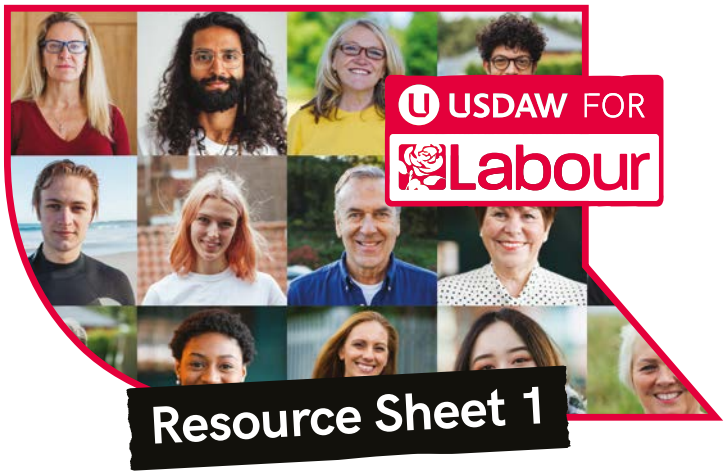
Usdaw and Politics:

A Short Guide for Union Activists



Why is Usdaw Involved in Politics?

Because our role as a trade union is to make things better for our members. Mostly we do that through negotiating with employers, but sometimes we need politics to:

- Create a level playing-field for negotiating with employers.
- Introduce fair minimum standards, eg the minimum wage, four weeks' paid holiday, longer maternity leave, equal rights for part-timers.
- Improve our members' lives in other ways – through better pensions and benefits and improving schools and health services.

Why Are We Linked to the Labour Party?

Trade unions created the Labour Party to campaign and act for all working people. We have many links with the Labour Party at every level – so we can campaign for the things our members need with MPs, local Councillors and the leadership and front bench. Most members of the Labour Party and MPs are committed trade unionists – they understand what is important to us and are willing to help where they can.

How Does Usdaw Influence the Labour Party?

We can best influence the Labour Party by developing constructive relationships at every level based on mutual trust and respect. Although communication with the leadership and front bench is important, it is much more effective if it is backed up by Usdaw members raising issues with MPs and with local Labour Parties all over the country.

Our members' votes are important to help Labour win elections so they know they have to address the issues that matter to us. But politicians need to be told what those issues are and why they matter.

What Issues Are Usdaw Promoting?

Usdaw's policies are decided at our annual conference (ADM) and the propositions passed there form the basis of our political campaign work.

Some examples of issues we are currently campaigning on:

- Better rights at work to give greater job security.
- Protecting workers from violence, threats and abuse.
- Improving the National Minimum Wage with higher rates and better enforcement
- Fighting for justice for injured workers.

What Does Our Political Work Involve?

- Finding out from our activists and members the issues that we need to run political campaigns on.
- Running campaigns and raising awareness of issues that affect our members – informing the Government, MPs, MSPs, devolved assembly members, Councillors, local Labour Parties, other trade unions and everyone who will listen!
- Informing our members about what is happening politically, especially on workplace rights (because the media is not very good at doing this!).
- Working to support Labour in government across the United Kingdom. Without this, we will not get action on the issues that matter to us.

How Can You Help?

In your workplace:

- By inviting your Labour MP or Parliamentary candidate to visit your workplace to meet and listen to our members.
- By involving Usdaw members in our campaigns – asking them to sign petitions and write to their MP.

By joining the Labour Party and raising issues there:

- Labour MPs and Councillors listen to their local Labour Parties.
- You also get a vote in selecting candidates for: Parliament; councils; leadership elections; devolved assemblies, etc.
- You have the opportunity to get more involved if you want to discuss policy, go to conferences, or represent Labour on a council, as a school governor, on a regional body, or even stand for Parliament!

By 'affiliating' your Usdaw branch to local Labour Parties:

- Your Usdaw branch can send resolutions to the local Parties asking them to lobby for and support our campaigns.
- You can send delegates to the Constituency Labour Party to back up our resolutions and speak directly to the Labour MP (if you have one), Labour candidates and other elected representatives.

By telling Usdaw's Political Officer when our members need political help:

- If our members are affected by an issue that can only be dealt with by Government legislation or if current legislation isn't working in practice, we need practical examples to help us point out to Government why it's important. For example, if working parents are struggling to make ends meet because they've had tax credits taken off them; if a member has been assaulted, threatened or verbally abused by a customer.

Usdaw's Politics Office is gathering evidence for our political campaigning work and can be contacted on **0161 249 2452** or by email: **politics@usdaw.org.uk**

Politics affects all of us. Usdaw can have a great influence politically. But we need your help.

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Stock photography, posed by models