

GUIDE TO TRADE UNION AND LABOUR PARTY LINKS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Some unions with Political Funds affiliate to the Labour Party. If a union wants to affiliate to the Labour Party, it must have a Political Fund to do so. There are, though, sizable unions with Political Funds that do not affiliate to the Labour Party: AUT, Connect, EIS, NATFHE, NASUWT, POA and Prospect.

Whether a union affiliates to the Labour Party or not is an internal decision by the union concerned, in accordance with their own rules.

This is an outline of what trade union affiliation to the Labour Party means in practice and how the so-called Link works.

2. BACKGROUND

The Link between the affiliated unions and the Labour Party goes far beyond any formal constitutional relationship or arrangement. Many Labour Party activists are also active trade union members and would regard themselves as working within a wider Labour Movement.

In fact, the Labour Party Representation Committee – the forerunner to the Labour Party – was set up by trade unions over 100 years ago. Its first resolution read:

That this Conference is in favour of working-class opinion being represented in the House of Commons by men sympathetic with the aims and demands of the Labour movement's, and whose candidatures are promoted by one or other of the organised movements represented at this conference.

Many Labour MPs, MEPs and Ministers started out as shop stewards and officials for whom the trade union movement provided a springboard into organised politics. For the Labour Party more widely, especially while it is in government, its affiliated unions ensure that it is rooted in the workplace – this is particularly important at a time when the Labour Party wants to broaden its electoral appeal as widely as possible.

The Labour Party was formed as a federal party with a system of representation for its constituent bodies - constituency parties, affiliated trade unions, and socialist societies. Later, elected public officials such as MPs, MEPs, and Councillors were included.



Constituent parts of the Labour Party		
Trade Unions	Other affiliates	Elected members
AMICUS	Black Socialist Society	Labour Councillors
ASLEF	Co-operative Party	Labour MPs
BECTU	Christian Socialist Movement	Labour MEPs
BFAWU	Fabian Society	Labour MSPs
CATU	Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights	Labour MWAs
CWU	Labour Disabled Members' Group	Labour GLA members
FBU	Labour Housing Group	
GMB	Labour Irish Society	
GPMU	Labour Students	
GULO	National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs	
ISTC	Poale Zion	
KFAT	Scientists for Labour	
MU	Socialist Educational Association	
NACODS	Socialist Environment and Resources Association	
NUDAGO	Socialist Health Association	
NUM	Society of Labour Lawyers	
RMT		
TGWU		
TSSA		
UCATT		
UNISON		
USDAW		

This federal structure gave trade unions a unique position. They were major 'pressure groups' seeking to exert influence on Parliament and governments at the same time as forming an integral element of the party system through their participation in the Labour Party.

Other countries such as Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Ireland have similar federal systems, although this structure has been abandoned in some countries such as Sweden and Norway.



3. MEMBERSHIP

Trade unions affiliate to the Labour Party at a certain rate per member (currently set at £2.50). The number of members a union chooses to affiliate is decided internally by the union. Some unions affiliate all of their members, arguing that their union as a whole affiliates to the Labour Party. Other unions set their affiliation levels according to the number of people who pay the political levy or lower. Affiliation fees must be paid out of trade union Political Funds. Political Funds, though, are not for the exclusive use of the Labour Party. Rather, they allow unions to campaign politically (as well as affiliate to the Labour Party if they wish). Some unions with Political Funds are not affiliated to the Labour Party: AUT, Connect, EIS, NATFHE, NASUWT, POA and Prospect, for example.

Affiliation fees are paid by unions to the Labour Party as a membership fee. They are not donations to the Labour Party.

By paying the political levy, an individual union member of an affiliated union does not become a member of the Labour Party, or even indicate support for the Labour Party.

A member of a union that affiliates to the Labour Party can, though, join the Labour Party at a reduced rate and become a full individual member. Being a member of a union that affiliates to the Labour Party (even without being a full individual member) still gives a union member the right to participate in elections for Leader and Deputy Leader of Party, the Scottish Labour Party Parliamentary candidates, Welsh Labour Party Assembly Member candidates, and Labour candidates for the Greater London Assembly and Labour Candidate for Mayor of London.

Donations

Some unions, especially at election time, choose to donate money to the Labour Party. This is distinct from the money paid by the affiliated unions to the Labour Party in affiliation (membership) fees.

Following a report by the Neill Committee on Standards in Public Life, there are now new rules under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. This Act established the Electoral Commission (please see **Electoral Commission** in **Useful Contacts**). One of the functions of the Electoral Commission is to maintain a register of donations made to political parties. Under the provisions of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act, the following controls apply to political parties:

- requirement on political parties to report donations of £5,000 or more at national level and £1,000 at local level
- control of donations to election of candidates, individual party members, member associations and third parties
- ban on most donations from foreign donors (unless they are on the electoral register), from blind trusts and from unknown sources, unless these are under £200.

Registered trade unions fall under this new legislation. Unions have existed under a strict legislative regime for many years and have always had to be open, transparent and accountable, not least as a result of close examination by the Certification Officer (please see **Certification Officer** in **Useful Contacts**). Big financial donations by unions to the Labour Party have therefore always been accounted for and registered. Under new legislation, help 'in kind' such as the use of union offices at elections, must also be declared. There are legal limits on how much parliamentary candidates and national parties can spend on election campaigns.

The Labour Party and the TUC

The Trade Union Congress (please see TUC in **Useful Contacts**), has over 70 trade union affiliates. Most unions affiliated to the TUC are not affiliated to the Labour Party but most of the larger unions are. The TUC is itself not affiliated to the Labour Party.



4. TRADE UNION AND LABOUR PARTY LIAISON COMMITTEE

The Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Committee was set up in 1994 by a motion to the Labour Party's Annual Conference. It had several forerunning organisations that co-ordinated trade union support for the Labour Party at election times such as **Trade Unions for Labour Victory (TULV)** and **Trade Unionists for Labour (TUFL)**.

The Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Committee comprises:

- General Secretaries of all affiliated unions
- Leader of the Labour Party
- Deputy Leader of the Labour Party
- General Secretary of the Labour Party
- Chair of the NEC and Chairs of the NEC Committees
- Treasurer of the Labour Party

The Committee co-ordinates trade union support for the Labour Party during elections but also provides a platform for dialogue between the unions and the Labour Party.

The Committee is serviced by a secretariat based at the Labour Party Head Office called the **Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Organisation** (please see **TULO** in **Useful Contacts**). This office provides support for the Committee and co-ordinates a network of Regional Liaison Committees in every Labour Party region. TULO serves the dual purposes of co-ordinating trade union support for the Labour Party and of acting as a channel of communication between the Labour Party and the affiliated unions.

TULO oversees the work of key seat co-ordinators and constituency-based Trade Union Liaison Officers (TULOs).



4. REGIONS

The Labour Party operates a regional structure with offices and organisers to service constituencies and stakeholders. Through their participation in Regional Trade Union Liaison Committees and election to Regional Labour Party Boards, unions play an integral role at regional level politics. This role has become increasingly important in devolved administrations in Scotland, Wales and London (please see **Useful Contacts** for full details).



6. CONSTITUENCY LABOUR PARTIES

At local level, individual trade union branches may affiliate directly to local Constituency Labour Parties. An affiliated union branch may send a delegate to the Constituency's General Committee and Executive Committee.

Trade Union Liaison Officers

A Constituency Labour Party (CLP) can elect a Trade Union Liaison Officer (TULO). This position is a functionary role and does not have the same status or voting rights as other constituency officers such as the CLP Chair. The TULO can, though, attend GCs and ECs.

The role of the TULO is to encourage local union branches to affiliate to the CLP and to provide a channel of communication between local unions and the local Labour Party.

An end to 'sponsorship' of MPs

Unions used to be able to 'sponsor' MPs of any party up to prescribed legal amounts. The old system of union sponsorship was ended by the abolition of the Hastings Agreement in 1996. Instead, unions may sign **Constituency Development Plan Agreements** with local Constituency Labour Parties which provide financial support (up to £2,000) for political development in the constituency.



7. NATIONAL ORGANISATION

Affiliated unions are constitutionally integrated into all aspects of Labour Party structures.

National Executive Committee

The National Executive Committee (NEC) is responsible for providing a strategic direction to the party as a whole, and for maintaining and developing party activity in all areas and at all levels.

Membership of the NEC is broken down as follows:

- Leader of the Labour Party
- Deputy Leader of the Labour Party
- Treasurer
- Trade unions (twelve – at least six must be women)
- MPs (three)
- EPLP Leader
- Young Labour (one)
- Socialist Societies (one)
- CLPs (six)
- Labour Councillors (two)
- PLP/EPLP (three)
- General Secretary of the Labour Party

The trade union NEC representatives are elected exclusively by the trade union delegates to Conference. Under Labour Party rules, members of the TUC General Council are prevented from being members of the NEC.

In practice the NEC trade union representatives tend to be national officials below General Secretary level or lay Executive members mainly from the biggest trade unions. The Labour Party Treasurer is traditionally drawn from the trade unions.

For a full list of current NEC members, please visit the Labour Party website www.labour.org.uk/nec/

Labour Party Policy

Partnership in Power, the Labour Party's policy-making process, is a rolling programme of consultation, involving the opportunity for every single member and affiliated trade union member to shape the Labour Party's policy

agenda and to discuss the issues before they become Labour Party policy. Please visit the Labour Party website for a full set of policy documents www.labour.org.uk

Local Policy Forums

Labour Party members in Constituency Labour Parties meet to discuss individual policy documents at Local Policy Forums. Suggestions and/or amendments are sent to the Policy Commissions responsible for a policy area or document.

Trade unions can and do organise local policy forums within their unions with full and affiliated Labour Party members to discuss policy documents and send reports to the Policy Commissions.

Trade unions at national/headoffice level also take part in the amendment of policy documents prior to National Policy Forums and their final adoption at Labour Party Conference.

National Policy Forum

The National Policy Forum (NPF) comprises up to 183 members and represents all stakeholder groups in the Labour Party:

NPF representatives	Numbers
Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs)	55
Regions	22
Trade Unions	30
MPs	9
MEPs	6
Government	8
Socialist Societies	3
Co-operative Party	2
Peers	2
Black Socialist Society	4
Labour Students	1
Local Government	9
National Executive Committee (NEC)	32

continued...



The National Policy Forum (NPF) meets a number of times a year to agree the current 'wave' of policy documents before they are again sent out to stakeholders for amendments and finally agreed or rejected at Labour Party Annual Conference.

Policy Commissions

There are eight Policy Commissions covering all policy areas from Welfare, Health, Education to Crime and Justice. The Policy Commissions are made up of at least three government representatives, three NEC members and four National Policy Forum members. There is at least one trade union representative on each Policy Commission.

Policy Commissions produce policy reports for discussion by the National Policy Forum and receive submissions from Constituencies, trade unions and other stakeholders and experts.

Joint Policy Committee

Once policy documents have been agreed by the National Policy Forum they are put to the Joint Policy Committee which is chaired by the Leader of the Labour Party and made up of members of government, NEC and the National Policy Forum. The Chair of the Trade Union and Labour Party Liaison Committee is a member of the Joint Policy Committee. Trade union voices are also represented via the trade union section on the NEC.

Final policy documents are then sent to Labour Party Annual Conference for agreement or rejection.

Labour Party Conference

The National Labour Party Conference is the sovereign body of the Labour Party. According to the Labour Party Constitution it:

- controls and directs the work of the Labour Party
- decides the specific proposals of legislative, financial or administrative reform which shall be included in the party programme.

In practice much of this power is delegated to the National Executive Committee and the Party's manifesto is approved at a joint meeting of the NEC and Cabinet (or Shadow Cabinet when not in government).

Conference debates

The Labour Party's policy-making procedure follows a three-year cycle, culminating in a series of agreed documents which form the basis for the General Election manifesto.

Each year during the policy-making cycle, Policy Commissions submit a progress report describing their work over the previous 12 months. The National Policy Forum report is put to Labour Party Conference for debate and approval, together with a number of consultation or final documents.

Conference delegates

For affiliated trade unions, the entitlement to send delegates and vote at Labour Party Conference is based on the size of the affiliated membership. Under current rules, each affiliated organisation is entitled to send one delegate for each 5,000 members or part thereof for whom affiliation fees have been paid. All delegates must also be individual Labour Party members.

Block vote and OMOV

Each union used to vote collectively (in a 'block vote'). Since 1993, the votes of each union are divided equally among registered delegates of the union, and the vote of each delegate is exercised separately. In practice, though, individual union delegations vote together.

Votes at conference are balanced at 50:50 for constituencies and trade unions. The ratio used to be 70:30 in favour of unions.



8. PARTICIPATION IN ELECTIONS

Through affiliation to the Labour Party, unions and their members can participate in a number of elections and selections.

Electing the Labour Party Leadership

Members of unions affiliated to the Labour Party and local union branches can nominate and vote in electing:

Labour Party Leader
Labour Party Deputy Leader
Leaders of Scottish and Welsh Labour Party.

Trade unions have a role in electing party officials such as:

General Secretary (elected/endorsed at Labour Party Conference)
Labour Party Treasurer
NEC trade union section
Auditors
Conference Arrangements Committee members
National Constitutional Committee members.

Candidates

Local/Regional/Divisional branches which affiliate to local Constituency Labour Parties have nominating rights for selecting parliamentary candidates, council candidates, candidates for European Parliament and candidates for other public elections such as the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, London Mayor and GLA members. Affiliated union branches can nominate but cannot vote in the selections.

Trade Union Parliamentary Panels

Trade unions, after close liaison and agreement with the Labour Party, select from amongst their own members a list of aspiring Parliamentary candidates. People on this agreed list will undergo written and oral examination to

comply with the rules of both the union and the Labour Party. Agreed trade union Parliamentary Panels are eventually merged with the Labour Party's Parliamentary Panel and endorsed by the Labour Party's NEC.

Parliamentary candidates must be shortlisted by the Executive Committee of a constituency. In a by-election, the shortlisting is done by the NEC. Union branches affiliated to a Constituency have the same nominating rights as a Branch Labour Party (BLP), but cannot vote in the all-member selection of a candidate.

Trade Union Group of MPs

Once elected, an MP can maintain his or her membership of a union and join a specific trade union parliamentary group, and the wider Trade Union Group of MPs within the Parliamentary Labour Party.

Once elected to the House of Commons, MPs represent the Labour Party and as such take the Labour whip. In principle, all Labour MPs are members of at least one union and many participate in the large and very active group of Trade Union Group of MPs. There is, though, nothing in this structure which obliges trade union group MPs to take one position or another on matters of policy.

European Parliamentary Labour Party

Given the fewer numbers of European Members of Parliament, there are smaller organised trade union groups and one large Trade Union Group of MEPs.

European Parliamentary 'constituencies' now reflect the regional boundaries of the Labour Party. As such, MEPs are fully integrated into the regional structures of both the Labour Party and the Regional Trade Union Liaison Committees.

9. USEFUL CONTACTS

Trade Union Liaison Office

The Labour Party Head Office
16-18 Old Queen Street
London SW1H 9HP
Tel: 020 7802 1165/6
www.labour.org.uk/tuloindex

Labour Party Head Offices

16 Old Queen Street
London SW1H 9HP

131 Bedford Street
North Shields NE29 6LA

www.labour.org.uk
Tel: 08705 900 200

Labour Party Regional offices

Scotland

145 West Regent Street
Glasgow G2 4RE
Tel: 0141 572 6900
www.scottishlabour.org.uk

Wales

Transport House
1 Cathedral House
Cardiff CF11 9HA
Tel: 029 2087 7700
www.welshlabour.org.uk

Greater London

16 Old Queen Street
London SW1H 9HP
Tel: 020 7490 4904
www.london-labour.org.uk

Northern

131 Bedford Street
North Shields NE29 6LA
Tel: 0191 296 6012
www.labour-north.org.uk

North West

St James' Court
Wilderspool Causeway
Warrington WA4 6PS
Tel: 01925 574 913
www.northwest-labour.org.uk

Eastern

97 Fore Street
Ipswich IP4 1JZ
Tel: 01473 228 700
www.laboureast.labour.co.uk

East Midlands

23 Barratt Lane
Attenborough
Nottingham NG9 6AD
Tel: 0115 943 1777
www.eastmidslabour.org.uk

South East

St Giles House
10 Church Street
Reading RG1 2SD
Tel: 0118 959 5326
www.labour-southeast.org.uk

South West

1 Newfoundland Court
Newfoundland Street
Bristol BS2 9AP
Tel: 0117 942 1900

West Midlands

Terry Duffy House
Thomas Street
West Bromwich B70 6NT
Tel: 0121 569 1900

Yorkshire and the Humber

20-22 Cheapside
Wakefield WF1 2TF
Tel: 01924 291 221

European Parliamentary Labour Party (EPLP)

2 Queen Anne's Gate
London SW1H 9AA
Tel: 020 7222 1719
www.eplp.org.uk

TUC

Congress House
Great Russell Street
London WC1B 3LS
Tel: 020 7636 4030
www.tuc.org.uk

Electoral Commission

Trevelyan House
Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2HW
Tel: 020 7271 0500
www.electoralcommission.gov.uk

Certification Office

Brandon House
180 Borough High Street
London SE1 1LW
Tel: 020 7210 3734
www.certoffice.org

AMICUS

35 King Street
Covent Garden
London WC2E 8JG
Tel: 020 7836 3070
www.aeeu.org.uk
www.msf.org.uk

ASLEF

9 Arkwright Road
London NW3 6AB
Tel: 020 7317 6800
www.aslef.org.uk

BECTU

373/377 Clapham Road
London SW9 9BT
Tel: 020 7346 0900
www.bectu.org.uk

BFAWU

Stanborough House
Great North Road
Stanborough
Welwyn Garden City
Herts AL8 7TA
Tel: 01707 260 150
www.bfawu.org.uk

CATU

Hillcrest House
Garth Street
Hanley
Stoke-on-Trent
ST1 2AB
Tel: 01782 272 755
www.catu.org.uk

CWU

150 The Broadway
Wimbledon
London SW9 1RX
Tel: 020 8971 7200
www.cwu.org.uk

FBU

Bradley House
68 Coombe Road
Kingston-upon-Thames
Surrey KT2 7AE
Tel: 020 8541 1765
www.fbu.org.uk

GMB

22/24 Worpole Road
London SW19 4DD
Tel: 020 8947 3131
www.gmb.org.uk

GPMU

Key's House
63/67 Bromham Road
Bedford MK40 2AG
Tel: 01234 351 521
www.gpmu.org.uk

GULU

9 Wellington Street
St John's
Blackburn BB1 8AF
Tel: 01254 51760

ISTC

Swinton House
324 Gray's Inn Road
London WC1X 8DD
Tel: 020 7239 1200
www.istc-tu.org.uk

KFAT

55 New Walk
Leicester LE1 7EB
Tel: 0116 255 6703
www.kfat.org.uk

MU

60/62 Clapham Road
London SW9 0JJ
Tel: 020 7582 5566
www.musiciansunion.org.uk

NACODS

37 Church Street
Barnsley S70 2AR
Tel: 020 7582 5566
NUDAGO
7/8 Imperial Buildings
Corporation Street
Rotherham S60 1PB
Tel: 01709 382 820

NUM

Miners' Offices
2 Huddersfield Road
Barnsley S70 2LS
Tel: 01226 215 555

RMT

Unity House
39 Charlton Street
London NW1 1JD
Tel: 020 7387 4771
www.rmt.org.uk

TGWU

Transport House
128 Theobald's Road
London WC1X 8TN
Tel: 020 7611 2500
www.tgwu.org.uk

TSSA

Walkden House
10 Melton Street
London NW1 2EJ
Tel: 020 7387 2101
www.tssa.org.uk

UCATT

177 Abbeville Road
London SW4 9RL
Tel: 020 7622 2442
www.ucatt.org.uk

UNISON

1 Mabledon Place
London WC1H 9AJ
Tel: 0845 355 0845
www.unison.org.uk

USDAW

188 Wilmslow Road
Manchester M14 6LJ
Tel: 0161 224 2804
www.usdaw.org.uk

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