

The Update

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The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

UNISON Conference

UNISON looks to mobilise for crucial COP26 climate talks in Glasgow



Climate has to be an issue for all our members

The environment was at the forefront of debate at UNISON conference, with members in agreement that any real recovery from the pandemic must involve the creation of a green and sustainable economy - one that includes public service workers at its heart.

All eyes are now on the United Nations Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP26), in Glasgow in November 2021.

The union will be mobilising members for a significant engagement at the talks, to ensure the needs of workers and public services are central to the results.

Moving the motion Tackling climate change and COP26, Tony Slaven of UNISON Scotland told the SDC: "The growing crisis of

climate is one we can no longer put aside, either as a society or as a union. The threat of climate chaos is going to drive massive social change. We no longer have a choice about that."

Mr Slaven said that the government's green 'rhetoric' was at odds with many recent ministerial actions - support for a new coalmine, cutting overseas aid, planning new gas stations and thousands of miles of road, and cutting taxes on flights.

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So far, the government was “failing miserably”, he said.

“Personal action will never be enough. It will take government action to ban fracking, to [take] our energy system away from fossil fuels and to a sustainable source, to ensure that existing housing is retrofitted and new buildings constructed to a higher standard. The bodies whose task it is to regulate and control our environment must be properly funded and empowered to do so.

“We must use all the leverage we can muster on government to take these steps and more.” He said that COP26 was not just a meeting of heads of government, but a gathering of activists and campaigners from around the world. UNISON had to ensure that its members’ voices were also heard ‘loudly and clearly’, not least in making the argument for public sector jobs.

“The decisions taken or not taken in Glasgow will affect all our lives... We can’t just call for change. We need to be part of it.”

Ameen Hadi of Salford City branch said: “We live on the edge of a catastrophic global crisis – flooding, famines, mostly inflicted on the global South. We can see our planet deteriorating in front of us, as the most powerful countries and businesses in the world continue to burn fossil fuels at an unsustainable rate.”

He said that 70% of global emissions were caused by just 100 companies. “They are the ones who need to be taken on. Unfortunately, our government, our institutions are all in hock to fossil fuel industries and refuse to break their links.”

Mr Hadi cited Greta Thunberg’s school strikes and climate strikes supported by the trade union movement as major reasons why the issue was still alive – all the reason to continue the fight in Glasgow.

“We need to mobilise in every quarter,” he said, “to make it an issue for all our members.”

The motion recognised the success of the Green UNISON Week in the run up to the global climate strike in September 2019. This demonstrated UNISON’s leading role and

commitment to tackling climate change and built on the union’s campaigns for pension funds to divest from fossil fuels and promote non-carbon alternatives.

Conference called on the NEC to:

- Conduct a full review of the union’s own use of carbon at national, regional and branch level – and issue guidance to enable all levels of the union to contribute to its becoming carbon neutral at the earliest opportunity;
- Mobilise for a significant UNISON engagement at COP26, to ensure the needs of workers and public services are central to the outcomes. This includes encouraging members to participate;
- Assist in ensuring that the international trade union movement, particularly from the global south, is represented at COP26;
- Demand that the UK government adopts policies that will allow the UK to be leading by example at COP26. These policies would include banning fracking, investing in research and infra-structure to move away from fossil fuels in electricity generation, gas supply and transport, and invest in a programme to insulate all homes and public buildings;
- Continue to support the creation of a UK Just Transition Commission to develop the new industries and jobs needed in a zero carbon economy;
- Call on the government to invest in public bodies and environmental protection agencies to enable them to meet the immediate impacts of global warming and climate change and improve public sector resilience in the face of this emergency.