

# The Update

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The latest news and announcements from Derbyshire UNISON

## UNISON Conference

UNISON's conference gets serious about the scale of the climate challenge



## Climate change: 'there will be no jobs on a dead planet'

**During the hottest week of the year, questions of how climate change will affect lives and livelihoods - and how unions will respond - were discussed at a conference online fringe event.**

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Led by NEC member and UNISON vice president James Anthony, delegates heard how the union movement is preparing for the seismic changes that will drive the UK towards its 2050 net zero target.

To achieve the goal, the UK government plans to phase out coal-fired power stations by 2024 and replace them with sustainable energy sources. Investment in public transport, renewable energy and nature

restoration will be ramped up, while diesel vehicles will be banned from 2030 - with all new cars and vans being electric.

The hope is that the green revolution will generate around two million jobs. But for trade unions, the transition from what was, to what must be, can't be at the expense of livelihoods.

Far from opposing the changes, unions are pushing to be included in the transition process, to help shape the inevitable.

Stephen Smellie, who sits on the NEC's policy development and campaigns committee and is deputy convener for UNISON Scotland, has seen a shift in attitude towards climate change.

"I remember a time when I held a climate change fringe meeting and seven people turned up. There are 70 people online watching this event," he said.

"Even unions with members in oil and gas extraction recognise that the world needs to transition to a low, or zero carbon economy, and they need to play an active role in the shift.

"Extreme weather events raise health and safety issues. The cost of dealing with extreme weather strains the budgets of councils, health boards and governments. Recognising that bargaining agendas need to reflect these issues and understanding that there are no jobs on a dead planet, make climate change a trade union issue."

### **COP26 opportunities**

Anna Markova, the TUC's policy officer for industry and climate, who helps to run the trade union sustainable development action committee, thinks that the UK hosting November's COP26 climate change conference may provide opportunities for unions.

"A lot of our priorities will be around trying to make the most of this moment, both in terms of organising and winning better, more worker friendly policies from the UK government.

"COP26 is an opportunity to strengthen the hand of the trade union movement by negotiating on the decarbonisation agenda. The [pay-off] could be securing better-quality green jobs and increased union representation in the new green jobs sectors."

For UNISON Stockport local government branch environmental officer Mary Clarke, years of broken promises have left her questioning the political will to take on the climate challenge.

"In 2015 at COP21 in Paris, leaders from most of the countries across the globe signed a legal agreement to limit average temperature rises across the planet to 1.5 degrees above pre-industrial levels," she said.

"Since then, governments have made plenty of promises and set lots of targets. The EU even declared a climate emergency in 2019.

"Most local authorities across the UK have declared their own climate emergencies and are working on climate action plans. But we are two years on from the [EU] declaration and they are not even close to meeting the targets.

"I think if we carry on the way we are doing, there's a very good chance we could see the temperature rise above 4 degrees by the end of the century.

"The problem is so big, it really does need everybody to understand that they must do their bit to help save the planet. And that's where unions can make a big difference."