



Unite Political Strategy

adopted by Unite EC December 2011

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The aim of our political strategy is clear –

- Winning Labour for working people
- Winning working people for Labour
- Building a broad alliance to defeat the Tories and their policies
- Winning a Labour government which will govern in the interests of working people and towards a socialism for the 21st century

But, for too long, Unite has talked; now we intend to carry through detailed plans to take forward our strategy.

For several years Unite has, along with others, talked of “reclaiming Labour” for the values of ordinary working people and for policies which advance their interests. This reflects the fact that the record of the last Labour government was, for the most part, a bitter disappointment for all those, including Unite’s predecessor unions, which had such high hopes in 1997. Apart from the wider failures, ranging from the uncritical embrace of the City through to the privatisation of public services and the Iraq War, trade unions were generally treated with disdain by the government. Moreover, trade union-supported candidates found it harder than ever to be selected for parliamentary seats, something which has led to a huge change in the social make-up of the Parliamentary Labour party.

However, we must acknowledge that for all the talk of “reclaiming” the Party, little progress was made. This has led to great frustration within the union, the more so since the Party’s requests for financial support from our union and others have continued unabated. So it is time for a change.

The times are favourable for a renewed effort to reconnect Labour with the concerns of our members and the working-class more generally. The crash of 2008 has highlighted the failure of neo-liberalism to almost everyone. And in Ed Miliband Labour has a new leader anxious to put the “New Labour” years behind us and embrace a new and more radical political approach. There is also a growing recognition that Labour cannot win again without addressing the loss of at least four million working-class votes between 1997 and 2010. In reclaiming Labour now, we are pushing against at least a half-open door. The crisis and the Coalition’s reactionary austerity agenda is pushing millions of people to look at politics in a new way, and the “Occupy” movement has caught the public imagination. On the other hand, forces more-or-less openly hostile to our agenda remain strong within the PLP, and are well-financed outside Parliament by groups like Progress. The battle for Labour’s future direction is therefore undecided, and it is right that Unite, as the Party’s largest affiliate, should play the fullest possible part in the struggle for Labour’s soul.

We are therefore already reinvigorating our political work at all levels after a period in which it was over-concentrated on top-level contacts at the expense of any strategy. We have initiated the formation, with other unions, MPs and interested parties, of the Centre for Labour and Social Studies (CLaSS) as a think-tank which can develop the new ideas needed to shape a renewed socialist agenda in the 21st century. We expect it to start producing valuable work in the course of 2012. We have also made efforts to bring together a group of Labour MPs

committed to reconnecting the Party with working-class communities – this has taken its first steps, although progress remains unsatisfactory to date.

Now we must do more. Our union needs a comprehensive strategy to advance our political work, reclaiming the Labour Party as an instrument of social progress which defeats the Tory Coalition government at the next general election and then governs in the interests of working people.

Winning Labour for working people - Strategy and membership

This requires a detailed and concrete strategy, with strong leadership, properly resourced, but which is bottom-up, driven by our members. We will, therefore, early in 2012, initiate a new campaign, embracing all parts of Unite, to extend our influence in the Party.

The basis of the strategy is three-fold:

1. Advancing our agreed policy agenda through all constitutional structures in the Party (while also, of course, rebutting efforts from within or outside Labour to break the 'link').
2. Working with other affiliated unions to secure the adoption of trade union (or union-friendly) candidates in winnable constituencies in particular.
3. Increasing Unite members' involvement and participation in local Labour Parties, without which progress on the first two points is implausible.

This strategy will include:

- A planned item, first on every Regional Committee agenda followed by presentations to every AAC and Equality Committee to discuss our work in the Labour Party. The aim will be to get full buy-in from Committees, but also to win new Labour Party members from amongst these key activists as a start. The Regional Political Committee should lead on ensuring this programme of meetings is carried through.
- A pamphlet to make the case for Labour Party membership and the case for this strategy.
- A drive to win 5000 Unite members to join the Labour Party by December 2012. Before we seek the 5,000, we will ensure that we have all these building blocks for retention and activity in place. This is emphatically not just a recruitment offensive to benefit the Labour Party with passive financial contributors – it is vital if we are to impact on constituency parties. 5,000 is a big number – but when broken down into the numbers needed by region and sector (see attached), it is more manageable.
- We will produce attractive and effective Labour membership forms specific to Unite which are widely available and Labour Party joining will be enabled direct from the Unite web-site. Senior officers in Region to be charged with responsibility of directly approaching leading lay members in region with a view to joining the party
- Each new LP member to receive a guide from Unite, to breakthrough the jargon and help and enable them to attend meetings and activities without intimidation and fear of the new.
- Early meetings of Unite Labour Party members in individual CLPs – an RPC and RPO responsibility.
- A regular LP members' newsletter will be produced by the Political Department for all new members and for existing members who ask for it on our web-site. Targeted direct-mail, e-mail and texting will be rolled out. This will be spread over many weeks so that best practice can be developed.

- We will encourage branches to send delegate to CLPs with a new energetic push.
- We will seek to have a significant item at every RISC/AAC Conference next Autumn, led by a purpose-made film with the same dual tasks of winning members and winning leaders for new members.
- Scotland and Wales will be asked to develop early plans taking account of their situations. (This strategy does not apply to Ireland)
- As a first step, in each region we will seek to pilot a more detailed CLP – Unite membership development plan, which will involve key workplaces and further innovative techniques.

Unite Political Organisation

Growing the Unite membership in the Labour Party and winning conviction at all levels that we need to intervene more effectively can only be a first step. Our entire political organisation requires an overhaul. As a first step we will redefine the role and expectations of the Regional Political Officer – including a membership allocation of a maximum of 75% to provide sufficient time for their political work. Fresh appointments will be made to these posts early in 2012, to ensure that each region is best placed to deliver. For clarity, some or all existing RPOs may be confirmed in post, but we need to ensure that we have officers with the focus and time commitment to devote to this work.

Each Regional Political Committee and RPO will have responsibility for preparing a Regional Strategic Political Development Plan to carry forward this new strategy, which must be agreed by the National Political Committee. This strategy will be supported from the National Political Department – and regular reports will be made to the EC on progress

We will also:

- Ensure CLP and NPF delegates receive regular mailings including useful materials – our own pamphlets, other publications, solidarity campaign materials etc.
- Instigate annual CLP delegate meetings with open attendance at Regional, or cross regional level (except for the year of election of RPC) with a lively political agenda in line with National Political Committee objectives.
- Political Weekend (non-residential) courses to take place in every region annually
- Work towards CLP meeting open to all local union members invited in every constituency on an annual basis in line with Refounding Labour decisions. Start with pilots in first quarter of 2012.
- Develop and sustain a Unite Councillors network.
- Ensure that our new Community membership and branches are fully involved
- Charge RPOs and RPCs with auditing Unite involvement by CLP

Developing candidates for Office

We aim to end the discrimination against working class candidates, BAME and women candidates for public office. That only 4% of the MPs in Parliament are from manual occupations is a notable part of the crisis of working class representation. 55% come from the PR, Politics and the media. This must change – we have it in our power to do so.

Unite industrial activists need to consider becoming Labour candidates at all levels

- Unite will launch a Future Candidates Programme (FCP). We will promote a new generation of Unite activists towards public office.
- RPOs, RPCs and senior officers and the EC need to identify potential candidates among our best activists, rather than careerists.
- The FCP will include regional training courses, individual mentoring and national initiatives.
- Enrolment will start in spring 2012. We intend to produce some potential MP candidates for selection by 2013 at the latest.
- We will also ensure that Unite members are taking up opportunities for council candidacy
- When Parliamentary candidate selection arises, there will often be good candidates supported by other unions who Unite will be inclined to support. Unite will do all it can within the strict rules governing candidate selection to assist.
- Open up the Parliamentary Panel on existing criteria in summer 2012

We are determined that this strategy will produce results and we will ensure that RPOs and the national political department adequately resource this work stream.

Constituency Development Plans

The Executive Council has previously agreed a process for CDPs. The union has followed the guidelines for these, but reality has turned CDPs into merely donations for a number of CLPs. The Political department will be drawing up new guidelines which will limit CDPs with CLPs with sitting MPs to a reduced number, and develop a larger number with key marginal CLPs. We will be very serious about expectations in relationships and activities expected in constituencies. New guidelines to apply from January 2013 after the boundary changes are confirmed (or otherwise) so our organisational and financial resources will be used in a targeted and effective way to ensure the defeat of the Tories.

Policy Formation

Unite remains concerned that the Annual Conference and the NPF process are deeply lacking in democracy - we will pursue rapid improvements in the next stage of Refounding Labour discussions. Whatever the process, we will seek to engage directly with the Policy formation process in the Labour Party to ensure that as many of our policies are adopted as possible. Winning the battle of ideas is really important – and developing our radical alternative as concrete policies.

But Labour Party policies are often determined by a small group of advisers – far too often dominated by old thinking, neo-liberalism and the organisation Progress. Unite will:

- Ensure we choose the best representatives for the National Policy Forum.
- Coordinate the work of our NEC members.
- Engaging in a planned way in the Policy Review groups
- Ensure through the Political Department that we originate papers and policies rather than simply commenting on bad papers and policies from elsewhere.
- Build alliances with other affiliates and community organisations and with the CLPs and appropriate pressure groups to win specific policies.

Winning Britain for working people –winning the General Election

We are deadly serious about transforming Labour – so that we can win the next election on an agenda for change. We will do everything in our power to organise, to mobilise our membership, working people in general and the broadest possible forces to the cause of victory for a transformed Labour Party.

Unite will place great emphasis on winning and mobilising our members to vote, and then to vote Labour.

We will use the modern and effective techniques -

- We will make phone contact with every member for whom we have a phone number in London – with peer to peer calls
- Continue contact with members after calling, including using text and e-mail
- We will seek to maximise voter registration – currently running at about 10% of union members not registered to vote.
- We will use various forms of interactivity to enable greater participation, and activist-run campaigns. New activists will be developed who will then get more involved in the party.
- We will use our workplace strength to maximum advantage. We will seek to utilise workplace organisation – flowing with existing structures but involving new people. New activism and workplace activism combining in the best way.
- Based on the experience of Unite4Labour and Unite4Ken, we will develop a new campaign leading up to the next General Election.
- We will have an organised presence at important by-elections from now on.
- Unite will seek to concentrate energy and resources towards key marginal seats leading up to the next General election. In the key seats, we will deploy the full force of new organising; mobilising trade union activists, not just from Unite, in effective campaigning – from leaflet delivery, street campaigns, community organising, door knocking and new methods at a level not previously achieved.

Unite will always be very clear that winning back the 5 million lost voters, reconnecting with working class voters, ending the crisis of working class representation, winning back Labour for trade union values are tasks that require profound organisational change by Unite and in our relationship with Labour.

Winning a Labour government which will govern in the interests of working people and towards a socialism for the 21st century is our objective – the strategy outlined here is our best shot toward that aim.

For more information contact political@unitetheunion.org