

YOUR
QUESTIONS
ANSWERED



VOTE *for* A
POLITICAL FUND

National Union of Teachers

In January the NUT will be on setting up a political fund and why is the Union urging

Why is the Union holding this ballot?

Delegates to the NUT annual conference at Easter decided to ballot all members and to urge them to vote in favour of a political fund so that the Union can campaign more effectively at election times against political parties and candidates who promote racist and fascist views.

What is a political fund?

Various Trade Union and Labour Relations Acts lay down that trade unions' so-called 'political objects' must be funded entirely from a political fund which members have voted to set up. If a union wants to hold a meeting or publish a leaflet or an advertisement to persuade people to vote – or not to vote – for a political party during a local, Assembly, national or European election, it must pay for these activities out of its political fund.

Balloting all members fund. So what's it all about getting you to vote Yes?

Has this ever been a problem for the NUT?

It has been a problem. Last year, for example, when the British National Party (BNP) put up candidates for the council elections in Barking and Dagenham, and won 11 of the 13 seats it contested, the law prevented the NUT from speaking out as clearly as it wanted to. Because it had no political fund, the Union would have been open to legal challenge if it had said: 'Don't vote for the BNP.'

But don't other unions campaign in this way?

They do. Unions with political funds can and do campaign specifically against racist and fascist candidates at elections. The NASUWT and the University and College Union (formerly NATFHE and AUT) already have political funds and so are not constrained in the way the NUT is. The Educational Institute of Scotland has had a political fund since 1987.

Why does the NUT want to campaign against racists and fascists?

Teachers know only too well how those who preach hatred, racism or fascism can damage children's lives. The NUT believes that racism needs to be challenged effectively – especially when those on the far right seek to clothe themselves in the suits of respectability when they stand for election. The BNP put up a record 806 candidates in the May 2007 council, Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament elections. It has 53 councillors in England and one in Wales.

But hasn't the NUT always campaigned for equality?

The guiding tenet of the Union has always been to champion equality. The NUT wants that work to flourish and not to be constrained by law at election times. Voting for a political fund will give the NUT a clearer campaigning voice to denounce those like the BNP who preach inequality and seek to divide us.

Would having a political fund compromise the Union's independence?

No, it would not compromise our independence. The ballot is not about affiliating to any political party or wanting to support any party or candidate. It is about putting the NUT in a position at election times to be able to say unequivocally: 'Don't vote fascist or racist, don't vote BNP.'

Aren't most unions which have political funds affiliated to the Labour Party?

Contrary to what one might think, only 16 of the 59 TUC trade unions are affiliated to the Labour Party. The NUT is, and has always been, independent of all political parties. This will not change. Many professional unions are similarly politically independent – but they have political funds. These include the education unions NASUWT, UCU and EIS, as well as the communications managers' union Connect, the professional civil servants' union Prospect, and the Prison Officers' Association. Members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) recently voted to set up a political fund which will go live early next year.

If members vote to set up a political fund will I have to contribute to it?

No. You will be able to opt out if you do not wish to contribute. That is your legal right.

I don't want to pay so why should I vote Yes?

Even if you think you probably won't want to contribute, the Union asks you to vote Yes so that those who do wish pay into a political fund are able to do so.

How much will it cost?

It is proposed that the annual contribution, by those who wish to participate, will be an additional payment calculated as one per cent of the full annual subscription. In 2008 the full rate will be £142. So you would pay just £1.42 a year (the 'political levy') on top of your normal subscription. This amount would be the same for all paying members, whether full-time, part-time or retired. Honorary and life members, who enjoy free membership, will have the option to pay into the political fund, as would student members.

How is the ballot organised and when does it take place?

It will be a secret postal ballot conducted under strict rules laid down by the Certification Officer, the government official responsible for seeing that trade unions conduct their affairs in accordance with the law. It will be administered on behalf of the Union by the independent scrutineers Electoral Reform (Ballot Services) Ltd who will post ballot papers to all members. The ballot opens on Monday 7 January 2008 and closes on Monday 28 January.

What will the ballot paper actually say?

The wording of the voting paper has to conform to the legal requirements of the Certification Officer. It will therefore ask whether or not you are in favour of a resolution that the political objects set out in section 72 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 be adopted as an object of the Union – i.e. do you agree to the Union setting up a political fund? The relevant section of the Act will be printed on reverse of the paper along with an explanatory statement and the rules of a National Union of Teachers' political fund.

What happens after the ballot?

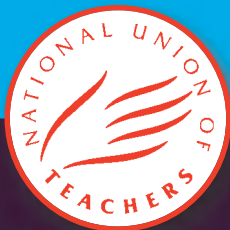
If a majority of members taking part in the ballot vote in favour, the political fund rules become part of the rules of the Union. The result will be publicised. In addition, by law, the Union must immediately inform all members of their right to contract out and to make available forms for them to do so. The Union will give notice to members of when the payments into the new fund will start, which would probably be in the autumn of 2008.



Vote Yes to help the NUT counter racism

NUT general secretary Steve Sinnott says:

"I believe that our Union has a moral responsibility to argue against the ideas of racism and fascism that are diametrically opposed to our approach to education, that values every child, irrespective of race, colour or creed. I urge you to vote Yes to allow the NUT to play its full part in opposing candidates who peddle their poisonous and divisive prejudice in the guise of an electoral platform."



*The NUT –
The largest teachers'
organisation in Europe*