

Political Fund Briefing Number 4: Does this mean the SoR will Affiliate to a Political Party?

In this briefing we look in more detail at the commitment given to members that if a political fund is created that it will not be a step towards affiliation to a political party.

The SoR Members Handbook which contains the rules of the union includes in its introductory paragraphs a statement on the political independence of the SoR. This says:

“SOR is politically independent which means we are not affiliated to any political party and will work on member’s behalf with the government of the day regardless of political affiliation to oppose any action that may be contrary to the interests of members and to support action that is in members’ interests. We will also work with any political party on issues where co-operation is in members’ interests.”

This position of independence will not be changed as a result of establishing a political fund.

Under the 1992 Trade Union and Labour Relations Act any union that wishes to affiliate to a political party can only do so if it has a political fund. Without a political fund it would be unlawful for a union to affiliate either to the Labour Party or indeed any other party. So the existence of a political fund is a requirement should a union wish to affiliate to a political party. However this is only one of many reasons why unions have political funds. Should we create a political fund members can have complete confidence that our political fund will not be used for affiliation purposes. Instead, as Political Fund Briefing No 3, which was emailed to all members on 9 November, explained in detail the fund, if created, will only be used to enable the SoR to continue to campaign on behalf of members and their patients.

Currently 25 unions, just under half of the total affiliated to the TUC, have political funds. Of these 15 use some of the fund to affiliate to the Labour Party. The remaining 12 do not use their fund for affiliation to any political party. This group of 12 include unions such as Prospect, The Educational Institute of Scotland, The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) and The Prison Officers Association.

Earlier briefings have explained that the policies of the SoR are determined by members through the election of members of UK Council and through debated resolutions at the Annual Delegate Conference (ADC). At the 2015 ADC members voted unanimously for the SoR to hold a ballot for a political fund. The previous year at the 2014 ADC members overwhelmingly voted to reject a motion calling for affiliation to the Labour Party and instead unanimously supported an alternative motion calling for the union to maintain its strong position of political independence.

Because of this very clear position adopted by members at the 2014 ADC UK Council proposed specific safeguards as part of the preparation process for a political fund. These were approved by members at the 6 October EGM this year, resulting in a change to the SoR constitution specifically ruling out political party affiliation.

Consequently, if members now vote to create a Political Fund it is clear that the money cannot be used to affiliate to a political party, including the Labour Party. There is therefore no question of this being a first step towards affiliation. In fact the SoR, like many of the unions with a political fund but not affiliated to a political party, has a long tradition of political independence. Most recently we

have seen this demonstrated during the 2014/15 pay campaign. At one stage during that campaign we were challenging the Labour Party in Wales, the Democratic Unionist Party in Northern Ireland, the SNP in Scotland and the Liberal Democrats and Conservative parties in England as none of them were prepared initially to see our members pay rates increase in line with inflation.

This pay campaign was therefore a very practical demonstration of us implementing our policy of political independence overwhelmingly endorsed by delegates at the 2014 ADC and it is this that has shaped our approach to the creation of a political fund. The rules have already been established at the vote at the Extraordinary General Meeting in October to ensure that when members vote on whether they wish the SoR to establish a political fund they can do so without there being any ambiguity regarding using any of the money to promote the interests of or support candidates of any political party.

As was explained in more detail in Political Fund Briefing No. 3 a political fund is necessary precisely so that we can continue this independence, challenging political decisions regardless of which party is in power when they are not in the interests of our members or their patients irrespective of who makes the decision.

So while there is no intention to use the fund to affiliate to any political party we do need a political fund to continue to campaign on work related and professional matters without the risk of a legal challenge from anyone who does not like what we are saying, including politicians. So please vote yes in the ballot and make sure the SoR can continue to punch above its weight and make the voice of radiography heard, at work and throughout society, on behalf of our members and their patients.

If you have any questions please refer to the earlier briefings which have been emailed to you and are also available on the SoR website. Please send any further questions to Paul Moloney at PaulM@sor.org so that a supplementary Q&A briefing can be distributed to all members if necessary.