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Editorial: Short term decisions for a catastrophic future

Rishi Sunak's decision to back off even further from climate mitigation plans already condemned as inadequate and illegal in the courts, to generate a political backlash to garner his failing government a few votes, takes the Conservative Party a step further towards the realms of delirious denial inhabited by Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro and Javier Milei on the crackpot far right.



The Tories update their logo

Sunak continues to pay lip service to Net Zero by 2050, but the Rosebank oil and gas field alone will burn through the whole of the remaining **UK carbon budget** for oil and gas use if allowed to develop. The UK exceeding this limit means the government wants other countries to do more as we do less. The same will apply to an incoming Labour government that “honours” new oil and gas licences.

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Those who say it doesn't matter what the UK does because we are “only” 1% of global emissions forget that,

- if every country said that we'd all be up the spout in no time
- we are 2% of global emissions by consumption (twice our fair share)
- and 7% of historic emissions (seven times our fair share).

So we have no business expecting a free pass from other, mostly poorer, countries.

This comes as the [International Energy Agency](#) has spelt out that we can still keep below the 1.5C limit as long as wealthy countries like the UK increase their targets and actions with a new aim to get to Net Zero by 2045. Globally this means:

- no new oil and gas exploration,
- a 25% drop in fossil fuel use by 2030,
- investment in fossil fuels restricted to efficiency and cutting emissions only,
- Renewable energy tripled by 2030.

In the labour and trade union movement we also have to be clear. If we try to dig into the same denialist trench as Sunak we will be buried in it. The faster fossil fuels can be phased out, the more we limit the damage they cause.

And that needs a plan. Even with new investment, production and employment in the North Sea will decline unless there is a just transition to employment in offshore renewables. That transition won't be gifted to us on a plate by the employers or the government. We will have to develop those ourselves and unite to fight for them, building on the work already done by [Platform and FOE Scotland](#).

Labour's pledge to reverse most of the Conservative retreats will reduce their impact; but agreeing to delay the phase out of gas boilers enfeebles the drive to cut household emissions, and pledging to honour new licences in the North Sea gives the Tories carte blanche to approve lots of them. [See our blog here](#) on the campaign to oppose them.

The GJA will be writing to union General Secretaries over the next month to seek commitments on recognising the imperative nature of the science and proactive steps to draw up and fight for the just transition plans we need. Watch this space...

Paul Atkin Ed



Questions for Rachel Reeves and Keir Starmer

This summer Rachel Reeves announced that Labour's plan to bring the UK up to the European average by investing £28 billion a year into green transition would be subject to "fiscal rules" that meant they would have to "ramp up" to get there. This poses a number of questions.

1. As we are in a climate emergency does this not require emergency measures?
2. As fiscal rules apply to unfunded expenditure, how do they apply to investment that has a return?
3. If there is a failure to invest on the same scale as the EU and the USA won't the UK become a deindustrialised backwater as the private sector investment you want to attract is drawn elsewhere?
4. £6 billion a year will be needed to meet your pledge on insulating homes: is this an irreducible bottom line?
5. As unnamed Shadow Ministers have been quoted in the press arguing that some investment in, for example, housing and transport will be needed that are not part of "the net zero agenda", how will you make sure that any investment that could contribute to net zero does; as any investment that is not part of the solution is part of the problem?*
6. If your plan is to "ramp up", what are your plans to do so, at what point will you start, with how much investment in what projects, who are you consulting with, and how do you calibrate the return on the investment?

If the anticipated problem is a lack of government income, why are you not planning to tax the energy producing companies on every penny of their windfall profits?

*An example that links the two is what kind of housing development Labour will push. There is a world of difference between

- the current paradigm of cookie cutter, ticky-tacky houses with poor insulation, with the maximum number of units squeezed in so developers can get the biggest possible profits, built in the green belt in car dependent "amazon deserts" (like an American suburb but meaner)
- and 15 minute neighbourhoods built as communities with all necessary facilities within walking distance, good public transport links to larger centres; and made up of homes built at zero carbon standard with very low energy use and bills.

Being in support of "*the builders not the blockers*" without legislating the latter as standard will mean that the next generation of mass house building will follow the line of least resistance – with developers cutting corners, skimping on materials, maximising units and profitability; and dumping the ensuing problems on a future that is getting shorter and more threatening all the time. Ed

What we need from Labour

As the dust settles on the announcements by Rishi Sunak to roll back on net zero policy, this should be the wake-up call for every socialist, trade unionist, and climate campaigner to unite around a common agenda of real economic and social justice, and a publicly owned transition plan – a national plan that addresses carbon emissions, air quality and wider environmental concerns, jobs and social justice, and one which is democratically negotiated with trade unions and with the participation of communities and campaigners.

[Read on at our debate blog here.](#)

Ireland shows the way

The country's planning authority last month refused a [proposal](#) for a liquefied natural gas import terminal on the Shannon estuary and a related gas-fired power plant, after taking into consideration policies outlined in [Ireland's energy and climate action plan](#). The strategy calls for the country to reduce greenhouse gas emissions annually by 7% on average between 2021 and 2030.

"It is considered that the development at this time would be contrary to current government policy", according to the [board decision](#).

[Read more on Bloomberg](#)

Letter to the Prime Minister: The new approach to net zero

Yorkshire and Humber Just Transition Network

TUC Yorkshire &
the Humber

We are writing to you to express our shock and disappointment at your announcement on Wednesday (20 September) to delay key elements of the UK's decarbonisation plan and to urge you to reconsider.

As members of the Yorkshire and Humber Just Transition Network, with cumulative expertise and insights from a huge variety of workplaces, cities, and trade unions across the region of Yorkshire and the Humber, we recognise the damage that your announcement will make to our and others' collective efforts to decarbonise our region and realise the advantages of decarbonisation.

In particular, we must condemn your characterisation of decarbonisation as an international competition where the UK, because we have been quicker to reduce carbon emissions from energy generation than other countries over the last few decades, have bought time to slow down now. As you must know, UK and international targets have not been set to allow business-as-usual until a specific date. The scientific imperative is to decarbonise as swiftly as possible with net zero being achieved by or before the target date. The science is clear that we must pursue a path of maximum abatement and mobilise efforts to decarbonise as rapidly as possible. That other countries have not been able to move as quickly as the UK is a problem, not a reason for us to slow down.

In addition, we must condemn the framing of your announcement as fairer for UK citizens. Fairness and justice for the people of our country during this transition will not be achieved by delaying action and further endangering their health and livelihoods, but by enabling us to decarbonise quickly and under principles of equity, whereby more assistance is made available to those with the greater need for help, including those who work in carbon-intensive sectors, those who live below sea level, and those unable to afford efficiency upgrades to their homes or businesses. Your decision, in particular, to disincentivise investment in homes retrofit leaves the majority of us in cold, inefficiently heated, and damp homes, and (according to the Social Market Foundation) will cost us at least £1bn more a year in heating costs, while doing nothing to allow the able-to-pay to increasingly live in greater comfort and health for lower running costs, increasing inequality and decreasing the opportunities for social mobility and levelling up.

Finally, as working people and elected representatives of working people, we are dismayed to find you diminishing incentives for businesses and public bodies to innovate and create new jobs in the green economy. The production of EVs, the establishment of new travel infrastructure, the homes retrofit market, and investment in green energy production in particular have all been practically deprioritised by your Uturn (whether you say that they have or not). Recent analysis by the TUC has shown that 800,000 new green jobs could emerge from this transition, but your new approach risks costing us these jobs and risks resulting in less training taking place to prepare us for the future.

We urge you to reconsider your decision and support a just, fair, swift, and effective transition to a green economy for the benefit of all the citizens of Yorkshire and the Humber.

Yours sincerely,

Yorkshire and Humber Just Transition Network

A Yorkshire and Humber Collective of Trade Union Green Activists and Allies

Most drivers support 20mph speed limits



Heading for a smash. Rishi thinks he can pimp his ride, burn rubber and jump the lights.

Sunak described Wales' new default 20mph speed limit as *“absolutely not right”* and saying: *“It doesn’t reflect people’s priorities.”* Commons leader Penny Mordaunt had previously called the scheme *“absolutely insane”*.

But **research** commissioned by the Department for Transport in 2018 found that

- *“20mph limits are supported by the majority of residents and drivers”*. In areas that had introduced 20mph zones: *“The majority of residents (78%) and non-resident drivers (67%) felt that 20mph was an appropriate speed for the area”*
- *“There is little call for the limit to be changed back to 30mph (12% support amongst residents and 21% amongst non-resident drivers)”* and that the introduction of 20mph zones encouraged residents to use other forms of transportation or walk more often.

From **Open Democracy**.

Defend School Streets

With support from their local councils, schools across the country are stopping motor traffic from driving right up to the school gates at pick up and drop off times. These popular School Streets schemes make it safer for children to walk, scoot and cycle to school, breathing cleaner air on calmer roads.

But now the prime minister wants to strip councils of the powers they need to enforce School Streets, threatening the safety of children across the country.

Please **SIGN** and **SHARE Possible's petition** to the UK government to protect School Streets today.



Green Bargaining Conference

Working for Climate Justice: a free one day conference

Friday 27 October, 2023

This conference on green bargaining strategies will bring together trade union organisers, academics and campaigners.

Industrial production systems have created climate change. Employers and their organisations continue to delay and put obstacles in the way of taking the necessary action. Our starting point is that workers and their trade unions must develop a collective bargaining approach to climate change and environmental degradation. A collective response from trade unions will be decisive in taking the action necessary to mitigate climate change.

Speakers include:

Linda Clarke, University of Westminster, Zak Coleman, SOS-UK, Ben Crawford, London School of Economics, Rosemary Harris, Platform, Wolfgang Kuchler, Campaign Against Climate Change, Sam Mason, PCS, Chris McLachlan, QMUL, Jake Molloy, RMT, John Moloney, PCS, Georgia Montague-Nelson, Global Labour Institute, Janet Newsham, Hazards and TUCAN, Tonia Novitz, University of Bristol, Declan Owens, Greener Jobs Alliance, Marie Petersmann, London School of Economics, Marianne Quick, UCU, Chris Saltmarsh, Labour for a Green New Deal, Hilary Wainwright, Red Pepper, Andrew Watterson, University of Stirling, David Whyte, QMUL and Sarah Wooley, BFAWU.

[Register here.](#)

National Bargaining for a Just Transition in Further Education

In 2020 UCU launched a Green New Deal bargaining guide for branches in Colleges and Universities – a detailed guide, together with reps training, to support branches to submit model claims on climate related issues to employers at a workplace level.

Following COP 26 and an opportunity to learn from some of our sister unions internationally, we wanted to explore how we can advance a GND and Just Transition for an education workforce – bargaining for the future at a national level at the depth and speed that is so desperately needed.

This development coincided with the formation of the democratic internal committee at UCU Climate & Ecological Emergency Committee – which has helped to establish the necessary policy to elevate a national claim outline based on GND and Just Transition principles.

Our policy is to embed climate demands in collective bargaining and to support local level claims across post-16 education. We understand the fight for a just transition must include every sector, worker, and community.

At the time of writing, Further Education members across England are balloting over pay and conditions. The five heads of claim include a comprehensive demand for a national **Green New Deal agreement on a Just Transition**. This comes directly from our membership and has the buy-in of all unions who bargain together for FE in England (UCU, GMB, NEU, Unison, Unite). As part of the Joint Trades Unions Further Education pay claim 2023/24 a proposal was put forward that:

“A National Green New Deal Agreement on a Just Transition for the sector which will include a Just Transition Commission in FE. The scope of which could include sustainability, new skills, climate justice and a road map to achieving a carbon neutral sector by 2030.”

The employer body agreed to scoping talks on this demand which began in September and a Terms of Reference drafted.

It is envisaged that this joint approach will address key issues facing the FE workforce including protecting jobs with a move away from certain areas of study and towards new areas; addressing skills, terms & conditions, and pay; identifying skills gaps and skill needs for a Just Transition; Identifying opportunities for employment within FE and the role of FE to support a Just Transition.

Other areas will include:

- Green Skills Demands
- FE Curriculum
- FE Estate, Fixed Assets, Supply Chain, and Local/Regional Impact
- Governance, Leadership & Best Practice

It is hoped that final recommendations arising out of this work will be ready for sector wide consultation in the spring of 2024.

As workers, as unions, we must take proactive, immediate steps to collectively bargain for our future: to prevent and mitigate what damage we can, and ensure a future structured to create equality, job security, employment rights, pensions – for all. We cannot afford further delays.

Marianne Quick UCU

Building it Green #2



Ireland Photo:..Courtesy WWETB Enniscorthy NZEB centre Ireland

The Vocational Education and Training (VET) system has strengths and weaknesses in each country.

- The construction curriculum of the Swedish school based system is underpinned by climate literacy and the inclusion of transversal abilities, it is insufficiently detailed.
- The curriculum of the largely school-based Belgian system succeeds in mainstreaming Nearly Zero Energy Building (NZEB) elements, breaking down broad occupational profiles into knowledge, know-how and attitudes and developing transversal abilities, so facilitating trainees to work independently and in teams across broad interfaces. Yet, climate literacy is not directly embraced.
- Germany has the advantage of a stepped programme of gradual specialisation, helping trainees to understand the whole building envelope and covering climate change relating to different occupations, but is weakened by low unionisation and dependence on individual employers taking on trainees.
- Though the market-constrained VET systems of Ireland and Britain, where unions play a marginal role, are disadvantaged in their ability to meet NZEB

requirements and incorporate climate and energy literacy in curricula, they are less constrained in developing new initiatives.

- In Ireland, though curricula lack emphasis on climate literacy, the state is pivotal in supporting NZEB and a training programme for construction workers has been successfully rolled out nationally.
- In Britain, though suffering from insistence on an employer-based VET system, lack of regulation and narrow curricula, unions play a role in promoting NZEB elements in building services curricula, and politically accountable local authority direct labour building departments together with the FE colleges provide an alternative model.

So, VET systems for construction vary considerably. Those that are 'school-based' rely on work placements to provide work experience and those participating have the status of students. In the Danish social partner-based system, those training are regarded as 'apprentices', but the construction occupations remain rather demarcated, especially the carpenters. In Germany, VET is conceived as a sector of tertiary education and those participating have the status of 'trainee' as distinct from apprentice.

In Britain, the employer-based system, undermines the number of apprentices, certainly in the construction sector, as the work-based training infrastructure erodes through self employment and extensive subcontracting; so full-time trainees in FE colleges struggle to obtain the necessary work experience.

What is notable is that high levels of unionisation, in the cases of Sweden and Belgium, go together with school-based systems, whilst the German system remains social partner-based despite low levels of unionisation.

In Denmark, with its high level of unionisation, apprentices may also lose their employment given the fragmentation of the labour market, and so cease to be 'apprentices' until colleges succeed in finding an alternative.

This is replicated across Europe, accentuated by labour shortages, so that, with the free movement of labour in the EU and the multinational nature of many construction firms, the construction labour market increasingly becomes a European-wide labour market.

The European Qualifications Framework, intended to facilitate the recognition of different qualifications, has succeeded in establishing an equivalence in terms of the level of qualification across Europe and in framing the qualifications of the different VET systems in terms of knowledge, skills and competences or attitudes. But it has not succeeded in establishing core competences for different occupations and ignores the scope, breadth or depth of knowledge, skills and competences embedded in the different occupational profiles.

It is generally accepted across Europe, especially by the unions, that to become a skilled construction worker requires at least three years VET, and for the building services closer to four years, to obtain a Level 3 or 4 qualification. What differs is the nature of the VET provided.

- In Sweden, students spend most time in a classroom or workshop setting, and work experience comes mainly later, particularly in the fourth and fifth year of training as an apprentice in a firm.
- In Denmark, VET alternates in blocks, with the classroom and workshop (or simulated) element lasting many months at the beginning, even up to a year, and only gradually reducing.
- In Germany, VET is divided almost equally between classroom, workshop and workplace, again on a block release basis.
- In Britain, in contrast apprenticeships rely largely on day release to a college, though this was not the case up to the 1990s, when the popular Standard Scheme for construction training was in place, consisting of blocks of approximately 13 weeks.

With the growing requirement for higher levels of qualification, as the labour process becomes more abstract and requires greater knowledge, know-how and precision, the classroom and workshop elements of VET have inevitably increased, not least because of the pressures of working on site, the difficulties of providing adequate work experience, and the importance of developing a climate and energy literate workforce.

The **Building it Green European report** was produced by the European partners of the Climate Industry and Research Team (CIRT) for the project, *Climate Literacy for Construction: Integrating climate literacy into the construction trades to prepare the construction workforce to better meet Canada's climate change commitment, coming under SkillPlan for the Canadian Building Trade Unions.*

The Report was compiled by Melahat Sahin-Dikmen, Christopher Winch and Linda Clarke of the **University of Westminster PROBE team**

Community energy

Where local communities directly own and profit from renewable energy projects built in their area, is a radical alternative to how our energy system works, and who shares in its rewards.

As multinational oil and gas companies are making record profits, community energy schemes are using their profits to cut bills and invest in community projects – while powering nearly 200,000 homes across the country with green energy.

If you're in England, you can use this [Local Power Locator](#) to check if there are any community energy schemes in your area and if not, join the voices calling on the Government to do more to back community energy.

From Co-operative Party

BP sponsorship of British Museum ends

After 18 years **BP's sponsorship of the British Museum's exhibitions is over.**

14 leading UK institutions - including the Tate, the National Portrait Gallery, the Royal Opera House and the Royal Shakespeare Company - have now cut their ties to fossil fuels since 2016.

BP's sponsorship of the arts is a strategy to "artwash" its toxic reputation, but this created a platform to expose it. Now, the pressure is on the Science Museum, which is still partnering with BP, as well as the oil and gas firm Equinor which aims to develop Rosebank and coal-producing conglomerate Adani.



We Make Tomorrow

The climate crisis will define politics and economics throughout this century, impacting working people in every way. From fast rising prices to food shortages, industrial change to floods and fires. The transition is underway but led by corporate interests at the expense of workers. Now more than ever we need to build workers power, to halt industrial pollution and win a fast and fair, worker led transition.

We Make Tomorrow is a one day conference for building workers power on climate and crisis.

[Get tickets here.](#)

Organised by the Trade Union Caucus of the Climate Justice Coalition, We Make Tomorrow will bring together workers in key sectors with trade union officials, climate justice activists and scientists to explore what climate change means for us and what we should do about it.



COP 28: Global Day of Action

Saturday 9 December is the Global day of Action

Politicians at COP28 must face extra pressure to shift the world away from fossil fuels.

There will be events across the UK.

Full details in the next Newsletter.



Green Bites

2 x

Heat pumps are twice as efficient as gas boilers in cold weather

40%

Increase in renewable energy investment in the last 2 years

25%

How much oil and gas use has to drop by 2030 to keep on target for <1.5C

£92m

The amount that the 20mph speed limit in Wales could reduce costs to the NHS and emergency services.

1%

Proportion of 18-24 year olds considering voting Conservative.

Quotes of the Month

“Advanced economies have special responsibilities in fighting climate change. What I would expect advanced economies to do is to increase their ambition further, rather than reducing it.”

Fatih Birol Executive Director International Energy Agency

...”the UK is part of a tiny club of wealthy countries that, while professing to lead on climate, is massively expanding oil and gas production. Just five nations – the US, Canada, Australia, Norway and the UK – are responsible for over half of all planned oil and gas field developments from now to 2050.”

Tessa Khan Uplift

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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.