

## TUC Supplement September 2023

### Planet at 'boiling point'. We need to act now

This Year's TUC is meeting at a time when the head of the UN says in all seriousness, *'the era of global boiling has arrived.'* Fossil fuel companies are making record profits and investments in oil, and arguing for a delay to Net Zero to the next century. Financiers are backing off from sustainability commitments that impact on profits. And Sunak's government is shamefully rowing back on green targets in an attempt to use them as a 'wedge' issue in the General Election. The UK is a long way behind major economies like the EU and US in funding the energy transition and China will be investing twice as much next year as the EU and US put together. The need is to catch up, not backslide.

For the Tory MPs and talking heads who say it's not *"realistic"* to make the changes we need to make now, requires a delusion that there is no consequence of delaying action. But, without urgent action now, we will face even worse consequences than we are witnessing across the boiling planet this year. A US report as long ago as 2008 predicted that as the climate breaks down *"Governments with resources will be forced to engage in long, nightmarish episodes of triage; deciding what and who can be salvaged from engulfment by a disordered environment. The choices will need to be made primarily among the poorest, not just abroad but at home."*

That couldn't be clearer. The more we delay, the greater the danger that governments representing those *"with resources"*, the very people who have caused the crisis, will decide who can and can't be *"salvaged"*, leaving *"the poorest"* to go under, *"not just abroad but at home."*

**The need for leadership from the labour movement has never been clearer. We all need to step up!**



Photo by Mick Holder

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# Motions dealing directly with the Climate Crisis

**UNISON's A tipping point in the climate emergency – we need to act now** (Motion 16) hits the nail on the head, recognising the accelerating pace of the crisis, calling for the *“UK government to recommit to introduce a Just Transition Commission with dedicated ministerial oversight and representatives from all stakeholders including unions’ and ‘continue lobbying employers and governments for facility time for green reps.”* This is aimed as much at the next government as the present one and one aspect of implementing it should be a drive from every union to set up Just Transition structures with the relevant Shadow Minister so the plans that will need to be in place to “ramp up” to the pledged £28 billion a year investment needed to regenerate the economy on a sustainable basis can be hammered out before the election and provide part of the momentum into it. All such bodies could be coordinated through the National Climate Service that PCS have proposed. The proposed Green Reps seminar in 2024 under the TUC’s aegis will be a good way to pull this together.

**UNITE's Unplug the profiteers - the case for public democratic ownership of energy** (Motion 18) makes the essential point that *“Public, democratic ownership of the entire energy network can end profiteering, make energy affordable for all, and create new jobs in a sustainable industry”* and that *“Public ownership of energy could have saved the UK nearly £45bn in 2022, over £1,800 per household.”* The call to *“support full public, democratic ownership of the energy network in the interests of workers and our communities.”* is clearly directed at the next government, and TUC support for this motion will strengthen the hand of those at the Labour Party conference pushing for this.

The amendment from the RMT stresses the need to *“use sectoral collective bargaining and public ownership to assist just transition in the offshore energy sector guaranteeing retraining and unionised jobs on equivalent terms and conditions”*; with the latter as optimal but the former as the bottom line.

**RMT's Solidarity with transport workers and a renewed campaign for better public transport** (Motion 12) *“condemns the government’s chaotic mismanagement of public transport in Britain, which is damaging our economy and our ability to meet our carbon emission reduction targets”* and calls for *“a massive growth in public transport use, delivered by a huge increase in funding, such as outlined in the TUC/transport unions-commissioned report Public Transport Fit for the Climate Emergency”* and *“an integrated, publicly owned and accountable rail, bus and ferry network.”*

The amendment from UNITE calling for *“a just transition with full worker participation to a sustainable transport system based on secure jobs, good wages and decent working conditions”* which notes the run down of bus services and shortage of bus drivers reinforces the thrust of the UNISON motion, and the TSSA amendment calling for *“a massive investment in a skilled transport workforce for a just transition and decarbonisation as part of a national climate service”* underlines the point that investing in transition is not just about *“shovel ready projects”*, but planning and acting to skill up the workforce to make those projects possible. Their call for *“electrifying all of the rail network and putting freight onto rail”* sets another challenge for an incoming government to plan a timetable for doing so with the unions in the sector.

**ASLEF's Invest in Rail** (Motion 13) underlines the point that current rail investment levels are insufficient to sustain existing infrastructure, let alone improve it and calls for the TUC to *“champion public transport and rail freight when highlighting how to tackle the climate emergency.”* Investing to maintain existing rail infrastructure is an immediate use for investment funds for an incoming government, if this one persists with its current malign neglect, but wholesale electrification and freight transfer will require pre planning through a Just transition body that the unions in the sector should be pushing for. It also pushes for HS2 to be completed to ensure high speed rail connectivity between major cities.

**Nautilus's Charting a just transition for maritime professionals** (Motion 17) recognises that the *“shipping industry achieving net-zero by 2050 will require innovative technologies and the use of alternative fuels”* and therefore this requires *“the government to future proof skills and training of maritime professionals by ensuring skills and training are fully accessible and fully funded”*, with trade union involvement in *“the procurement and design of new vessels”* to secure safety at sea and for the government to work with other member states at the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) for regulations for the implementation and use of alternative fuels” and for collective bargaining in offshore energy. Again, this is a challenge for an incoming government to set all this in train, and poses the need for the relevant unions and Shadow Ministers to meet to make the plans now.



**Community's Steel and national security** (Motion 11) calls for investment to secure a “*sustainable domestic steel industry*” with a “strategic plan of support” from government “*including the transition toward sustainable steel, recognising the importance of keeping open all green steelmaking technology solutions, and fair energy pricing*”. Steel is an essential resource for transition and all sorts of manufacturing, so it is a pity that this is primarily framed around supporting arms manufacture and “*national security*” posed primarily in military terms, when climate breakdown is a more certain threat; which could limit support from the many unions that see this as inextricably bound up with overseas interventions and war crimes in Yemen.

**USDAW's amendment to the CWU's Technology in the workplace** (Motion 42) makes the essential point that for the training and re-education needed to make the transition there needs to be a “*significant and long-term investment in skills and retraining, including a fundamental overhaul of the Apprenticeship Levy and recognition of the vital role of trade unions and union learning reps in encouraging workers to take up training opportunities*.” An employer led training system subordinates the needs of the transition to the vagaries of the market. The training we need can only be led by a plan that integrates targets with provision and training on an escalating basis.

## Motions that need a climate dimension

There are a number of motions that would be strengthened by a necessary link to the climate crisis. Perhaps these points could be raised in the debate.

**NASUWT's Affordable Housing for key workers** and Equity's **Secure, affordable housing for all workers** rightly address the chronic shortage of affordable housing, but it should now be a reflex in the movement that we insist explicitly that any new construction has to be not only “*high quality*” as the USDAW amendment rightly argues, but zero carbon, as part of affordability is low energy bills, and built in communities that allow workers to get to work “*without prohibitive transport costs*”, as the USDAW amendment puts it. That means 20 minute neighbourhoods and concentrating high density housing near transport hubs, or building the hubs into the new developments where they are big enough.

**NAHT's Standing of Education in the UK** (Motion 58) notes the lack of “*vision for high quality 21st century public education*” expressed in “*failure to invest in the school workforce and estate*” and a “*complete lack of energy, enthusiasm and dynamism from a government that appears to have run out of ideas*.” This would be strengthened by a demand for government to properly implement Article 12 of the Paris Agreement, that requires a wholesale education campaign across the whole of society so that we not only understand the reality of the climate crisis but are working together to transform our society so that it has a future. That would be an energising mission that fits the needs of the 21st century and it involves the sort of far-ranging debate about everything about the way we live and what we value that terrifies the current government; who prefer despair to any hope that might threaten their paymasters.

This is touched on by **UCUs Education; ensuring all political parties put students and staff first for the 2024 general election** (Motion 62) which stresses the “*vital importance of post-16 education in creating a fairer society in the UK, and developing the skilled workforce we need to build a greener future*” but it's important that we don't just pose this as a technical question of specific skills needed for specific jobs, but frame in within an overall educational mission to green our whole society - so workers retrofitting know why they are doing it as well as what they do, and so does everyone else.

Similarly, the **Artist Union's A national coordinated creative arts policy** (Motion 8) notes “*ecological change affecting work and non-work*” and there is an absolute centrality of the creative imagination in confronting this to think beyond the limits of “*realism*” and the way we've always done things; possibly another reason the current government undermines it, wanting us all in “pragmatic” blinkers.

**The Musicians Union's AI** (Motion 43) CWU's **Technology in the workplace** (motion 42) NUJ's **Artificial Intelligence** (motion 44) and Aegis's **Impact of AI on financial services** (Motion 45) also relate to this as they all warn of the dangers of wholesale replacement of human creative labour with machines; with the additional element that this will be in areas that have hitherto required original human thought and interaction. The extent to which this is replaced by systems of glorified sampling will take us further away from a society based on deepening human interaction and deeper into an ultimately sterile machine mediation of everything; an apotheosis of alienation.

## Trades Union Congress fringe meeting

# The case for a National Climate Service: reorganising the state for the climate emergency, people and public ownership

**Sunday 10 September 6.30 pm - 7.45 pm. Room 4a**

The impacts of climate breakdown are intensifying: more than ever, a rapid transition away from fossil fuels is needed. But this government's failure to address the crisis has left ordinary people facing soaring energy bills, and crucial infrastructure like public transport failing, while energy giants pocket obscene profits. A transformation is needed.

A National Climate and Biodiversity Service could deliver on decarbonisation and biodiversity targets at the pace and scale demanded by science.

By providing coherence and coordination across government, including devolved, regional and local government, a NCS will organise, plan, train and deliver the huge number of jobs required for a rapid and far reaching transition that puts economic and social justice for workers and communities at its heart.

### Chair:

Tahir Latif Greener Jobs Alliance

### Speakers:

John Maloney PCS,  
Stephen Smellie UNISON  
Suzanne Jeffery CACCTU

***NB This meeting is only open to TUC delegates. If you are going to the TUC it will be great to see you there.***

Organised by,

