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1. Some unions don't like

There's no escaping the reality that unions are at the heart of the fight against climate change. No blind eye turning will help. No heavy hearted 'jobs-versus-environment' get outs. Fossil fuels are polluting the very air we breathe. Yet the transition from fossil fuels is 'neither imminent nor inevitable', as we report from a new TUED study. Trump has split the US labour movement by reversing President Obama's ban on two trans-America pipelines. With average wages falling, what's not to like about Trump's promises of more oil and more steelmaking jobs?

Except that some unions don't like. In America, nurses' and service workers' unions are speaking out: Trump's pipelines are an environmental threat, and an insult to Native Americans. In the UK, Unison Scotland, is weighing into the divestment debate. Scotland's council pension funds have over £1.6 billion in fossil fuel shares. *Divest and Reinvest* in Scotland is their call. In London, a trades council, we report here, enters the fray over air pollution at shockingly high levels. It invites local unions to get it on the bargaining agenda. Meanwhile, the UK's fire and rescue services are winning key battles over the way we tackle the growing hazard of flooding.



2. Firefighters win flooding concession

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) welcomed the Welsh Assembly's decision to put a legal duty on fire and rescue services to respond to flood emergencies. It's backed by an extra £1.8m to replace ageing flooding and water rescue equipment, as well as the purchase of a second high volume pump in North Wales. That leaves Tory controlled England as the only UK nation where fire and rescue services aren't supported by a duty to respond to flooding incidents and new resources that come with it. <http://bit.ly/2mErgEO>

Matt Wrack, FBU general secretary, said:



"We have been pushing for a statutory duty for nine years, during which time Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales have all adopted one. It begs the question, Do ministers think it's acceptable that firefighters in England are not given the same level of resources to help protect communities from flooding?"

The Conservative government refused to grant the duty in England despite a recommendation from the cross party Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee who called for **services to be given more resources** to tackle flooding.

3. Honours for London's green firefighter

Thanks to FBU member Simon Jakeman, who has highlighted some of the things that can be done by union members at workplace level.

'As a Firefighter of 21 years, I have evacuated flooded homes by boat, pumped flood water, chased wildfires and picked up the pieces after storms. It feels that I really am on the frontline of an increased frequency of extreme weather due to climate change. Seeing how the effects of climate change affects people's daily lives, has inspired me to act on climate and "rescue the planet".

In 2011 I started to encourage fellow Fire Station personnel and the local community in making a difference to our environment. I know small actions all add up. This all started with a tomato plant in a fire bucket, and transformed into a fire station roof garden. This now provides locally grown produce and a habitat for local biodiversity.

In October 2015 I was seconded as London Fire Brigade's 'Super Green Champion' and have given presentations to hopefully inspire London's Frontline Watches, area teams, admin personnel and HQ staff on how to 'green the workplace' and act on climate (that's 425 presentations!). There's many ways to go about this - reducing emissions, saving energy, recycling, encouraging biodiversity, greening the buildings, reducing car use, growing seasonal food and inspiring their own local communities. In Jan 2017 I was amazed to be on the New Year's Honours list for Services to the Environment.'

4. Divestment Victory (Article by Danni)



Divestment victory at Kings College, London

On 10 March 2017, after a hard fought campaign, student activists at King's College, London, celebrated the university's agreement to divest from all fossil fuel companies within the next five years. The college has £18m in fossil fuels, including tar sands and coal mining <http://bit.ly/2drOi1n>.

An eight-week campaign by King's College Climate Emergency (KCCE) – with direct actions, occupations, chalking and painting university walls, and above all the courageous 14-day hunger strike by PhD student Roger Hallam - prompted "a significant change of policy" at one of Britain's most prestigious universities. <http://bit.ly/2mLNloD>

The seven-point agreement, set out in a letter to staff from Chris Mottershead, Senior Vice President at KCL, says *'King's will be carbon free by 2025, by when the net emissions from our use of fossil fuels will be zero. The aim will be to be 'carbon free' before 2025, but this is dependent on having options without significant financial impact.'*

The university will increase its commitment to investments with socially responsible benefits from the present aim of 15% to an aspiration of at least 40% by 2025, subject to there being no significant impact upon the financial risks and returns.

And crucially, progress towards delivering these targets will involve a formal annual report, with 'the College and the Students' Union jointly responsible for upholding the agreement.'

<http://kingsezine.newsweaver.co.uk/ChrisMottershead/6hfvll1m07ay1wiixpgllm?email=true&a=11&p=51561710>

5. Unison breaks into divestment

UNISON Scotland is the first UK union to publish guidance on pension fund divestment, and how to make better use of the money. Divest and Reinvest Scotland (March, 2017) says Scotland's councils hold a £1,683 million stake in fossil fuel companies through their pension funds. That's £3,300 for every scheme member. A whopping £543 million is directly invested in oil and gas and £113 million in coal. Councils invest in BP, who are fracking and drilling for oil in the Arctic. BHP Billiton, the 12th largest extractor of coal in the world, is mining in the centre of the Borneo rainforest and facing prosecution over Brazil's worst ever environmental disaster.

Unison wants the funds to be switched to socially and environmentally sustainable projects like council housing and renewable energy.

<http://reinvest.scot/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Divest-and-Reinvest-Scotland-Printable.pdf>

GJA is producing an on-line divestment training module this summer, so please let us know about your union initiatives in this area.

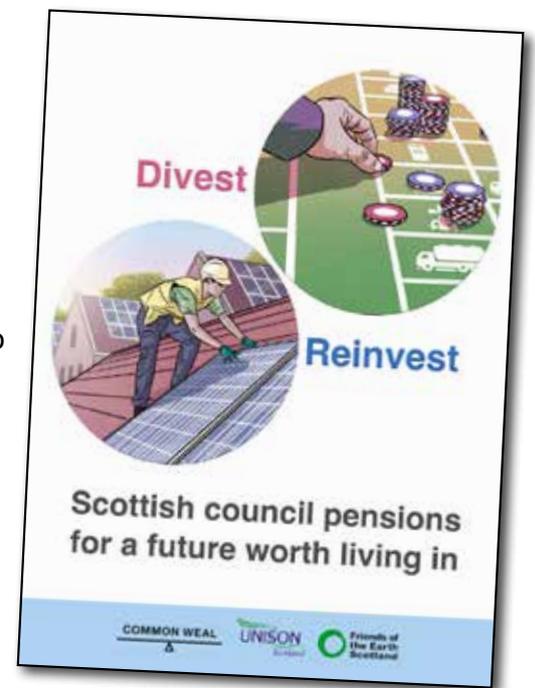
6. Clean air is a workplace issue

Poor air quality choking our cities continues to grab the headlines. Yet, despite the column inches, little is written about air pollution as a workplace issue. Most air pollution is created by work, and work journeys. Workers are exposed to, and create, pollution to fulfil their daily obligations to employers.

The GJA believes that employers must be required to take greater responsibility to tackle air pollution. The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), now working on new guidance on air pollution, could have led the way. But its draft guidance says <http://bit.ly/2gBBbrV> employers 'could consider' some transport-related initiatives.

It's a missed opportunity. The GJA's submission to the NICE consultation (which closed at the end of January) argues that employers' responsibilities on air pollution should be much clearer, and be commensurate with their role in an economy responsible for this public health crisis. It should include employers' energy management, procurement and low carbon transition strategies. Their role in the awareness raising of their workforce requires consultation with employees and union representatives. This should be wide-ranging - on air pollution and related issues like climate change. We made these points in the GJA submission to NICE, so we will have to wait and see if they are taken on board in the final version, expected in June, 2017.

As a workplace issue air pollution should be a trade union priority. Unions have carried out trail-blazing work in the field of occupational health, yet very little has been done on air pollution. It is time to put that right. An example of a trade union motion going to annual congress in 2017 is reproduced [here](#).



7. Trades Union Council's air quality campaign gets underway

Putney High St, South London, has the dubious distinction of being the most polluted road in the whole of Europe. It's where Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council is launching a new air quality challenge and wants to bring local trade unions on board. "Air pollution is a public health emergency in our area. It's time for action and clear commitments," argued Graham Petersen, who is heading up the campaign.

The trades council is working with political and community bodies in the borough to galvanise support. Action by government and others is essential to reduce emissions of pollution harmful to human health and restore clean air in all parts of the borough. A high priority is to work with local trade unions to get action from their employers to help cut emissions.

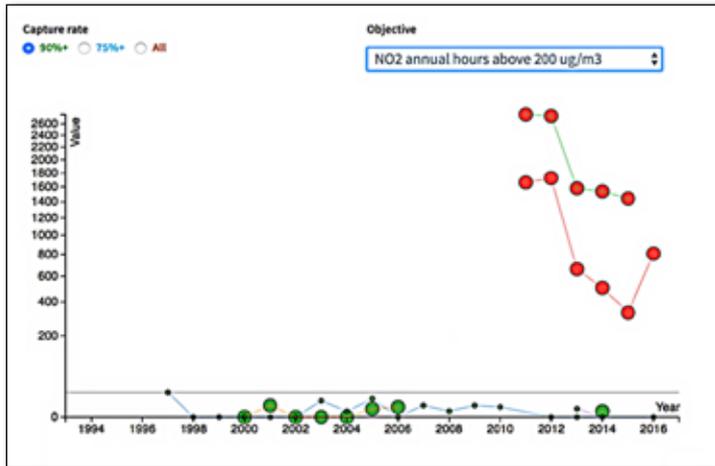
Graham disputes a claim made by council leaders that in Putney, 'pollution levels have actually fallen in recent years.' The trades council challenges this statement with evidence from Kings College, London. Nitrogen Dioxide (NO₂) emissions have levelled out since 2014, with no improvement in average level for three years. The annual average for 2016 <http://www.londonair.org.uk/LondonAir/Data-Visualisations/objectiveVStime.aspx> remained at over three times the 40 ug NO₂/m³ limit.

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Explainer: The concentration of an air pollutant like nitrogen dioxide is given in micrograms (one-millionth of a gram) per cubic meter of air, or $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

Even worse, by law, hourly levels of Nitrogen Dioxide must not exceed 200 micrograms per cubic metre more than 18 times in one year. In Putney, the hourly limit was exceeded over 1,200 times in 2016. In January, 2017 the standard was breached 11 times in one day.

Pollution in Putney - red dots



Source: <http://www.londonair.org.uk/LondonAir/Data-Visualisations/objectiveVStime.aspx>

Air quality is a major public health issue. We will support positive actions proposed by the Council but we will not hesitate to challenge the policies and actions when they fail to recognise the scale of the problem. A 'clean bus zone' may finally start to make a difference in the Putney area this year, but it needs to be rolled out rapidly to other parts of the borough.

This applies to our approach towards the Greater London Authority and the Government. For example, it is our view that the Mayor's proposed Ultra Low Emission Zone is very welcome but does not extend far enough. Large parts of the borough, like Tooting, with serious air pollution would be outside the zone.

As for the Government, there has been a complete lack of leadership. 'The Government's failure to get to grips with the challenge of air pollution is evident to all of us,' said an editorial statement from the *Evening Standard* (20 March 2017). Another group that needs to up its game is employers. Most of the toxic air we breathe is a product of work or workers travelling to work. Yet employers are often ignored when it comes to demands for action and should be doing far more to reduce their direct and indirect emissions.

BWTUC will support workers who want to act on pollution as a workplace issue. We are assisting local unions to carry out monitoring of pollution levels where they work.

We will also be adding a new training module on air quality to our online courses this summer.

Contact: Graham Petersen: grahampetersen4@hotmail.com / Tel 07879492339

8. Trump divides US unions, overturning pipeline bans

Trump has reversed President Obama's ban on the controversial Keystone XL pipeline, taking the project one step closer to delivering oil from Canadian tar sands for refinery and export in the US.

In a move that will further divide the American labour and environmental movements, Sean McGarvey, president of North America's Building Trades Unions <http://www.bctd.org/Index.aspx>, joined the chief executive of pipeline developer TransCanada at the announcement.

Here's the union's 'indepth' analysis [http://www.bctd.org/Newsroom/Blogs/Presidents-Message/November-2011-\(1\)/For-the-99---Keystone---JOBS.aspx](http://www.bctd.org/Newsroom/Blogs/Presidents-Message/November-2011-(1)/For-the-99---Keystone---JOBS.aspx) of the jobs vs environment debate:

'For America's skilled craft construction professionals, any discussion of the Keystone XL project begins and ends with one word: JOBS. Today, roughly 14% of the American construction workforce is unemployed—which is significantly higher than the overall national unemployment rate of 9%.'

But then the AFLCIO's views on the also disputed Dakota Access Pipeline is only slightly different:

'Community involvement in decisions about constructing and locating pipelines is important and necessary, particularly in sensitive situations like those involving places of significance to Native Americans. ... However, trying to make climate policy by attacking individual construction projects is neither effective nor fair to the workers involved. The AFL-CIO calls on the Obama Administration to allow construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline to continue.'

The opposing unions

<http://www.peoplesworld.org/article/unions-still-disagree-on-dakota-access-pipeline/>

led by National Nurses United but also including the Postal Workers, the Communications Workers and the Service Employees, call Dakota Access pipeline an environmental threat and an insult to Native Americans, too.

Obama blocked each project, in line with a recommendation from his State Department that the climate change impacts meant they were not in the US national interest.

9. Unions and energy - are we winning?

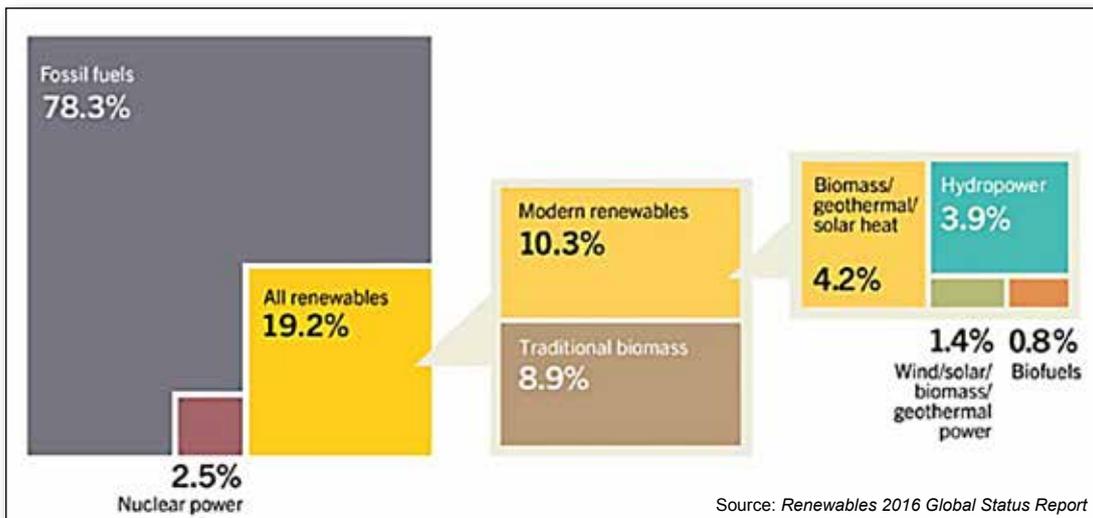
'There is no basis for the belief that a substantial transition away from fossil fuels is either imminent or inevitable.'

This is the stark conclusion of **Unions and energy – are we winning?**, a new analysis from Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) <http://bit.ly/2op0v83>

'Unions and their allies—in the environmental movement, indigenous communities, racial justice formations, and others—must have a clear sense of what is happening with the global energy system and what is likely to happen in the future. Our politics must be grounded in both a clear-eyed approach and an analysis based on facts.'

TUED's analysis show that the world is not moving away from fossil fuels, and that the "era of fossil fuels" is certainly not over. While renewable energy is growing quickly— more quickly than suggested by established sources — the transition to a renewables-based electricity system is far off. There is, therefore, no basis for the belief that a substantial transition away from fossil fuels is either imminent or inevitable.'

Estimated Renewable Energy Share of Global Final Energy Consumption, 2014



'It's up to us to face the bleak reality that the world's ruling elites have created, and for us to embrace the real source of hope: our communities, our movements, our organizations, our people. It falls to us to move the world away from fossil fuels. No one else will do it.'

10. Global Goals local Action Conference

The Environment Association for Universities and Colleges (EAUC) held its annual event at the University of Lancaster at the end of March, 2017. The political backdrop to the conference was highlighted in the opening plenary. It was the day when Trump signed his order to dump Obama's climate policies and May signed her letter to withdraw from the European Union. This meant the "business as usual approach" was no longer an option, and in the words of Iain Patton, the EAUC CEO, a "new narrative was needed".

The conference was built around the theme of implementing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that were agreed by the United Nations in 2015.

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300>

The 17 goals were adopted by the UK last year and could end up being just a wish list unless serious effort is put into implementing them. The Education Sector has a crucial role to play here and the conference workshops highlighted the opportunities to do this. For example, the University of Manchester implemented a mass sustainability engagement programme for 5,000 of their 1st Year undergraduates last year. Other institutions showed how they had mapped across the SDGs into their curriculum and research programmes.

SDG 11 - Sustainable Cities and Communities - was covered in a presentation by Maria Adebowale-Schwarte from the Living Space Project. She

highlighted the importance of meaningful connections with local communities. Too often there is just a token reference in a corporate mission statement rather than something embedded in organisational culture.

The final session addressed the issue of government policy and implementation. Jane Davidson, from University of Wales, Trinity St David, referenced the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. Wales is the only country in the world to put the SDGs into law. It currently applies to public bodies but this hasn't prevented other organisations like Trinity from adopting it.

The GJA welcomes the decision to work with other organisations to establish a UK-led Global SDG Charter and a post-Brexit narrative that strengthens rather than dilutes EU environmental and social justice standards. http://www.eauc.org.uk/what_we_do