

Political Fund Ballot

Briefing – Reps

Summary

- A trade union wishing to spend money on political matters is legally obliged to set up a political fund. To do this requires a ballot of all members.
- The last TSSA Political Fund ballot took place in September 2014. Trade unions must re-ballot their members every ten years to maintain the fund. TSSA has voted to keep the Political Fund since 1984, when laws on political Funds were introduced.
- We are due to re-ballot this September. Ballots will be dispatched on 27 August and voting closes at noon on 23 September.
- It's vital that TSSA maintains the fund so that we can continue to campaign for transport and travel workers and shape Government policy. Without the fund, our ability to campaign for members is significantly curtailed.

What is a trade union political fund?

- The trade union political fund laws sit alongside a raft of anti-trade union laws designed to make campaigning and lobbying harder for trade unions.
- Under the Trade Union & Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992, trade unions are prohibited from spending money on a range of political aims, unless they ballot their members specifically in relation to furthering these aims. Without a ballot on a political resolution, the Act prohibits expenditure on this range of campaigning activities.
- For trade unions to engage in any of **these activities** requires that they ballot their members and pass a political resolution to create a fund specifically for expenditure of this kind– a political fund.
- Since 2016, in a further restriction on trade union advocacy, it has become a legal requirement for new members who joined after 2016 to actively opt-in to the political fund. All members can opt out of the fund at any time.

Why do we need a political fund?

- Without a political fund, it is significantly harder – or in some instances, impossible – for TSSA to represent the views of our members in a range of political and campaigning contexts (which is why Conservative Ministers first introduced these laws on political funds – as a barrier to trade unions effectively representing their members).
- For example, our political fund has paid for a variety of successful campaigns. Last year, the Government moved to close nearly all ticket offices. Our campaign to keep ticket offices open – supported by the political fund – meant that we were able to stop them.
- It has also enabled us to campaign on bringing our transport network into public ownership. It funded our “Scotland’s Railway” campaign, where it allowed us to influence the Scottish Government through debate-leading research on how the railway should be structured. That led to ScotRail being taken into public ownership – increasing lines of accountability, and our leverage to hold decision-makers to account.
- Now we are seeing the fruits nationally. The new Westminster Government is committed to bringing Train Operating Companies into public ownership under Great British Railways and allowing local government to operate bus franchises, bringing them under public control. That would not have been possible without TSSA engaging in the political process and making the arguments to elected officials.

- This is a significant time for the transport and travel sector, with legislation passing through parliament that will profoundly affect members' pay, conditions, and experience at work. It is critical we engage with that agenda, pushing for members where we can, and shaping the debate on the future of travel and transport.

More information

- For more information, please contact TSSA's political officer, Sam Browse, on browses@tssa.org.uk