. Sometimes you will be campaigning alongside members of other unions, through a dedicated union/Labour Party body called TULO (see page 8).

Types of activity include:

- leafleting your neighbourhood
- putting a poster in your own window
- canvassing (knocking on people's doors and asking them how they plan to vote)
- stuffing envelopes
- working on a telephone bank
- helping with the visits of leading politicians
- driving.

3. Refocusing local anti-cuts campaigns on the election

In many parts of the country there will already be local campaigns up and running that will gain added significance in the context of the general election.

In many cases UNISON members will already support such campaigns and activists may be fully involved. Examples might include campaigns about local NHS services, library closures, adult social care, private rents or the Living Wage.

In such cases those involved in the campaign can think about how the issues play out in the political context. For example, can a campaign about saving local services that have been under threat from closure, reduced opening or privatisation be used to highlight differences between the candidates at the election?

Have a think about local campaigns that fit this category and how you might approach others involved to re-invigorate them in the months ahead.

4. Tackling intolerance

The lead up to the 2015 election has already thrown up intolerant and inflammatory rhetoric that seeks to exploit economic anxieties, job insecurity and low pay to divide our communities and marginalise vulnerable groups of people. This is only likely to get worse as the election gets closer. Your voice and your contribution will be crucial, particularly talking to other members and supporting UNISON self-organised groups' activities and campaigns. Young people, Black communities and low-paid workers are less likely to be registered to vote and many are located in significant numbers in marginal constituencies. Raising their turnout will be crucial. Each region has a lead contact who will be co-ordinating activities in your area. Your regional organiser will help put you in touch.

UNISON works around the year with groups such as **HOPE not hate** and other local anti-racist, anti-fascist campaigns to tackle racism and to organise local communities against the politics of hate. Many will already be active, but encouraging other UNISON members to become engaged in local community activities and building their reach and capacity is one of the most positive responses we can make to those who seek to divide working people.

A link to HOPE not hate and other relevant campaigns can be found at the end of this document in Useful links and contacts.

NEXT STEPS: HOLDING A BRANCH PLANNING SESSION

To start planning how the branch and members can be most effective in the run-up to the election start by thinking through the answers to the following questions:

- What are the dynamics of the constituencies in which members live and work? For example, is your workplace in a marginal constituency, or a safe Labour/Conservative or Liberal Democrat seat?
- Do many of the branch's members live in neighbouring constituencies – and if so, are these marginal?
- Are there council elections on the same day as the general election?
- Can you evaluate the suitability of any of the options in *How to prevent another Tory-led government* (see page 4) for your branch and/or members of it?
- If you and other members live and work in safe or no-hope seats, would people be willing to devote some time, however limited, to doing some campaigning in a target seat in your region?
- What experience do activists and members in the branch have of getting involved in election and election-related campaigns?
- Are there members / activists in the branch who are already involved in either the local Labour Party or other campaigns?
- How can you get more people involved?
- Can you issue a call for volunteers?
- Can you get involved in encouraging members to register to vote, if they aren't already? Young people and BME members are least likely to be registered to vote. (See page 8)
- Can you hold an event to enable the wider membership/workforce in your workplace to discuss the issues that are at stake at the election. This could take the form of hustings, to which candidates are invited.
- Do any of your colleagues work shifts? If so, encourage them to register for a postal vote. (See page 8)
- Can you set up a UNISON LAOS (Learning and Organising Services) election campaign course? There are many new courses that have been put together to help branches plan election-related activity.
- Can you set up a buddy scheme in which active campaigners and or Labour supporters in the branch help those who have not been involved before?
- What will happen when? Draw up a local general election campaign timeline.
- How will you try to increase the intensity of your campaign the closer we get to the election?

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What are the key election dates?

The 'long campaign' runs from 18 December 2014 to 30 March 2015. During the long campaign period political parties and other campaigners that spend money on their campaigns need to account for their spending and stick within limits.

Start of short campaign – 30 March (final 26 days until polling day)

Deadline for registering to vote – 20 April

Deadline for requesting a postal vote – 21 April

Polling day – Thursday 7 May.

What resources are available for campaigning?

The union is producing some 'pledge to vote' cards and other useful campaign tools. Government websites include voter registration and postal vote applications that can be downloaded (see page 8). Although available resources are severely restricted by the Lobbying Act branches are also welcome to bid to the General Political Fund (GPF) to support issue-based campaign activity. The GPF cannot be used to campaign for a particular political party, but can be used to encourage people to vote and urge them to consider the issues at stake at the election etc. Regional organisers will help branches to complete GPF bid applications.

What if I am not in a target seat?

Although the union is targeting its resources towards marginal constituencies there is still lots that can be done in other parts of the country. There is important work to do to 'get out the vote' in safe seats – and virtue in maximising participation. However, we do urge those in safe or no-hope constituencies to try and spend at least some time in any

neighbouring key seats that they can get to.

Does UNISON support tactical voting?

It's up to individual members to make these decisions. A recent survey of members suggested that more than a quarter would consider voting tactically.

I have a local election on the same day as the general election

It's possible that there will be local elections on the same day as the general election where you live. Where this is the case branches will want think about how they can engage with council candidates on cuts to local public services – and ensure that these are on the agenda of local media.

USEFUL LINKS AND CONTACTS

Securing the future of our public services: A UNISON manifesto

<https://www.unison.org.uk/Catalogue/22518>

Target Labour seats

<http://labourlist.org/2013/01/labours-106-battleground-target-seats-for-2015/>

Labour election commitments

<http://www.labour.org.uk/pages/changing-britain-together>

Volunteer for the Labour Party

<https://donation.labour.org.uk/index.php/volunteer-pledge-home>

HOPE not hate

<http://www.hopenothate.org.uk/>

UNISON's political fund

<http://www.unison.org.uk/political-funds>

Effective campaigning: A UNISON Guide

<http://www.unison.org.uk/catalogue/19308>

Government voter registration website

<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>

Applying to vote by post

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apply-for-a-postal-vote>

Operation Black Vote: Power of the Black Vote in 2015

<http://www.obv.org.uk/sites/default/files/images/downloads/Powerofthe%20BlackVotev3.pdf>

TUC young worker registration

<http://www.tuc.org.uk/young-workers/young-workers-month/tuc-voter-registration-packs>

Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation (TULO)

http://www.unionstogether.org.uk/pages/member_unions

For more information contact

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