



Image by Filmbetrachter from Pixabay

Editorial: Getting ourselves on the right side of history

With 2023 the hottest year on record, we know that however severe the consequences of the climate crisis are this year, it will be worse next year. As Prof Andrew Dessler of Texas A&M University put it, *“every year for the rest of your life will be one of the hottest on record...2023 will end up being one of the coldest years this century. Enjoy it while it lasts.”*

Failure to take adequate mitigation action leads to higher adaptation costs. The current floods in the UK are a small but indicative local example. Regulations to create “sponge cities”, with planned areas of greenery, trees, ponds, pocket parks, soakaways and permeable paving etc, were due from 2011, but delayed until 2015, then dropped because they would be too costly for developers.

So, increasingly intense rainfall has nowhere else to go but to overwhelm drainage systems, leading to floods and regular discharges of raw sewage, leading to far greater costs for everyone affected.

What Rishi Sunak calls a *“proportionate and pragmatic”* way to deal with the climate crisis adds up to a series of false economies like this.

The same applies to the notion that “fiscal rules” are more of an imperative than sufficient investment to prevent ecological breakdown; which will look pretty ridiculous if we are lucky enough to still be here in 50 years time.

The same applies to the COP decisions. The slow pace of mitigation is leading to increasingly expensive impacts and, therefore, adaptation costs that could have been avoided.

We need COPs because they are the annual focus for monitoring how bad the crisis is getting, with the UN mobilising the scientific evidence and governments being dragged much too slowly in the right direction, but with fossil fuel vested interests trying to drag them back and put our futures at risk. They show where everyone is standing, and what they are doing (and not doing).

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By the time of the next COP in November these impacts will be even more severe, it is possible that there will be a change of government in the UK, and every possibility that the Second Coming of Donald Trump will lead to the USA going full on rogue state by withdrawing from the Paris Agreement again; a definitive abandonment of any pretence to “American global leadership”.

In the UK, a defeated Tory Party is liable to definitively follow suit; turning to rabid nationalism as a way of denying reality with regular infusions of hallucinogenic nostalgia and war mongering.

By the time of the next COP, the trade union movement in this country will also have had the opportunity to put itself unambiguously on the right side of history on this question through passing versions of the model motion below, and acting on it.

We will be discussing all this and more at our AGM in February (see below). Please come along, or zoom in, and have your say.

Paul Atkin Ed

Pass this Motion for climate action!

This motion is for trade union branches, trades councils, AGMs and annual conferences, and TUC 2024.

It aims to settle the fundamentals for the climate debate within and between trade unions, in the interests of workers across the whole of society.

It begins,

“Conference affirms that climate change is a class issue and a trade union issue” and goes on from there. Please take it, or a tailored adaptation of it, to your union at whatever level you can.

The [wording of the motion is here](#).

If you pass it at a meeting, AGM or conference, please let us know on the form at the bottom of [this link](#).

Greener Jobs Alliance AGM

Tuesday 13 February at 12 noon

In person at UCU HQ, Carlow Street, Camden, London N1

Or online via zoom

- Speakers from the Green and Labour Party to be confirmed.
- Debate on union policy around Steel and energy industries, with a TUC speaker (also tbc)

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.



ITUC on COP28: Progress for a just transition but big gaps remain

The ITUC welcomes the inclusion of references to labour rights and social protection in the Just Transition Work Programme adopted at the COP28 climate talks and recognition of the continuing work undertaken by trade unions around the world to tackle climate change.

Nevertheless, the absence of any reference to workers and their unions in the key COP28 “Global Stocktake”, which tracks progress in countries around the world, is a significant omission and indicates the scale of the work required to ensure its inclusion in the coming years.

Worrying gaps remain in the global ambition to keep the world temperature rise under 1.5C, and the lack of an overall commitment to fully engage with trade unions in transitioning away from fossil fuels and in other vital areas of climate action will hinder progress, as it risks leaving workers and their communities behind.

While the formation of the Loss and Damage Fund is a positive step, efforts must be made to ensure it is financed adequately to support less wealthy countries to invest in mitigation projects that will reduce the impacts of global warming and undo the damage already being done to lives, livelihoods, infrastructure and the biosphere.

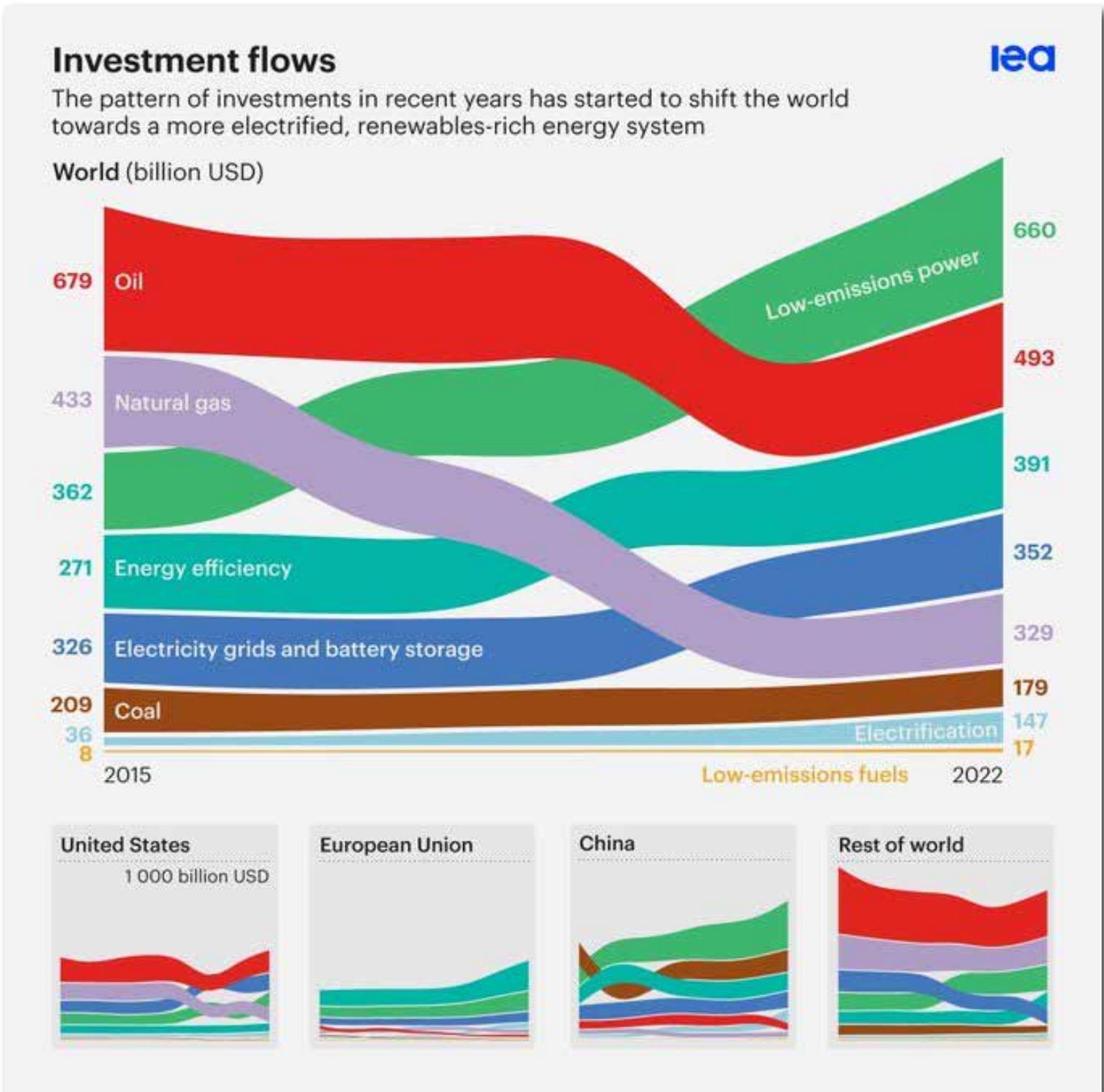
ITUC General Secretary Luc Triangle said: *“We are resolute in our commitment to continue and increase our action for a just transition to a sustainable future for humanity and the ecosystem.”*

Some progress has been made at this COP, however, much more needs to be done. The fact that certain countries continue to block any reference to unions in the Global Stocktake and elsewhere reflects poorly on those countries and, more importantly, will hold back progress.

Government climate negotiators have recognised that explicit reference to labour rights, decent work, quality jobs and social protection is necessary. However, sufficient financing must be delivered coherently and the [ILO Just Transition Guidelines](#), agreed by tripartite discussions between union, government and employer representatives, need to be put into practice.”



IEA: Energy investment flows in the world and the three major continental economies



This IEA graph is essential background to the positions taken at COP indicating who is investing how much in what.

Gaza at COP



Photo: Alisdare Hickson www.flickr.com/photos/alisdare/

The latest bulletin by [Trade Unions for Energy Democracy](#) is a detailed summary of all unions actions in solidarity with Palestine including this account of mobilisation at COP28.

A protest broke out on the fourth day of the conference, with participants calling for an immediate and permanent ceasefire in Palestine. Colombian president Gustavo Petro drew a link between the climate crisis and the ongoing attacks on Palestine:

“What we see in Gaza is a rehearsal of the future...Perhaps if we see a free Palestine emerge among the spoils today, we will be able to see a living humanity emerge tomorrow amidst the spoils of the climate crisis.”

On December 8, the largest of COP28’s protests took place as hundreds marched behind a banner reading “Ceasefire Now”. [Full report here.](#)

Hopeful Chinese Whispers

Despite remaining the largest consumer of coal, China positioned itself as the [largest producer of renewable energy](#) for yet another year. In 2023, China built as much new solar capacity as the total installed capacity in the US.

The country [controls](#) more than 80% of the global solar panel supply chain and can manufacture more than twice the annual global demand.

By 2023, installed battery storage capacity [exceeded](#) the total added in the last decade. With the announcement or start-up of solar and wind power construction, China will exceed [clean energy targets](#) five years ahead of schedule. China’s carbon dioxide emissions are expected to decline next year as a result of record growth in new energy sources. [From Dongsheng](#)

Climate Collateral: militarism in the climate crisis

The Climate+Community Project, the Transnational Institute (TNI), Commonwealth, and War on Want have produced a powerful webinar breaking down the relationship between war and climate change that can be [viewed here.](#)

[Analysis](#) by TPNS and TNI showed that if NATO succeeds in its push to ensure member countries earmark 2% of their GDP for military spending, \$2.57 trillion will be diverted away from climate spending by 2028. “This would be enough to pay for climate adaptation costs for all low- and middle-income countries for seven years.”

Revealed: Colonial rule nearly doubles UK’s historical contribution to climate change, [Carbon Brief](#)

GKN workers in Firenze, Italy - For a worker led Just Transition!



Logo of the Workers Coop, showing the cargo bikes and solar panels they aim to make.

Readers will remember the struggle at GKN Driveline in Birmingham, where UNITE members tried to resist the closure and mass sackings imposed by GKN owners Melrose, a UK based private equity company, by developing a workers' plan for making components for Electric Vehicles. Perhaps because of the support this plan gathered, and its potential viability, it was rejected out of hand by management.

As GKN Firenz convenor Dario Salvetti puts it

“[Our bosses] have to show that they are free to close down the factory whenever they want, for any reason they want and there’s no discussion about it. It’s a struggle of who controls the society. They don’t care about one factory, but they have to show that they are the boss”.

The Birmingham factory closed with the loss of over 500 skilled jobs but with an enhanced redundancy package. See reports in GJA Newsletters 34 and 37 for background.

But, in Italy, the mass redundancies at GKNs Firenz factory were found to be illegal after the company was taken to court by the FIOM-CGIL metal workers union and the workers there have occupied their factory since July 2021 - the longest running factory occupation (permanent assembly) in Italian history.

They want to transition production away from auto parts to cargo bikes and solar panels, and to bring the company into collective worker ownership.

In December 2021, they set up a technical scientific committee that is composed of university researchers

and developed industrial plans to set out what the factory could produce that would benefit the planet. In autumn, they made two cargo bike prototypes that will be used to link up rural farmers with food delivery cooperatives in cities.

They have also met with a start-up to investigate making solar panels without using lithium, silicon and cobalt: **minerals that chuck out billions of tonnes of carbon dioxide when mined for, often in precarious working conditions.**

Watch the Reel news film or read this **summary of the struggle so far from Progressive International** to find out more.

News has just come in that the deadline for the cooperative application has been extended to 30 June, and the share appeal has so far secured 600,000 euros of the one million needed. An **update on the latest situation is on Facebook here.** Ed



For a Just Transition in Steel

In September the government and Tata, who own the steel making plant at Port Talbot in South Wales, announced a plan to replace the existing coke powered blast furnaces with a single 3 Megaton Electric Arc Furnace. This would require an investment of £500 million from the UK government and a further £750 million from Tata and would lead to 3,000 workers out of the current 8,000 losing their jobs. This deal was negotiated with the trade unions, Community, GMB and UNITE, and local community excluded from discussions.

There are now two alternative union plans contesting this fait accompli from the government and company. One from Community and the GMB, which [you can read here](#). One from UNITE, which [you can read here](#).

All three unions have common red lines.

- No compulsory redundancies
- Protect downstream operations (plants that use Port Talbot steel)
- Secure a sustainable future for steel making at Port Talbot.

Both plans call for one of the two blast furnaces to carry on operating until the end of its design life in 2032. Both envisage the other BF closing by 2027. UNITE envisages additional EAFs to replace the last BF. Community/GMB envisage either another EAF or an Open Slag Blast Furnace to replace it. Both envisage a new Direct Reduced Iron (DRI) plant. Both require significant increases in investment, £1.4 billion in the Community/GMB plan and £1.5 billion a year for ten years from UNITE. Both require a national plan for scrap steel. The UNITE plan implies a substantial government stake and direct voice in the business and envisages a more substantial increase in demand for green steel than Community/GMB do. This also requires significant additional investment in manufacturing hubs across South Wales, geared to making green hydrogen, onshore wind components and the Swansea tidal barrage.

Had a general election and presumed change of government not been in the offing it is probable that the plan announced by the government and Tata would have stood as a fait accompli. With Labour committed to a £3 billion investment in steel manufacture (over the next ten years) and Labour figures like Stephen Kinnock and Sarah Jones supporting the Community/

GMB Plan, Tata is engaging in a sort of proximity talks with them via Syndex (the company that helped draw up the plan) possibly to see how much of that £3 billion can be nudged in its direction; as British Steel is planning to build another EAF on Teesside and will be angling for its slice of the pie. UNITE is trying to build a community campaign.

- The issues raised here for the trade union and climate movements include the extent to which government aid for industries is primarily a subsidy for the companies that own them,
- what, if any, obligations are put on the companies that benefit from this investment, other than not shutting up shop,
- through what mechanisms a government investment can be a means to public ownership (in whole or in part),
- to what extent this sort of government investment is a series of fire fighting reactions to stave off crises or how far they reflect a strategic plan to decarbonise industries as they are reconstructed
- and, more widely, the extent to which this process is posed within a “nation first” framework, that carries with it a lot of other, rather dangerous, baggage.

We would like to invite comment on this from any of the unions involved, and aim to have a discussion at our forthcoming AGM, so the debate can be developed further. Ed

City of London Report on “green skills” for commercial building retrofit

A recent report from the City of London [Skills for Sustainable Skyline Taskforce](#) shares common ground with the trade union movement’s critique of the current government’s skills and training regime. Its introduction is quite scathing.

“By some estimates, the UK is anticipating that over 100,000 people will need to be recruited and upskilled to carry out the work required for our upcoming projects.

While this number continues to tick upwards, there are many challenges preventing progress from being made. A lack of a nationwide strategy on commercial buildings has led to inconsistent requirements being applied at the local level, creating lopsided demand for skilled workers. Qualifications, training offers, and apprenticeships are not currently fit for purpose and are not being delivered quickly enough to match emerging roles.

Additionally, the sector has a dire image and diversity problem that is making it difficult to attract and retain new entrants.”

And it goes on to recommend the following

- National, GLA, Local: Create a London-wide strategy to fill green skills shortages within the built environment. Invest in upskilling, apprenticeships, and training as a part of a commitment to net zero.
 - National: Develop regulation that supports greater data sharing across the built environment.
 - National: Make the business case for investment in green skills for the built environment as a COP28 commitment.
 - National: Finalise the [Minimum Energy Efficiency Standard EPC B](#) regulations and adoption of the operational performance metrics.
 - The Apprenticeship Levy system should be reformed to cover non-apprenticeship training such
- as short courses, mentoring or coaching.
 - Additional funding is needed to encourage SMEs to increase their uptake of apprenticeships.
 - National and Local: Develop policies for reducing embodied carbon across the industry.
 - Local: Set more ambitious standards for sustainability and social value outcomes through planning regulations and procurement rules.
 - GLA: The London Plan should be updated to include a fixed [BREEAM](#) rating for local boroughs to aspire towards.
 - GLA: Create a London-wide approach to [s106 requirements](#) for apprentices and training.

This is looking for an appropriate

level of regulation and standards, not taking a bulldozer to them.

Linda Clarke writes: *I am increasingly concerned about the use of the words ‘green skills’. Nobody seems to just say that this is to do with plumbers, electricians, insulators, building services engineers, gardeners etc, or talks about occupational profiles, or Vocational Education Training for these occupations. Or that the more they promote and pour money into apprenticeships, the fewer there are! So that direct labour might be one solution rather than relying on private sector chaos.*

Not cooking with gas

We should note that in their limited proposals for Future Home Standards even this government has recognised that Future Homes will not be heated by gas, that Hydrogen is not a viable replacement for domestic heating, and that heat pumps are the future. That will require a structured programme of retraining for gas fitters and the relevant unions need to get ahead of this and start demanding it for their members.
Ed



It's Orkney's Wind! Public energy potential for cash-strapped Scottish councils

Research by Transition Economics and **Platform** launched today reveals that public ownership of energy generation could create:

- Up to £150 million a year additional income for communities in North East Scotland
- Up to 27,000 green jobs in North East Scotland
- A 'virtuous spiral' of green investment: sourcing locally and boosting regional economies

Their case study of Orkney Islands Council provides an inspiring example of how a local council is leading on renewable energy to the benefit of their communities.

[Read the research here!](#)



Photo: Karl Cooper

RMT response to Scottish Just Transition Report

The Just Transition Commission has released their **Annual Report for 2023** claiming that Scotland is not on track to deliver a just transition in energy, and “*significant*” further action and support is needed for the workforce.

Responding to the report's publication, Offshore union RMT General Secretary, Mick Lynch said:

“The Just Transition Commissioners in Scotland are absolutely right – there can be no more ‘business as usual’ on just transition issues anymore.”

“We urgently need to head off potential job losses in offshore oil and gas through a combination of pro-public procurement, resilient public transport networks and a digital training passport that works for our members and not one sector of industry.”

“RMT stand ready to work with the Commission and the Scottish Government to deliver the specific plans and policies that our members in Scotland’s rail, maritime and offshore sectors need to safeguard their futures.”



Photo RMT

We make tomorrow - Workers & Climate Justice

This conference has been rearranged, giving all a second chance to go!

We Make Tomorrow: A Conference for Building Workers' Power on Climate and Crisis

Sunday 28 January 2024 – 10 am - 5:00 pm

NEU, Hamilton House, London WC1H 9BB

[REGISTER HERE](#)



Unions, Climate Justice and a Just Transition

Thursday 8 February 6.30pm

Unite the Union Regional Office

[33-37 Moreland St, London EC1V 8BB](#)

Scientific predictions about the impacts of climate breakdown are being surpassed. Unless we shift to a sustainable economy and society, humanity faces a bleak future. We need change, and the environmental challenges we face offer an opportunity to create a sustainable and fairer society.

The union movement has always fought for rights and justice - now trade unions should play a leading role in the struggle for climate justice.

We invite trade unionists from across North London to discuss the positive changes we need for a sustainable economy and a fairer society.

Speakers will include

Jeremy Corbyn Independent MP for Islington North
Sam Mason Public & Commercial Services Union
Officer for Sustainability and Climate Change
Jim Mowatt Director of Education Unite the Union

Light refreshments will be provided and this meeting will also be streamed. Organised by ILEF (Islington Labour Environmental Forum)

Green Bites

32

The number of referrals to Prevent for "Left Wing - Environmental" reasons between 2015 and 2022. [BBC](#)

1.26
million

Average daily journeys into work by bike in London in 2023 (a third of total daily tube journeys)

75%

Proportion of people installing heat pumps who have experienced a cut in bills. [From Nesta.](#)

281,000
metric
tonnes

of CO2 generated by the [first 60 days of the war on Gaza.](#)

Quote of the Month

"For the first time, the move away from fossil fuels is explicitly stated in a COP outcome—a first nail in the coffin for the fossil fuel industry. Oil and gas producers squeezed in unhelpful language, pretending gas can be a transition fuel, or that carbon capture can clean up after them. These small battle wins for the industry are bitter and hollow, and ultimately won't win the war. Loopholes and false solutions can only serve to delay their inevitable demise, yet it's clear from the text—which is strongly committed to the 1.5°C warming limit - that there's no time to lose."

[Bill Hare; Climate Analytics](#)

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