

# Climate AND Jobs

The huge vote to resist the closure at Bridgend gives members the opportunity to save jobs and community and stop employers sacking us at a whim. The proposed closure of Ford's factory and potential loss of about 1,700 jobs would be another hammer blow to Britain's manufacturing sector. After the announcement at British Steel, we are faced with a series of threats to thousands of high skilled, well paid jobs. UK manufacturing output dropped by 3.9% percent in April as car production which plunged by an unprecedented 24%.

Ford is the latest international carmaker looking to reduce its UK operations. In February, Honda announced the closure of its Swindon plant in 2021 with the loss of 3,500 jobs, while Nissan reversed its decision to build a new model in Sunderland. Tens of thousands of workers in the supply chain would be affected too. Ford members' vote shows it is possible to stop these closures and job cuts.

## Climate crisis - we can't wait for Labour

These latest announcements follow decades of declining manufacturing employment and little resistance. But today we face greater challenges. The jobs crisis comes at the same time as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that we have only 11 years left if we are to limit global warming to 1.5C, a central goal of the 2015 Paris agreement. An Australian report predicts civilisational collapse by 2050 if we fail!

For the first time we have a Labour leadership committed to an industrial strategy and a 'Green New Deal'. This matters - under New Labour governments the decline in manufacturing jobs accelerated! A Corbyn-led government could help us save jobs and deal with climate change.

Britain has enormous potential as a green energy economy. It is already the world leader in offshore wind. We urgently need a huge investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency including upgrading every building, expanded public transport, a sustainable farming system. This can bring hope and



Photos: Steve Eason

jobs to communities hollowed out by Tory and New Labour deindustrialisation.

However, no one knows when we will have a general election nor even if Labour will win. We can't wait.

## Unite and a Just Transition

School children have been striking to force governments to deal with the climate emergency. The school student strikes are an inspiration. Our children are using weapons from the labour movement to change the political agenda. Their actions and the protests by Extinction Rebellion have forced governments across the world to discuss the changes we need to stop the climate crisis.

However, the scale of the climate crisis demands faster and greater action. Renewables must be increased at least six-fold just to meet the Paris agreement target, which is itself woefully insufficient. The UK's Committee on Climate Change has set a target of net zero emissions by 2050 - too little too late. The government likes to boast about reducing emissions yet supports Heathrow expansion even though aviation emissions are one of the fastest-growing sources of greenhouse gases.

### Also in this bulletin:

- Defend freedom of movement
- Sexual harassment and bullying
- Rule changes
- Solidarity

**SOLIDARITY ACROSS THE UNION**  
**UNITE** Rank & File

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Many members work on these projects but there is little future in environmentally damaging jobs. If we don't act then change will be forced upon us, as in the automotive sector, with members and our families thrown on the scrap heap and more towns becoming industrial wastelands like the former pit villages.

The recent EU elections provided a warning of what happens when communities are ignored, let down and left behind. Who wasn't sickened by right wing Tory, Ann Widdecombe getting a standing ovation at Featherstone, a West Yorkshire former mining town? This was a solid Labour seat but around 70% voted Leave, and the Brexit Party are cynically exploiting working class people who feel ignored by the government and by our movement. This is what the future could hold if we fail to defend the jobs, plants and communities at Bridgend, Swindon, Sunderland and every town affected by the crisis in manufacturing jobs. This is what could await communities relying on Heathrow, HS2 and other environmentally damaging projects.

### **We need a Just Transition before it's too late**

The school kids remind us of the power of strikes. Action by workers can stop employers and government in their tracks. We have the power to stop employers closing our industries and governments wrecking our planet - if we have the confidence to use it. Our jobs are on the line now. Our union needs to act now to stop us haemorrhaging more jobs.

We need a just transition that protects jobs, not an unjust transition that throws us on the scrap heap. The quick response at Bridgend is really important. But as well as stopping the immediate job losses shouldn't we be demanding retraining and retooling to make the products need to stop runaway climate change? Why aren't we demanding that every car plant threatened with closure is nationalised and retooled? Why isn't Unite linking the manufacturing jobs crisis to the climate crisis?

In Australia, Belgium and France unions have mobilised members to join the school children's climate strikes with thousands joining the protests. A call has now been made for a global general strike against the climate crisis in September - already supported by the Bakers' Union and UCU. Unite should join with them and link the climate protests with a campaign for the jobs needed to combat runaway climate change. This would be a popular campaign that could mobilise our members, their families and communities for well paid, skilled, green jobs.

Unite prides itself on being the union for manufacturing workers. If we want a viable manufacturing sector in the UK we can't rely on Tories or employers only

interested in a quick profit. The climate crisis and the changes needed to protect us from climate catastrophe affect every sector. Our campaign could involve all of our members across every sector in our union.

We recently marked the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the D-Day landings that helped end WW2. There was no question then about finding the necessary resources. Climate change threatens our civilisation and the planet we live on. We must find the resources to tackle it. We don't have a choice. We need a workers' green new deal and we need to fight for it. Unite should be at the forefront of leading that fight. This fight should start with a campaign to defend Bridgend that demands a 'Just Transition' to green jobs - to save the jobs, plant, community and a planet fit to live on.



### **Defend Freedom of Movement**

The rights of migrants in a post-Brexit Britain is a key issue for trade unionists today. The Tories have used Brexit to impose tough new rules on EU migrants that makes their lives less secure. In 2018 we were all shocked by the shameful deportations of Windrush generation migrants, many of whom have made an immense contribution to this country. The NHS couldn't function without migrant staff.

Unite should lead the way in supporting the rights of migrants, the vast majority of whom are working class people just like other Unite members. Our policies contain many good points, including an amnesty for illegal migrants working in exploitative conditions, cracking down on exploitative gang masters, and ending pay and employment discrimination against migrant workers.

On the other hand, there are serious gaps. For instance, the only statement directly relating to the question of immigration controls is a proposal to amend existing controls so they don't discriminate against BAME workers. Furthermore, Len McCluskey's proposal during the last election for

## Sexual harassment and bullying in Unite?

General Secretary that companies should only be able to recruit from abroad if they were covered by a trade union agreement or sectoral collective bargaining was a backward step. In practice, it would block many migrants from working legally because migrants often have to work in sectors which are least likely to be unionised.

The argument in favour of immigration controls is immigration takes jobs from UK-born workers and forces down wages. In fact, it is freedom for business that is the real job killer. Employers maximise profits by understaffing, overworking, and using cheap labour whether that is young workers denied the full minimum wage, people coming off benefits and desperate for a job, migrants here or workers in another country. They switch investment in pursuit of higher profits. You can't work in partnership with the boss who is sacking you to defend our jobs. We push up wages by uniting, and we can't do that when denying some workers legal employment. Low wages & bad conditions are caused by weak unions & greedy employers NOT by immigrants.

There are good examples of workers, migrant and UK-born, fighting to defend their rights and for better pay and conditions for themselves and their fellows. Migrant workers from the Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy combined with workers from the Ministry of Justice and University of London to fight for a range of demands including the London Living Wage. And at the Fawley oil refinery, members spurned the divisive slogan of 'British Jobs for British Workers' and built solidarity to win equal pay for workers of all nationalities instead of trying to restrict the employment of migrants.

The labour movement should stand shoulder to shoulder with migrant workers standing up for their rights at work. But it's only possible when unions stand wholeheartedly in favour of migrant rights, and against immigration controls, rather than seeing other workers as competition, as part of the problem. Low wages and bad conditions are caused by weak unions and greedy employers NOT by immigrants. It should never be the position of workers to take a stand against other workers, and neither should it be the position of Unite. Wherever we are born, we are all workers - and all of us brothers and sisters in struggle.

Unite prides itself on equality and opposing bullying and harassment. These are core issues our activists have to tackle. But we also have to address the same issues in our own ranks.

Unite lost a case brought by Sally Nailard, who was forced to leave her job as Regional Officer at Heathrow after what the Regional Secretary acknowledged was a "a sickening and orchestrated campaign of harassment ... [including] bullying and even sexual harassment" by lay officials. When she appealed to the union's senior figures for help, she claimed they helped force her out. The court found that Unite had failed to respond to her complaint firmly and decisively.

For a union that prides itself of fighting for the rights of its members this is a massive blow.

In April this year Len McCluskey wrote to the United Left about the case, seeing raising the Nailard case as being about an attack on him, the Executive and the left. He claims that the union "did act correctly" and Nailard "had other motives that had been planned for some time and she set out to try to secure a payment from the Union". These are the same sort of smears against survivors' motives that we face when supporting members. The same counterposing of the organisation and its leadership to addressing sexual violence and harassment.



Image: Wolfmann / WikiCommons

The #MeToo movement helped expose how many organisations closed ranks to protect perpetrators, cover up problems and silence survivors. It seems Unite still needs its #MeToo moment.

The 2016 study *Women Officers in Unite* showed that more than half had raised a bullying or harassment issue with the union in the previous five years. Half of these did not believe that the issue was handled at all well by management. Only a quarter said management handled their problem well.



Many women activists still feel that the union is still regarded as a boys' club. There are many women in employment within Unite and a growing number of female lay officers but that does not stop the "banter". The fear still stands that if you complain about it, you're "just a girl" and you need to get thicker skin. Being spoken down to like you don't understand or that its above you is common. For Unite to have a General Secretary that defends moving a female officer complaining of sexual harassment and bullying feeds into this air of male dominance.

Unite has female officers in various positions and even has a team dedicated to women's issues, but women still get told they are wrong when talking about women's issues male dominated meetings, even by a senior male officer.

We need support for those who take a stand against sexual harassment and bullying, whether that is in workplaces where we organise, or within our own ranks.

Is this the same in all unions? Possibly. Members and lay officials in many industries and unions all seem to say the same thing. Even if they feel able to stand up for others, they are uncomfortable to speak out about their own experiences for fear of reprisals.

Maybe we need to open the debate on this topic so we can heal the divisions within. And maybe that would be supported by a less top-down culture.

## The rules - what needs to change... and what doesn't

- **Support 3, 4 and 5.** Retired and Community members are an integral part of our union. It is fundamentally undemocratic that they are denied an effective voice inside union structures.
- **Support 41, 42** to give retired and community members delegates rather than observers.
- **Support 71 and 80** to use Single Transferable Vote or Alternative Vote for General Secretary elections. This would prevent someone winning without majority support, encourage more diverse candidates, and enables debate on policy rather than speculation about splitting the vote.
- **Oppose 77 and 79** which would raise the barrier to standing for General Secretary from 50 branch nominations to 5% of all branches and stop workplace nominations. This would make it almost impossible for any candidate other than those from the highest levels of the bureaucracy to stand. It risks turning elections for General Secretary into coronations.
- **Oppose 103** which would stop members electing reps and branch officers without two years' membership. This would be a barrier to new reps in precarious jobs, young reps, and newly organised workplaces. Members should decide their reps. It presents a barrier to engagement.

## Solidarity forever...

Workers at Colloids in Kirkby have been on indefinite strike since 20 May for the reinstatement of their Unite shop steward, George Gore. The workers have been raising support from across the movement and taking leverage action to put additional pressure on management.

Show your support at the 24-hour pickets at Colloids Limited, 10 Kirkby Bank Road, Knowsley, L33 7SY. You can send messages of support to [garryg0411@gmail.com](mailto:garryg0411@gmail.com). Updates are being posted on the Unite North West Facebook page. Donations payable to 'Unite NW/84 Alpla branch' can be sent to Pat Coyne, Unite the union, 100 Hallgate, Wigan, WN1 1HP. Share support for the disputes on social media using #ReinstateGeorge.

I'M  
SUPPORTING  
STRIKING  
COLLOIDS  
WORKERS

#REINSTATEGEORGE

## Get involved with Unite Rank & File

Leave your details via our web site if you want to get involved.

We are not aiming to create yet another electoral faction within Unite and we welcome your participation whether or not you are affiliated with any of the electoral groupings such as United Left.

[www.uniterankandfile.org](http://www.uniterankandfile.org)