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### 1. Editorial: Tipping points for planet and union movement



What will it take to release trade union energies to confront the climate emergency? Across the Arctic, large amounts of methane from rotting vegetation are trapped in permafrost. When scientists broke the ice in a demonstration watched by millions in David Attenborough's BBC film, *Climate Change*, the facts, they ignited a bubble of trapped methane gas as it escaped. Vast expanses of the Arctic region, are fast approaching the tipping point when millions of lakes across the Arctic will release uncontrollable quantities of methane gas once they unfreeze. Methane is 40 times more potent as a greenhouse gas than CO<sub>2</sub>.

Source: BBC, *Climate Change: the Facts*

#### Are trade unions at a tipping point?

Sure, the trade union movement saves the world for thousands of people every day. It combats discrimination and exploitation with dignity and justice and won us decent working hours and sick pay. But is organised labour doing enough to save the planet?

Look at the banners and the faces of the climate emergency movement. While school children and environmental activists in Extinction Rebellion have transformed the political debate from climate change to climate emergency, have trade unions stepped up to the plate?

Young people have been at the heart of these climate actions. Recent union campaigns such as the **TGI Fridays strike** and Ritzy Living Wage show that young workers can be recruited and organised. But no union has yet worked out how to do this on a large scale. Meanwhile, fewer than one in 25 union members are under 24 years of age.

The danger is that unions are sidelined, perhaps seen to be holding on to what they have, and we end up with proposals to scrap vast numbers of decent, well-paid jobs in carbon-reliant industries – but no substantial plans for what to replace them with.

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When advisers called on the government to set a zero carbon Britain by 2050, TUC General Secretary Frances O'Grady responded that, 'trade unions stand ready to do our part. Workers who are at the forefront of dealing with the challenges of climate change must have a central voice in plans.' So yes, unions are on the right side of the argument when the TUC demands a Just Transition, and when Unite decries the government's failure to build an electric vehicle industry. And Matt Wrack, General Secretary of the Fire Brigades Union, got a great reception in Parliament Square on May 1 as MPs debated a Climate Emergency. Firefighters the world over, he said, were on the frontline, fighting the fire and flood impacts of climate change. <https://bit.ly/2Jvq3k>

But if the union movement wants to reverse its membership decline, it must do more than persuade nonmembers of its own agenda, for it must accept theirs. It would be pretty difficult for anyone to recruit the same young people who walked out of school en masse over climate inaction into unions which argue for the further development of fossil fuels or fracking.

And as Rebecca Winson argued on International Workers' Day, it's never been clearer that the climate movement needs unions – or that unions need the climate movement. <https://bit.ly/30kGYZu>

## 2. This report will change your life...

The UK must reach net zero emissions by 2050, so ending our contribution to global warming, says the independent Committee on Climate Change (CCC). And for the first time ever an official report has told government to deliver a Just Transition to a low carbon future for workers and their communities <https://bit.ly/21UK9lo>

The 2050 target date disappointed many in XR, the Extinction Rebellion movement. XR says the government must tell the truth by declaring a climate emergency, and act now to cut greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2025 <https://rebellion.earth/the-truth/demands/>.

*The GJA believes that the 2025 date is idealistic but to get to zero emissions, three essential changes are needed:*

**Political leadership:** as Justin Bowden, GMB National Secretary for Energy, said, 'The implications of the report reach into every home, job, business and nook and cranny of our lives and society. Government itself and Parliament must now take direct responsibility for the economic and industrial consequences of the political decisions that are required. <https://www.gmb.org.uk/news/gmb-responds-ccc-report>

**The Treasury to fund the transition, not energy bill payers:** Energy consumers are shouldering much of the UK's new energy investment through their gas and electricity bills. The GMB says, 'These subsidies should be funded progressively from general taxation rather than asking lower paid workers to pay the same amount as the better off.' It seems the CCC agrees, calling on the Treasury to 'review how the transition will be funded and where the costs will fall. It should develop a strategy to ensure this is, and is perceived to be, fair.'

**Consult with unions on a Just Transition:** The committee took advice from the TUC and some unions like the GMB. But GJA believes it should now set up a permanent Just Transition Advisory Group, working urgently with unions from across all sectors.

*Photo: Parliament Square, 1 May, as MPs debated Labour's Climate Emergency: GJA team: David Judson, Richard Payne, Philip Pearson*



### 3. Government told to deliver a Just Transition

For the first time ever, the CCC has told government to deliver a Just Transition for workers and their communities:

- *the Government should ensure that the overall transition is perceived as fair, and that vulnerable workers and consumers are protected. That means Treasury support. It must include analysis at the regional level and for specific industrial sectors. Scotland has already appointed an independent Just Transition Commission. The UK government should do the same.*

The report acknowledges what we have been saying for years: ‘There is potential for more jobs in some areas, and a decline in jobs in others. Employment needs may change in terms of location and skills.’ Maybe a fifth of all jobs in regions like Yorkshire and the Humber are affected, with their reliance on heavy industry and fossil fuels.

So here in the pages of this report, are the outlines of a new industrial strategy for a Zero Carbon Britain:

- Up to one in five jobs across the UK will be affected by a Zero Carbon Britain strategy.
- Major moves away from fossil fuels - with job losses across oil and gas extraction, power and heating industries, as well as job losses in supply chains for these sectors.
- Some gas fired power stations could be needed, but they will need to run using hydrogen or Carbon Capture & Storage. All coal-fired stations close.
- Huge job growth is expected in sectors like renewables, electric vehicles, home insulation and domestic heating.
- Employment in offshore wind, for example, is predicted to quadruple to 27,000 jobs by 2030. The big prize comes when all three main parts of a wind turbine – the tower, the cell at the top and the blades – are made in the UK. The UK is currently a big importer of renewable technology. The UK has to develop full supply chains across the renewable energy sector.
- By 2025 at the latest all new cars and vans should be electric, or use a low- carbon alternative such as hydrogen. The automotive industry must transition to electric vehicles, with major implications for jobs, skills and investment.
- No new homes should be connected to the gas grid after 2025.
- Retrofitting homes with energy efficiency measures and installing low-carbon heat into new and existing homes will require new skills. This programme could generate many more high-skilled jobs in the installation and construction industries.



The Committee warns that a just transition is essential:

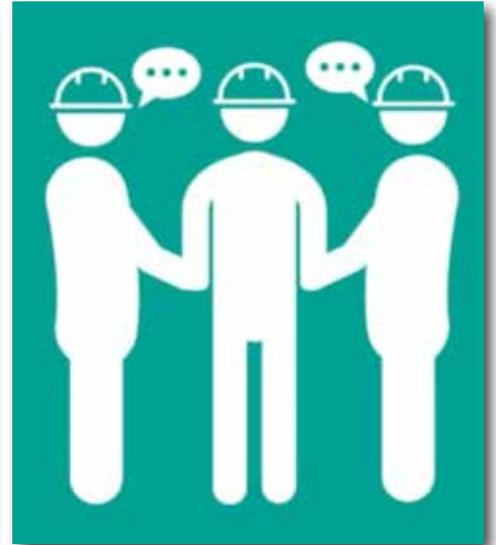
*If the impact of the move to net-zero emissions on employment and cost of living is not addressed and managed, and if those most affected are not engaged in the debate, there is a significant risk that there will be resistance to change, which could lead the transition to stall.*

If the committee intends to heed this warning, it should set up a Just Transition Advisory Group, with union representation from across the labour movements' industrial, energy, public services and voluntary sectors. The Committee already has three expert advisory groups on technology, international affairs and cost-benefits. The CCC has acknowledged a TUC input to the study. **However, the absence of a strategic advisory role for unions in the work of the committee is no longer tenable.**

The Committee on Climate Change report is available at: <https://bit.ly/2lUK9lo>

## 4. ITUC Global Day of Action – June 26th

The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) is calling a day of global action on climate change. It is calling on unions to find out what their employers plans are to climate-proof their operations and jobs.



A Campaign Guide provides resources for the global day of workplace action, including a model letter to send to employers and questions to ask in the meeting. A web page is available where you can sign up for more information and download campaign posters and social media graphics.

<https://www.ituc-csi.org/cpow-campaign-en>

The next GJA newsletter will carry a report on UK union engagement with the campaign so keep us informed of any workplace initiatives.

## 5. Trade Union Clean Air Network – 20 June gathering

Since the launch of the TUCAN Charter

<https://bit.ly/2vVDZZC>

in February, 13 unions plus other organisations have signed up.

We now need to develop the campaign for air pollution to be treated as an occupational health issue. With this in mind a meeting has been called on:

**National Clean Air Day**  
**Thursday 20 June**  
**UCU Head Office**  
**1.30-4.00pm.**

In the lead up we will be carrying out workplace monitoring to highlight the extent of the problem faced by workers. Please contact the GJA if you are interested in more information. TUCAN will also be active around union conferences this year. A fringe meeting took place at the NEU conference in April and others are planned. There will also be a TUCAN workshop at this year's Hazards Conference in July.

<http://www.hazardscampaign.org.uk/hazards-conference>



## 6. National Education Union Climate Policy

The NEU has kicked off the union conference season with an excellent motion on education and climate change. Commenting on the passing of Motion 8 at the Annual Conference of the National Education Union, Kevin Courtney, Joint General Secretary of the National Education Union, said: "Climate change is a public health emergency and NEU members and the children they teach are at the forefront of this crisis.

Other unions will be debating similar motions in the coming months. The plan is to hold a conference in the autumn to look at the role of education in ensuring a just transition. The GJA will carry a detailed report on this in the next newsletter.



## 7. Scottish TUC: Broken Promises and Offshored Jobs

This year's Scottish TUC backed radical action on climate change and green jobs. Less than a third of the green jobs promised from renewable energy had actually materialised. A new report, *Broken Promises and Offshored Jobs*, says, the Scottish economy suffers 'over-reliance on overseas financial interests in the low carbon economy...where low carbon jobs have been created, too often these have been poor quality and non-unionised. Green jobs are particularly insecure and prone to the volatility of the market.' <https://bit.ly/2Yr1DJF>

Past predictions of employment in the low carbon economy have not translated into the jobs boom promised. Up to 130,000 jobs were predicted in the low-carbon and renewable energy economy by 2020. But current figures show some 46,400 employees in these sectors – one third of the promised jobs.

Examples:

- *Moray East Windfarm* - 100 turbines off the coast of Caithness are being built by a consortium involving Portugal's main energy firm EDPR, French utility Engie and Diamond Generating Europe, a subsidiary of Japanese firm Mitsubishi Corporation. The blades are being built by a Danish company.
- *Kincardine Offshore Wind Limited* - A joint Spanish venture involving Navantia, who build warships for the Spanish navy, and wind company Windar, were recently awarded the contract to build platforms for a trial floating windfarm south-east of Aberdeen.



Site of £2.6bn Moray East Wind farm

revenues; limits transparency and lessens the accountability that workers, communities and Government hold over multinational companies. There are clear risks associated with allowing nationally important energy assets to be shaped and controlled solely by private interests.

The STUC says this is a failure of industrial policy that means workers, businesses and Government in Scotland do not benefit from Scotland's natural resources. It has serious implications not only in terms of jobs but also in terms of tax revenues, transparency, and economic democracy.

Scotland can do better. A proper industrial policy considering procurement, planning, licencing powers, public ownership and investment must be pursued if we are not to repeat the mistakes of the past.

But a lack of concern about who owns new energy investments has encouraged a wide range of overseas financial interests within the Scottish economy. This leads to the offshoring of jobs and tax

## 8. Irish Congress of Trade Unions calls for Just Transition

A major conference organised by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions has recommended that work begin immediately to establish a Just Transition Forum for the Midlands to identify key measures and supports that will be required by Bord na Móna staff and communities. Thousands of workers are currently involved in peat extraction and the company is currently seeking voluntary redundancies as restructuring takes place.

Bord na Móna, is a semi-state company in Ireland, created in 1946 by the Turf Development Act 1946. The company began developing the peatlands of Ireland with the aim to provide economic benefit for Irish Midland communities.

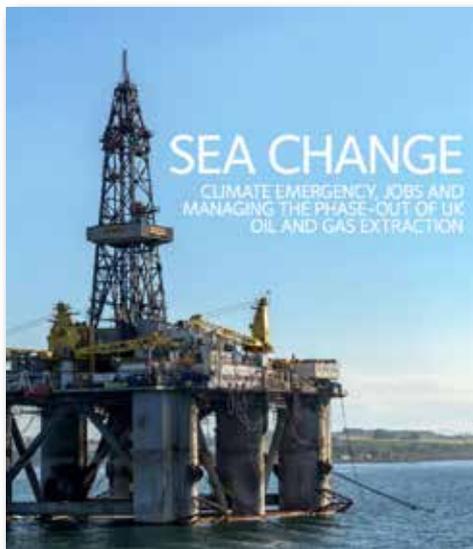
The Irish Congress argues that Bord na Mona should move to increase its involvement in renewable power generation – wind and solar – in order to help create new and replacement employment opportunities for existing staff and the surrounding regions, with retraining provided as required. The SEAI estimates some 4400 net jobs could be created in the wind energy sector alone.

Irish Congress of Trade Unions: <https://bit.ly/2HqzLyB>

## 9. Sea change – call for managed transition for oil and gas

A well-managed energy transformation based on Just Transition principles can meet UK climate commitments while protecting livelihoods and economic well-being, provided that the right policies are adopted, and that the affected workers, trade unions and communities are able to effectively guide these policies.

- The UK's 5.7 billion barrels of oil and gas in already-operating oil and gas fields will exceed the UK's share in relation to Paris climate goals - whereas industry and government aim to extract 20 billion barrels.
- Recent subsidies for oil and gas extraction will add twice as much carbon to the atmosphere as the phase-out of coal power saves.
- With the right policies, job creation in clean energy industries will exceed affected oil and gas jobs more than threefold.



The study calls on the government *'to open formal consultations with trade unions to develop and implement a Just Transition strategy for oil-dependent regions and communities.'*

Read the Sea Change report here: <http://priceofoil.org/sea-change>

## Supporting the Greener Jobs Alliance

The GJA is a loose coalition of organisations involved in climate change work. We wish to make it clear that the views expressed in our publications and activities do not necessarily reflect the position of all the organisations whom we work with. We will always seek to make that clear by listing the organisations that have specifically signed up to a particular initiative.