



TOGETHER WE CAN WIN!

ORGANISING EFFECTIVE
WORKING-CLASS SOLIDARITY
THROUGH YOUR LOCAL
TRADES COUNCIL

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Chapter One: A brief history

From the dark days of trades unions' illegality in the early 1800's, trade unionists knew that, to make the trade union movement a permanent fixture, they had to build working class solidarity. They did that by creating Trades Councils to bring together all the trade unionists in a locality, beyond the borders of their own trade union, to fight for what they all needed.

The first UK trades council (or trades union council-these terms are interchangeable) was established in Liverpool in 1848. Others followed, and, most important, the London Trades Council in 1860. By 1868, trades councils in the North of England had decided that a national organisation of the working-classes was needed, so they established the first Trades Union Congress (TUC) at the Mechanics Institute in Manchester in 1868. By 1871 unions were made legal and by 1875 so was their right to strike. Sticking together was working!

Of course, these campaigns were political, but trades councils were involved in Politics with a capital 'P' from the start. As "New Unionism" swept through the trades' councils' movement in the 1880s, the realisation took hold that trade unionists needed an electoral political voice at local and parliamentary levels. Some trades council delegates stood for election as trades council candidates, others as Independent Labour candidates.

As local unions amalgamated, and eventually became national



Sheffield Trades Council 1984

unions, with full-time general secretaries, the increasing socialist influence of Keir Hardie, and others within the TUC, panicked many national unions to take action against trades councils, in spite of the fact they had founded the TUC in the first place! In 1895 all trades councils were

excluded from invitations to attend the Trades Union Congress, and we are still, 129 years later, suffering from that lack of representation. It doesn't stop us from organising and campaigning though!

By 1900 several trades councils, affiliated to the Labour Representation Committee, attended its founding conference, which gave

birth to the Labour Party. National Trades Councils' Conferences, independent of the TUC, were held in 1922 and 1923, and, again, their radicalism aroused TUC opposition. In 1924, as a response, the TUC organised its first trades councils' national conference, and set up a national committee, to supervise the affiliated trades councils and make sure they did not 'step out of line!' The TUC JCC committee still exists today, but, hopefully, to support trades councils!

What is a trades' council for?

Today, including England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and similar bodies in the Republic of Ireland, there are about 200 active local trades union councils. They exist for one basic purpose – to build working class solidarity across the boundaries of our own trades' unions for the betterment of the communities in which we live and work. For example, our trades councils have been at the forefront of organising the fight to stop the Tories anti-trade union bills and defend our right to strike. We have been particularly active in the last few years in building picket line solidarity and raising strike funds.

We are always alert to the threat to our communities and our trade unions which the far-right pose – never more so than now! A new Labour government provides huge opportunities for advancement – we will be organising to maximise them! Trades councils



desperately need more support from trades unions: trades union branches in particular: that means affiliating your branch, and sending delegates along to trades council meetings, which are usually held monthly.

We hope you will get involved if you aren't already, and more involved if you are. This pamphlet is a collection of ideas from our wonderful movement – hopefully it will give you some new ideas to help build your trades council better.

Chapter Two: Supporting strikes, supporting picket lines

During the recent strike wave, many trades councils became very adept at organising effective and welcome picket line solidarity. This is arguably the trades' councils most important role. If you are a new trades council delegate and keen to support other unions' strikes, here are a few tips:

- At the picket line, introduce yourself to the strikers.
- Ask what the strike is about and tell them you are here to bring solidarity.
- Ask if they need anything specifically, if they have a hardship fund or would like your trades council to organise a rally for them on a future strike date.
- Organising a rally where other trade unionists are



Welwyn Garden City Trades Council

invited to come along to express their solidarity can give a huge boost to the strikers.

- The trades council having equipment such as loudspeakers or megaphones to bring to them can also be useful.



Wolverhampton TUC supporting UCU strike

- Some trades councils have a picket line pack, consisting of a letter to the strikers introducing the trades council and an affiliation form.
- Other trades councils have produced postcards to give to trade unionists who might be interested in getting more involved in the local trades' council.
- Many trades councils have business cards now: they may seem flash, but they are handy when meeting many new trade unionists!
- If a donation is made to the local strikers' dispute fund, consider making a giant cheque to photograph and put out on social media etc to promote the dispute.
- Even if you are not able to get along to a picket line you can send a letter of solidarity and offer to circulate details of the dispute to delegates and via social media.
- Invite a speaker from the strike to your next trades council meeting – find them ten minutes on the agenda, even if you already have a speaker booked.

Strike committees and hardship funds

When strike action is very prolonged or widespread you can consider setting up strike committees to discuss ways of helping to

build the strikes. Consider producing local leaflets and holding joint strike rallies to bring strikers together.

Setting up a hardship fund is straightforward and an appeal for funds to affiliates will start it off nicely. Fundraising for strike funds can be very successful.

Leeds Trades Council, for example, in 2023, collected over £12,000 in their hardship fund. They did this by launching an appeal, selling Leeds TUC Xmas cards, taking bucket collections at events, holding a singalong and socials with raffles and auctions. So, use every means you have – email, social media and WhatsApp to promote strikes and build those picket lines.

Don't forget to encourage unions to publicise victories to spur on the next strike!

Chapter Three: Holding interesting, accessible and well attended meetings

Trades councils must hold regular meetings to share news from affiliated branches, discuss topical political, social and economic issues, and, (this is important!) organise campaign activities. Try to make them as interesting and as welcoming as possible.

Role of the chair

Having a chair who commands respect within the movement is key. Ideally one who is independent-minded, friendly, encouraging of new delegates, and who is firm enough, when necessary, to keep the agenda moving along. Try to create space in the meeting to allow genuine discussion and for maximum delegate participation.

Welcome everyone!

Take time to go around introducing each delegate, or visitor/supporter, especially if they are new, and try to make them feel welcome. Having a break midway, and access to the venue early, gives delegates time to get to know each other and build those vital relationships.

Speakers

Most trades councils invite a speaker each month from across the movement. At least once a year consider having no speaker: instead, ask each delegate to give a brief workplace report. Having some meetings without a speaker, particularly if time needs to be given to a local problem or opportunity, can give room for more discussion, involving contributions from new and/or shy delegates.



The AGM of the Somerset TUCs Association

Formats and agendas

No one comes to a meeting just to discuss the minutes of the last meeting. Nor do they want to hear written reports being read out loud. Try to minimise that sort of thing. Consider asking delegates to submit written reports that can be circulated in good time with the notice and agenda, and insist that verbal reports at meetings, in lieu of written ones, only take two minutes each. Firm chairing is needed, sometimes, to suppress egos!

Motions

Consider how best to use motions. Motions should always come from branches. If an information leaflet would suffice then the motion is unnecessary. Formal motions can lead to one or two delegates dominating meetings, they can also be divisive and frequently go nowhere, if they are not worded to propose sensible and practical actions.

Venues

Choose an accessible venue where everyone feels welcome. Venues that serve alcohol can give rise to problems and are best avoided. Some trade unions will let you use their premises free of charge, in the evenings when they are unused. Ask.

Regularity

Many trades councils have been meeting at 7pm on the same day every month for decades. Regularity of day / time and venue can help when delegates dip in and out of activity due to personal, family, health or other commitments. It also enables the day and time to become well known and helps clashes to be avoided.

Hybrid meetings?

Post-covid, many trades councils meet in “hybrid” fashion, so delegates and visitors can attend either on-line or in person. This is helpful for delegates with caring responsibilities, with disabilities, or who work from home. However, “hybrid” meetings are less social, can be difficult to chair and seem disjointed. Maximum in person participation also helps with aspects of organisation, such as the quick distribution of campaign materials.

Sandwiches

Putting on a few sandwiches does seem to increase attendance at AGM’s and some trades councils have tried this, to increase in person participation post-covid. Increasingly our reps are under pressure and very “time poor”, so this might be worth considering as they rush from work without needing to grab a meal.

Politics

The following TUC rule needs to appear in full in every Trades council constitution:

“In no circumstances shall the Council: cooperate 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 subscribe to the funds of 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."

Who can attend

Most attendees should be delegates, with full speaking and voting rights, from their branches: this is what gives the trades council legitimacy. Observers from branches considering affiliation, or in dispute, should be invited. Some trades councils are more 'open' than others, inviting visitors from local or national campaigns that trades union could or should support, but if these welcome visitors can speak in trades council discussions, they should be informed that will not have the right to vote. Paid trade union officers and organisers should be encouraged to attend meetings, either as full delegates, or as occasional speakers. Not only do they have useful and accurate information, but they are also able to encourage their trades union activists to become delegates.

Improving meetings, building the trades council, reflections

On a regular basis, do ask delegates and visitors for their ideas to improve their trades council meeting.

Chapter Four: Getting out there

Equipment

Most trades councils have a banner. Some are beautiful, some historic and valuable, some are very heavy too! Many trades councils now have a cheaply produced lightweight replica banner, to take to street stalls and picket lines. If you buy two, it doesn't matter if the delegate who has one is away on holiday! These banners can be printed for under £50.

A megaphone, pasting table and collection tin are probably essential. Stationary such as business cards, postcards aimed at recruiting delegates, leaflets about why you should join a trade union are also very useful. The TUC's "union-finder" leaflets are helpful. Templates of useful stationary are regularly shared on the Trades Council

WhatsApp group.

Street-stalls

Many trades councils hold regular street stalls to recruit to unions in their area, find out what is going on and identify new delegates and new branches to affiliate. If the neighbouring town does not currently have a trades council holding a street stall there can be a useful way of scoping



Cardiff Trades Council stall

out the possibilities of **1. Having occasional meetings there; 2. Establishing a new trades council.**

Having a stall at carnivals, cultural events, political events, protests or at a football match or other sporting event, can be a way of recruiting and contacting union reps your trades' council does not know. Briefing delegates on the aim of the stall will help to make it more effective. If you meet any trade unionists who are interested in the trades' council, take their email address, and make sure these contacts are followed up ASAP! Similarly, if you meet someone wanting to get involved in their appropriate trade union, tell them how to sign up and pass their details on to the relevant branch.

Heart Unions' Week

This annual event, usually around Valentines Day, provides an opportunity to try out a street stall or target a stall outside a workplace that needs help organising. The TUC provides some freebies and some recruitment material to use.

An inspiring campaign example: "Sheffield needs a pay rise!"

Sheffield Trades Council started campaigning from 2016 onwards after research by the Resolution Foundation found that Sheffield was the UK city with the largest share of workers on low pay. This



led to the launch of ‘Sheffield Needs a Pay Rise’ and research with Sheffield Hallam University on working conditions in low pay sectors and barriers to unionisation. This research help generate publicity that in turn allowed the Trades Council to raise funds and hire a full-time organiser (in partnership with

the Bakers’ Union/BFAWU).

The project ran for five years spawning a sister project from Leeds Trades Council – “Leeds Get Organised”. These projects were exciting, and produced some great results organising precarious workers, including winning back £10,000 in unpaid wages from a pizza franchise, tackling union-busting, and winning up to 44% pay increases at a popular food hall, and signing a recognition agreement with South Street Kitchen.

These projects were particularly good at identifying worker leaders in unorganised workplaces and training young reps. In fact, several activists associated with the campaigns have gone on to become reps in other workplaces, or even union officials. Nonetheless, they were also limited by the extremely precarious nature of employment, hostile anti-union laws, and the small-scale nature of the interventions. With greater institutional support from existing unions and an improved industrial climate, it would be interesting to see if these sorts of projects could be rolled out more successfully and more sustainably in the future. Why not ask your regional TUC if they would support such a project in your area?

“Outreach” on demonstrations

Most trades councils make sure they are represented on important strike and other important campaign demonstrations: many organise their own! We often get a great reception with the public clap-

ping as we go past and filming on their mobile phones. During the wave of public sector strikes in 2022 / 2023, the trades councils played a leading role in organising demonstrations in support of the strikers. For example, on February 1st 2023 in Yorkshire, trades councils organised a number of demonstrations. They decided to produce a leaflet to give out to the public. This went down very well and strikers felt good giving it out! It wasn't just telling the public what the strikes were about: it also urged them to join a union and get involved themselves. Consider producing a similar leaflet to hand out on your next demonstration, the next May Day or Workers Memorial Day, held annually on April 28th.

May Day celebrations

Many trades councils have long-standing traditions, some going back to the 1890's, of organising a march and rally for May Day. If your trades council does not feel confident about organising one, why not combine the effort with neighbouring councils?

Choosing an attractive theme can help to maximise attendance.

The Chesterfield May Day Gala, March and Rally was established by the trades' council in 1978 when May Day became a bank holiday. Originally held on a local recreation ground, the Gala quickly grew, and attracted people from all over the region, with a celebration of working-class culture in the spirit of internationalism. Moving to the town centre in the late 1980s, the Gala is still a major regional event, showcasing the trade union movement to the local population. May Day is, of course, international, and if you can get a speaker from abroad, that will often be the most memorable contribution.



Chesterfield TUC May Day



International Workers' Memorial Day' (IWMD)

International Workers Memorial Day

In 1989, International Workers Memorial Day was declared to be April 28th for that, and each following year. IWMD is well-established now and gives an opportunity to highlight the tragedy of workplace accidents and deaths, and the criminal negligence of many

employers. Many trades councils have campaigned for physical memorials to be set up in town and city centres, where IWMD events can best be held. Most trade unions, Labour or other left-wing MPs, councillors, solicitors and campaigning groups will accept invitations to attend and speak or lay wreaths. Hartlepool Trades Council, for example, has put a great deal of work into their event, and, as a result, it attracts hundreds each year.

A bag of purple ribbons for IWMD can be bought from the Manchester Hazards Group by emailing c.bedale@btinternet.com

Social media

Most trades' councils have a Facebook page, X, or Instagram. Some have a website. Make sure you take photos at all events, to publicise what you do, and spread solidarity. Look at Huddersfield trades council's Facebook and X: they have a tremendous reach!

Unemployed Workers' Centres

Decades ago, in the dark days of Thatcherism, many Trades Councils were involved in setting up premises or Unemployed Workers Centres. The Derbyshire Unemployed Workers' Centres (DUWC) were born out of the Chesterfield & District Trades Council and are one of the few remaining examples. Throughout the country in the

1980s trades councils responded to mass unemployment by encouraging the establishment of local centres to offer help, support, advice, and representation to the jobless.

Trade unions represent people in work, but there was now a need to organise those facing the difficulties of navigating the benefits system and giving a voice to the issues confronting people out of work, or unable to work. Derbyshire UWC has survived, despite serious funding difficulties and still enshrines the principles of those that founded it – solidarity between those in and out of work for the benefit of all.

Chapter five: Learning from our past. Shaping our future

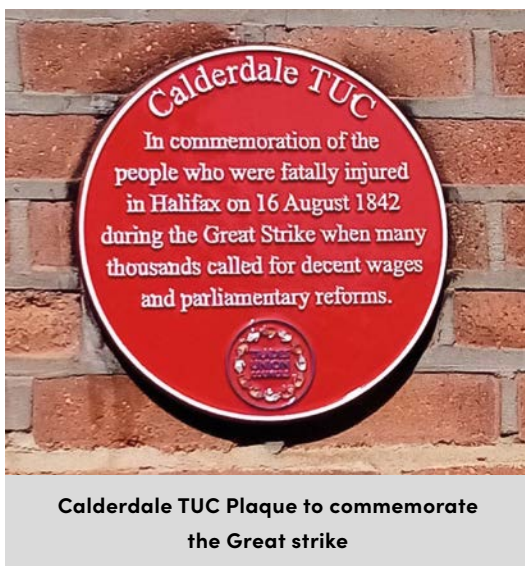
Working-class history events: We truly stand on the shoulders of giants, but, although our history is rich, it is still inadequately documented. Some of our trades' councils have organised brilliant working class history events around significant but previously little-known events. A superb recent example was organised in 2022 by Calderdale Trades Council. They celebrated the 180th anniversary of the Halifax Great Chartist Strike of 1842: together with Preston and Stoke, part of the first ever UK General Strike. Calderdale TUC organised a tour of the cemetery, where work had been done to uncover the history of some of the Chartists buried there. Information boards were unveiled.

A talk was given at the site of the gibbet in Halifax town centre, explaining its horrific history. Speeches were made, and a commemorative plaque (red not blue!) was unveiled at Halifax Museum. A history lecture was organised in the run up to the day, and a social organised, when a special beer was served which was named "Strike 1824"! It was a great way to raise awareness of vital events in danger of being completely forgotten and overlooked. What important events, worthy of a trades' council-organised celebration, happened in your area?

The 1984 Miners' Strike, 40 years on: The 40th anniversary has given us several opportunities to reflect on our history. Inviting some of those involved to hear first-hand of the sheer class hatred they

endured in that dispute is important. The solidarity that sustained the miners for a year is wonderful to remember, but the ways in which they (we) were sabotaged and sold out is also a salutary lesson.

Cortonwood Colliery, near Rotherham, was where the miners' strike started, and Rotherham Trades Council have done



some brilliant work commemorating it including a display at the local park and museum. They have also campaigned with the Orgrave Truth and Justice Campaign to make sure that they get the justice they need for all the fitted-up miners. Invite this campaign to your meeting, to hear "living legends speak." Help set the record straight after 40 long and bitter years!

Blue plaques

Blue (or Red!) plaques are a great way of commemorating our history. Look at what more you could campaign for, to commemorate important working class history events and people.

Plays

Putting on a play, musical, or other theatrical event, can be a great way of educating young and old and drawing in new people to your local trades' council. There are several great companies, including Banner Theatre, Red Ladder and Townsend Productions, who, against all the odds, continue to put on inspiring socialist-themed productions. Many trades councils, for example, have hosted the brilliant Townsend Production of "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist." Unite the Union commissioned a play from Red Ladder Theatre company about women in the miners' strike: "We're not going back" was

born! A powerful play that has packed out theatres all over the North.

Banner Theatre's Dave Rogers has been around for 50 years! This company has done some excellent work on the NHS, on refugees and on education. Their anniversary production is a joint celebration of the GMB Coventry Amazon dispute and the miners' strike. Break-out Arts, a newcomer, is currently touring with "The Lions of Rotherham", a play celebrating the bravery of four men from Rotherham, who went to fight for the Republic in the Spanish Civil War. Contact details for these companies are at the back of the pamphlet. Hull Trades Council has recently entered into a collaboration with the musician Joe Solo, who has written a book about Hull trade unionists who fought in the Spanish civil war: in English, Spanish and Catalan! This has also given them an opportunity to collaborate with a local school about a local history project.

Chapter six: growing your TUC, gaining more affiliations

Chasing affiliations: Unless your Trades council is brand new, your starting point will be last years list of branches that affiliated. Spend some time in your trades' council executive committee, officers' meeting, or the monthly delegate meeting, considering what other branches are not affiliated that could be. Send out your affiliation request in good time. Most branches meet monthly so, ideally, allow at least two months. Chase up branches that have not replied: sending personal emails is the most effective way coupled with texts and telephone calls. Most branches that have previously affiliated will re-affiliate. Keep chasing them: if your first contact does not reply, try their full-time officer; if they do not reply, try their regional secretary; if they do not reply, try their general secretary: don't get downhearted, never give up!

For example, Bridgwater and District TUC down in rural Somerset, with a catchment population of less than 60,000, increased its affiliated unions and union branches from 12 in 2014 to 48 in 2022! That includes, besides branches with local workplaces that also meet locally, branches covering your area that meet elsewhere, but have members who live locally; union regional committees, where no

branches exist; even national committees, where no regional committees exist. If you are being ignored, use your TUC JCC Rep to take the matter up, even publicly at a TUC Regional Committee: after all unions do not tolerate discourtesy, so why should we?

Many of the smaller TUC-affiliated unions, especially those with no branch structures, will not have come across trades councils or will have not considered them, but these, nonetheless, can be won over to affiliating to trades councils for the first time, especially, and for example, if you have met a small specialist NHS union activist on a picket line!

Cost

If cost appears to be a barrier, then you could consider reducing your membership fee or offering to reduce it for branches who cannot afford it. Most trades councils charge between 10p and 20p per affiliated member. Some trades councils charge a flat rate of £50 per branch. Cost does not appear to be the main barrier to affiliating: the main barriers seem to be 1. Knowing that a trades council exists; and 2. Being convinced of its relevance to the branch. Some unions, including Unite and TSSA, will re-imburse branches for some or part of their affiliation fees.

Delegates

Most trades councils allow branches to nominate delegates: the basis of this can vary considerably. Many use a one delegate per hundred members basis. Bridgwater & District TUC uses more generous entitlement: up to 25 members one delegate, 26 to 100 two, 101 to 200 three, 201 to 300 four, with a maximum of six. Maxima can vary but are useful to ensure that larger union branches cannot dominate a council. Most trades councils extend observer status generously to new branches, to trade unionists who want to get their branch affiliated and trade unionists whose branch delegation is full.

Affiliation packs

Having an affiliation form on hand is a lot easier, now we all have them on our phones or e-mail attachments. There is still merit, though, in printing off an affiliation form, adding in a "This TUC Needs You!" postcard, your business card, and, perhaps, the TUC's own national trades councils' information leaflet, explaining what trades councils are about: put this all in an envelope and give it to interested

trade unionists you meet on stalls, demos and picket lines. Sometimes getting to someone who isn't the hard-pressed branch secretary can be helpful. If you can identify someone who wants to be a delegate, then you practically have the affiliation in the bag!

“Trades Councils Need You!” postcards

Several trades councils use these. The one from Leeds trades Council is at the back. They are perfect for giving out to trade unionists who might be interested in becoming delegates.



Paul Nowak TUC General Secretary spoke and sang at Bridgwater & District TUC

Having a ‘big name’ speaker at AGM

Inviting a ‘big name’ speaker to your AGM and advertising it widely and opening the meeting up can be a great way of getting more delegates interested and increasing attendance. Aim high: Bridgwater and District TUC had Paul Nowak speak in November 2023 and attracted an audience of 36. Many general secretaries are only too pleased to come along, and, of course, this can be an opportunity to attract branch secretaries, and other activists from that union to their first local TUC meeting.

Making your trades council relevant

Make sure your trades council is focused on the correct issues. Discuss this with your other TUC officers’ or, if you have one, at executive committee meetings. Create space to discuss it at delegates’ meetings. Don’t allow the meetings to get so hung up on minutes and motions, that you forget the core aims of the trades’ council.

Chapter seven – Trade Union mapping: Really knowing your area!

Many of our larger trade unions and trade union branches have successfully introduced on-line mapping systems to identify possible and actual unionised workplaces, and within these branch and workplace membership systems, to identify union density, union recognition, multiple union workplaces, union reps and pre-rep leaders, and members' density according to equality characteristics. Ideally, there is no reason why, despite the ambitious level of work required, that trades councils cannot use these methods to map, not just unionised workplaces in their area, but the whole working class, i.e.. To identify all non-union workplaces according to the same criteria these unions use.

Google mapping could be used, with click-on circles or 'tears' highlighting the workplaces, and, within that workplace, other click-on 'tears' to identify:

- How many workers on site
- How many workers off site and/or working from home
- How many are in trade unions
- If multi-union, how many in each trade union
- Is there union recognition
- What are the pay rates
- What sections are there, e.g. Skilled, unskilled, technical, research, admin, managerial
- How many full time, part-time, agency, casual workers
- Structure of supervisors, managers, directors
- How many men, how many women workers
- How many black/other ethnic-minority workers
- Annual recruitment turnover, etc.

This workplace mapping work is in its infancy. In fact, we do not know of any local TUC that has successfully mapped its area. Yet, suitably supported, it could be the making of a tremendous resurgence in trades councils.

Which local trades council will be the first to have a go at map-

ping? If the TUC is to ever fully appreciate the work we do, then, maybe working with Regional TUC Offices, we can be encouraged to map our council areas. Recruitment opportunities for most TUC unions will shoot off the scale, is that not a TUC/Trades Councils long-term co-operation that is devoutly to be sought?

Chapter eight: Raising money

Affiliation fees

This is the core income of a trades' council and allows for campaigns to be run throughout the year. Bridgwater's affiliation fee has been 10p per member per year for over 30 years, maybe it's time to increase! Where TUCs have increased their affiliation fee in the Southwest, there have not been any cases of a branch or union no longer affiliating for that reason. In the very few cases of genuine branch hardship, don't make the mistake of excluding them!

Appeals

Appeal to your supporting branches and unions if additional work is to be undertaken. For example, putting on an educational play, recruitment work, a coach to a big demonstration, or organising a demonstration or other event, a new banner, even recruiting an organiser. Writing to affiliated branches and the wider trade union movement is a great way of raising much needed funds. The regional TUC will often circulate financial appeals.

Fundraisers

Stalls at local carnivals and political events can help to promote our work and make new contacts but can also bring in additional funds. Consider a raffle or tombola.

Socials

Socials can make money – but this is not guaranteed. Putting on a play can be relatively expensive, and if you do not sell enough tickets, you can make a loss. Similarly, buffets can eat heavily into profits. Often when these events are put on raising morale or political education are the determining factors. Making a profit is not necessar-

ily important. Raffles and auctions can help to swell the coffers at these events.

Ask local Labour MPs, as well as trade union officials, if they have suitable prizes. Ask union leaders, at your May Day event, to sign books to be auctioned later. Holding a singalong event is low-cost, and Leeds TUC have held these recently. Asking a branch to sponsor the cost of



Coventry Trades Council

the song book. Invite talented delegates and local musicians to lead each song. A night of communal socialist singing is a great way to raise money and morale! Trades council DJ nights-soul, reggae, hip-hop, rap, drum& bass, garage nights will put a few older delegates off but might just involve the younger generation!

Regional TUC development grants

As long as you have registered with the national TUC by the annual deadline (usually mid-January) and paid the £10 registration fee, then you will be eligible to apply to your regional TUC for a development grant of up to £300 for events your trades council is organising. It is possible to apply for two grants in one year for different activities. Contact your regional TUC for an application form.

Chapter nine: Building links

TUC Joint Consultative Committee (TUC JCC) Reps

The national TUC has a subcommittee of the general council for trades councils – the Joint consultative committee. Each English re-

gion of the TUC, plus Wales, has a representative. They are your link to the TUC nationally. They are experienced trades council representatives. The names and contact details of the current postholders are at the back of this pamphlet. If your trades council needs advice do contact them, but bear in mind that there is no facility time for being a JCC rep, and that they undertake the role voluntarily in their spare time, just like you!

County (or other area) associations of trades councils

Most trades councils are affiliated to a county, or other suitable geographical association, which brings together trades councils in that area to share good practice. Make sure you send at least one delegate along to let others know what you are doing and to report back.

Some county/area associations are responsible for electing the trades council delegates to the Regional TUC and electing the trades council JCC member. This may also be where motions to the relevant Regional TUC are sent from. Some TUC regions, and Wales, allow motions and delegates direct from individual trades councils.

Regional TUCs, Wales TUC

The Regional TUC, and the Wales TUC, bring together all TUC-affiliated trade unions. Even if your trades council does not have a representative, you should get reports via your county/area association, or your TUC JCC rep. You can ask the Regional TUC to circulate notices of your events.

Don't be shy about asking your regional TUC for help with events you are organising and to arrange speakers at rallies and other events you put on. They often have a stock of merchandise for Heart Unions Week, and other recruitment and campaigning events. Most TUC Regions/Wales TUC have a campaigns officer, and they are well worth getting to know. In recent years the TUC has fewer staff and has often relied on local trades councils to organise rallies and events the regional TUC had taken responsibility for previously.

For example, in Yorkshire, the trades councils were asked to organise the rallies for the coordinated "Right to Strike" on February 1st, 2023. The TUC produced high quality leaflets to give out to the public on the day, with local trades council input, which meant they went down very well. The TUC national produced banners and national branding and publicity which brought all the rallies together

and gave the campaign huge impact. Unity really is our strength!

Around that time the Yorkshire and the Humber Regional TUC campaigns officer was regularly bringing together all the trades councils in Yorkshire. This has continued and works well. We meet monthly on zoom, to hear what the national and regional TUC are doing and hear what each trades council is doing. Consider asking for this in your region if it does not happen already.

Regional trade unions

Most trade unions have a regional headquarters. Try to develop a relationship with them. They can circulate news about your events, circulate your affiliation requests, and encourage affiliations. Ask for a meeting with the regional secretary. Aim to get them to promote and encourage their branches to affiliate. Better still, ask the regional secretary to speak at one of your monthly meetings, and ask them to bring along new possible delegates! Many regional trade unions have seen the value of trades' councils in the recent strike wave. Hopefully you can use that to build more beneficial relationships.

The Labour Party

Under our TUC Rules, Trades councils are not allowed to affiliate to any political party, including Labour. Trades Council funds cannot be used for donations to any political parties, MPs or elected councillors, or election campaigns. However, we are allowed to "cooperate" with the local Labour Party, but with no other political parties. Inviting local Labour Party members, councillors and MPs to events, including picket lines, can be really positive.

So, consider ways of developing a constructive relationship with a Labour MP, a Labour Council, or Labour councillors. Write to them with your concerns. Invite them to meetings. Ask to meet the Labour leader at least annually. Speak to the council-employed trade unionists about their key areas of concern and lobby the leader with them on these issues.

By building a good relationship in Leeds in recent years, the Labour council responded very quickly to calls to make a statement on Gaza. It was one of the first councils to pass a motion on non-cooperation with minimum service levels and worked hard to avoid compulsory redundancies during swingeing Tory cuts. The Labour Group even have a 'Labour Councillors support this strike' banner they bring to picket lines!

However, there is nothing to stop independent socialists, Green Party and other left-wing, pro-trade union, councillors and MPs becoming delegates to your trades' council, or speakers at meetings: provided, of course, no official trades council support, or funds go to those parties. Jeremy Corbyn is an honorary delegate to Islington TUC!

Chapter Ten: Increasing diversity



Nottingham TUC at pride

Cultural events

Many areas have Melas, Pride events or other local cultural events you might have not considered attending. See if you can get enough delegates interested in staffing a stall or taking the banner. Going to places where we might meet new people can really help to increase our

diversity of representation.

LGBT+ campaigning

Most towns and cities hold an annual Pride parade. Consider going along with some appropriate material to encourage trade union membership and involvement in the trades' council. Consider inviting a relevant speaker – especially from local trans campaigns. Trans members are particularly under attack right now, and really value solidarity work from the local trades' council. Sadly, there have had to be a number of trans vigils in recent years in response to anti-trans violence: again, solidarity is much appreciated!

Campaigning with young people

In all this work keep the safety of young people paramount as you organise. Ensure safeguarding advice is always followed. Never allow yourself or any trades council delegate to work alone with a young person.

1. **Student unions.** Many student unions have little if anything to do with trade unions.

Nonetheless it is worth trying to gain access to your local university or Further Education college to hold a stall at freshers' week, or to give a talk about trades councils and trade unions. Unite the Union has a special form, inviting all full-time students to become a member of their Community Branches.

2. **Schools.** Some schools are keen to hear from trade unionists as part of their political education syllabus or citizenship lessons. It is also possible to be part of mock interviews or work experience if that is something your delegates can offer. Some trades councils have been able to do some useful work in this area. Keighley Trades Council has for many years offered a "Safety" course to local schools and has at the same time as training thousands of young people in the benefits of Health and Safety. They have at the same time, educated those young people in the benefits of joining a trade union.
3. **Workplaces.** Most trades councils are mainly comprised of older workers. Attracting younger workers is vital. Targeting workplaces for a stall with a high percentage of young workers can help them to organise in those workplaces and see the value of the trades' council at the same time.

Anti-Fascist actions



Consider an inclusion area

Organising anti-fascist education, and counter activity, has been on our agenda since Oswald Mosley reared his ugly head in our communities back in the 1930's.

Linking up with TUC-affiliated campaigns, such as "Stand Up to Racism!" or "Show Racism the Red Card!" in our communities, can help to strengthen our reach and build an effective alliance. Whenever fascists attempt to mobilise in our communities, we should always be at the forefront to stop them. In the recent wave of fascist activity many trades councils played pivotal roles. The TUC nationally is already planning education specifically aimed at countering the current rise of Reform, and the far right, within our communities. Get involved to strengthen that work!

Palestine Solidarity Campaign/PSC support

Many trades' councils have been extremely supportive of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign and have helped to organise local demonstrations and vigils. Some of these have been thousands strong! We are internationalists: The cause of Labour is the "hope of the world!" May Day, and Workers Memorial Day are both international events. It is important always to remember we have so much more in common with the working class of other countries than the ruling class of our own!



Keighley Trades Council talking to school students about Health & Safety – horrible history style!

Raising our banner everywhere!

When Jane Aitchison, Leeds Trades Council President, first became a union rep, her brilliant branch secretary used to say, "If someone is unsure if it is a trade union issue bring it to me and I will decide." It always was. He helped women members fleeing domestic violence to

get re housed. He helped a member who was struggling to get to visit their son in prison miles away.

Is it a trade union issue?

Are trade unionists or potential members involved? Then we should almost certainly be there. Some of our trades' councils have done excellent work well beyond our normal remit. In Hull the trades council has set up a Foodbank, in conjunction with Unite the Union. Solidarity not charity!

Raising our banner for everyone!

Consider accessibility when organising your events. Consider the ease with which everyone can get to the venue by public transport. Are there any barriers to going to the venue? Is it welcoming to women, LGBT people, Black members?

Could you add a children's tent at May Day? Have you considered the needs of disabled members for the route of your march? Do you know where toilets are? Are signers needed?

Thinking a little bit harder about how we make our events more inclusive can really help to grow our movement into the diverse all-encompassing movement we want and need!

Chapter Eleven: Learning from each other

Trades councils' annual national conference

Every year the TUC holds the annual trades councils



Exeter TUC re-launch

conference. It used to be hosted by different trades councils going round different regions providing an opportunity to showcase varied work. In recent years it has been held in Congress House. Your TUC JCC Reps have campaigned for, and are hoping, expecting, that our conference venues, from 2025, will now revert to the regions. The conference provides an opportunity to discuss motions have some excellent speakers and to meet other trades council delegates. Some great ideas are shared and good contacts made. Try to send a delegate from your trades' council. Costs are high, so consider asking for a donation from the union that your conference delegate is a member of.

Trades councils' National "Whatsapp" Group

Your TUC Joint Consultative Committee/TUC JCC has set up a "Whatsapp" group for trades councils to share ideas and events. Please email your JCC rep to get signed up.

Chapter Twelve: Setting up or reviving a trades' council, a basic checklist

1. Get hold of, and work with, your TUC JCC Rep and your Regional/Wales TUC Secretary to identify key unions, union branches, union organisers/officers, and workplace reps.
2. Call one or two initial meetings to gauge support, until you have sufficient interest and, crucially, volunteers for secretary, chair and treasurer. These can be on-line, live, hybrid or a mixture of all these.
3. Hold a launch meeting with one or more leading trade union speakers
4. Register the new trades council with the TUC. (NB: Each November the TUC sends out a registration pack to each registered trades council. If you are new, or not currently registered, contact them to get registered. Registration MUST be completed by the deadline in January for your trades council to be eligible for a development grant, to participate in TUC structures, including trades councils conference, and to appear in the TUC's national

- directory.)
5. Once you are launched, set up date for an AGM. Issue letters to your local trade union branches asking them to affiliate.
 6. Set a day for your delegate meeting
 7. Elect a delegate or delegates to your county (or other area) association
 8. Elect a delegate to trades councils conference
 9. Communicate with affiliates regularly. Send emails advertising each delegate meeting in good time – usually a week in advance. Consider setting up a delegate “Whatsapp” group for more immediate communication.
 10. Plan an annual calendar of events. This would usually include:
 - Heart Unions’ Week in February – have a stall
 - April 28th International Workers Memorial Day
 - May Day event
 11. Last but not least: Support as many local strikes as you can!

We haven’t finished

Thank you for reading this – the first edition of our pamphlet. We intend to update it and re print it. If you have suggestions from your trades councils work that you think should be included please email us at janeaitchisonleedstuc@gmail.com or davidchapple2020@gmail.com

We would love to hear from you!

Together we can win!

In solidarity

Jane Aitchison,
Leeds TUC;

Dave Chapple,
Bridgwater & District TUC
(Authors)



Walsall trades Council supporting GMB security guard strikers

All Leeds TUC photos – thanks to Neil Terry
All Norwich & District TUC photos thanks to Philip Williams

Appendices

List of TUC JCC Reps

TUC JCC Chair

Steve Gillan

TUC JCC Secretary

Carl Roper

TUC JCC Northern

Martin Levy

twcatuc@aol.co.uk

TUC JCC Y&H

Jane Aitchison

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TUC JCC South West

Dave Chapple

davidchapple2020@gmail.com

TUC JCC London & South East

Mick Houghton

mick_at_home@btopenworld.com

List of Radical theatre company contact details

Banner Theatre

Bannertheatre.co.uk

Townsend Productions

townsendproductions@hotmail.co.uk

Break Out Arts

Karenmulcahey76@yahoo.co.uk

Red Ladder

redladder.co.uk

Further reading

Emile Burns

“The General Strike: Trades Councils in action” 1926

Reg Groves

“Trades Councils and the struggle for Socialism” 1935

Alan Clinton

“The Trade Union Rank and File” 1978

Michael and Josh Bor

“Come Together: Trades Councils 1920 to 1950” 2024, in print

Copies of annual Trades Council Conference reports, from 1924 to at least 1990, can occasionally be found second hand online at “abebooks.com” or “Bibliophile” sites.

Scores of local trades council histories have been published, all now out of print, but worth seeking out.

Example Resources

Example of a card to give to potential delegates



