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## **STULP Submission to the Collins Review**

### **Introduction**

The Collins review was established by Ed Miliband following his speech in July arguing for various changes to the way the Labour Party operates, including selections, possibly introducing primaries, reforming Constituency Development Plans, and most significantly, positive consent from individual trade unionists for affiliation to the Party. Ray Collins produced an interim report to Labour Party Conference. His report gave a brief overview of each of the issues and posed a series of questions, and he has encouraged affiliates and constituency parties to respond by 24 December. He will then draft proposals in the light of these responses which will be considered at a special Conference in March.

### **Distraction**

STULP supports the contribution of Paul Kenny, as Chair of TULO, to the UK Labour Party conference on the distraction this debate is from the issues that matter to our members. He said, *"The reason being we think the real debate this week is about jobs, homes, living standards, employment rights NOT irrelevant navel gazing about internal party structures which frankly the British public do not give a fig about."*

This concern is particularly significant in Scotland. Scottish Labour has consistently argued that the SNP's obsession with the constitution is a distraction from the real issues that matter to those who live in Scotland. That argument is weakened when we as a party engage in our own distractions.

### **Relationship between the party and affiliates**

The Labour Party was formed by the unions and other groups and individuals and the party structure is a federal one that comprises individual members and affiliated unions and socialist societies as collective bodies. The link gives trade union members not just individual rights in the Labour Party but a collective voice through their unions, an expression that balances our collectivist values with those of the individual party members.

That collective expression is a particularly important value in Scotland and is reflected in the role civil society organisations play in our political life. This has been enhanced by devolution with a much greater engagement in the political process. We therefore welcome the recognition in the discussion paper of the importance of not damaging the collective relationship.

The union link works because it gives a voice in Labour's policy making to many ordinary working class voters whose concerns are grounded in the realities and issues at the workplace and in their local communities and it enables a wide group of supporters to participate in electing Labour leaders. The link gives affiliates a role in the party structures locally and nationally both in Scotland and at UK level. The link is primarily political not financial and is the most transparent process in British politics.

We agree that the link needs strengthening, particularly at a local level with far more trade union members being encouraged to both join the Party as individual members and become active union delegates to their constituency parties. STULP has undertaken a number of initiatives to promote this.

However, while members are happy to join the union's affiliated fund which allows the union's collective voice to be heard in the Party and grants fund members a specific body of rights through the union's affiliation - they are not saying they want to be a Labour Party member. That is a different process that trade unions cannot administer because of our rules, statutory regulation and data protection considerations.

While we are sympathetic to Ed Miliband's goal of building a mass membership party and particularly building an active link with union affiliated members, we do not think this can be simply achieved by changes to structures and rules. It can only be the result of communication, activity and relevance to ordinary people that makes membership of the party a real proposition. We are also concerned that any change could seriously impact on the size of party membership.

### **Constituency Development Plans**

In Scotland there is already a standard CDP that reflects devolved structures. They are signed off by the trade union, constituency and the General Secretary of the Scottish Labour Party.

### **Using primaries in candidate selection**

The proposal for primaries is something that has superficial attraction, but is often based on the simplistic transferring of US style politics to this country where the whole culture and public involvement with the political parties and politics is very different.

The Scottish Labour Party considered this idea as part of its review of Scottish Labour. It was overwhelmingly rejected largely because primaries are likely to be heavily influenced by a hostile local press and may be open to manipulation by well organised interest groups.

In addition, it is unclear who the electorate would be as the registered member concept has only limited traction in Scotland. We also believe it would act as a disincentive to join to the party as a full member.

### **Fairness and transparency in selections**

STULP would support spending limits and other steps that might provide a fairer process and positive steps that can widen the field of candidates to underrepresented communities to reflect labour supporters in their representatives. We therefore have no objection to a review of the code of conduct. STULP has previously highlighted our concerns over the professionalisation of candidates. Any cap must of course apply to all those who wish to influence selections including those largely funded by business interests.

However, policing rules in a voluntary body is always going to be difficult. Similarly, it is difficult to say what should be the appropriate penalties when rules are breached, sometimes accidentally. We do not want contests to become a battleground for complaints between candidates. The party has managed quite difficult matters in this regard in the past and that expertise will be needed to draw up a practical code.

### **Conclusion**

STULP views this matter as an unnecessary distraction from the issues we should be concentrating on. In Scotland, there is the added risk that if Labour is seen to distance itself from the values of our members; they will look elsewhere for a political voice and that could impact on the independence referendum.

Dave Watson  
STULP Secretary  
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