



Unions and Climate Change

A Gap?

There is a considerable gap between the views/ambitions of many trade unionists and environmentalists committed to combating climate change. In order to create workable bridges it is important to understand and respect these differences. It is not the intention to get all trade unionists to adopt 'green lifestyles' and to become pre-occupied with personal actions. While such things help, the help is minimal. Furthermore, many trade unionists are aware of these messages, and are quite possibly sick and tired of hearing about the need to take personal responsibility, and that 'we all need to make sacrifices'.

Trade Union Movement and Climate Change

The International Trade Union Movement (ITUC) is deeply concerned at the loss of momentum on climate change. It has called on governments to support a global regime whereby developed countries assume an emission reduction target of at least 25-40% by 2020 based on the 1990 levels and for major emitters in developing countries to take action to prevent projected emission trajectories through investments in energy efficient technologies, public transport and other measures.

It considers essential the preservation of a legally binding framework provided by the Kyoto Protocol and calls for a second commitment period. Governments have also been urged to reach agreement on the legally-binding nature of the outcome of the Long-Term Co-Operative Action track, taking into account the different responsibilities and capacities of developed and developing countries.

Workplace Rights

Workers must have access to education, skills, healthcare, social security, and fundamental rights at work, social and legal protections, including occupational safety and health, and opportunities. Governments, trade unions and workers, and employers all have a role to play in promoting decent work for all, including green jobs, and all should help youth gain access to needed skills and employment opportunities including in new and emerging sectors. Women and men should have equal access to opportunities to acquire job skills as well as to worker protections.

Opportunities for the greening of existing jobs and decent job creation can be achieved through, *inter alia*, public and private investments in scientific and technological innovation, public works in restoring, regenerating and conserving natural resources and ecosystems, and social and community services.

The ITUC states that it is encouraged by government initiatives to create jobs for poor people in restoring and managing natural resources and ecosystems, and they encourage the private sector to contribute to decent work and green job creation for both women and men, and particularly for the youth, including through partnerships with small and medium enterprises as well as cooperatives. The promotion of the exchange of information and knowledge on green jobs and related skills is important.¹

¹ More information:

<http://www.ituc-csi.org/climate-change.html>

<http://www.sustainlabour.org>

Green workplaces

Within the UK the TUC's green work places project shows how trade unions lead the way with a wide range of innovative initiatives on energy saving at work, waste reduction and recycling and many other measures aimed at reducing workplace carbon emissions. Many trade unions run their own courses for members and activists on creating a green environment and decent jobs. The TUC wants trade union environmental representatives to have statutory rights to both training and time off in order to promote environmentally sustainable workplaces, to carry out environmental risk assessments and audits and to consult on policies and practices.

Bridging the gaps

The strength of the trade union movement is its capacity to organise collectively. This strength would help the environmental movement to step beyond its traditional boundaries. But there is also a gap inside the TU movement between the climate policies that the ITUC supports and the membership. Much work still needs to be done.

In all UK towns and cities there are a range of environmental and low-carbon groups. In general, their connections with the trade union movement are poor, and indeed sometimes hostile. However, the vast majority of environmentalists would welcome connections.

In order to have a sustainable climate movement it is necessary to develop a strong network of local groups; a forum committed to building a movement based upon collective action and involving unions, linking with national and international developments, but also putting pressure on local government and supporting 'low carbon' projects, local actions and campaigns which are strongly related to generating of 'climate' jobs, protecting of existing jobs and the reduction of greenhouse gases. We need to find ways of dealing with issues so that they do not allow us to be divided.

What can be done

1. Explore opportunities inside existing workplaces to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
2. Support a drive for environmentally friendly new jobs, and make the connections where possible between threatened job losses and the need for green jobs.
3. Support national demands and campaigns as appropriate by inviting outside speakers to trade councils, passing resolutions, sponsoring public meetings around climate jobs, and inviting speakers involved in protecting local climate campaigns to anti-cuts protests.²
4. Take the lead in inviting local environmental organisations to build a forum where they can meet and operate jointly, focusing upon common grounds. This may be best done through the Trades Council. The Alliance for Jobs and Climate is committed to building such forums.
5. Contact the Alliance for Jobs and Climate with questions and thoughts relating to building local alliances and coalitions.
6. Ask your Trades Council and your local trade union branch to affiliate to the Alliance for Jobs and Climate and make an appropriate donation, e.g. £50.³

² A good example is the Million Climate Jobs campaign: <http://www.campaigncc.org/greenjobs#pamphlet>

³ Other Trade Union Links:

<http://www.unison.org.uk/green/>

http://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/arguing_for_the_alternative.aspx

http://www.unitetheunion.org/campaigns/back_bombardier_-_keep_uk_rail.aspx

<http://www.gmb.org.uk/default.aspx?page=275>

http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/resources/green_workplaces/pcs-green-policies/index.cfm

<http://www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=4286>

<http://www.climate-change-jobs.org>

<http://www.itfglobal.org/policy/climatejustice.cfm>