

## A just transition now!

It's great to see the conference agenda reflecting the key role Unite needs to play in tackling the climate crisis. Not only are governments and employers doing too little too late, but we know that left to their own devices they will put their own interests ahead of people and planet. We need to be fighting for a rapid and just transition to a decarbonised economy.

Composite 10 (M64, 66, 69, 70, 73) will commit Unite to mobilise for the protests around the COP26 climate conference. Because of Covid, these are taking place regionally on Sat 6 Nov, not just in Glasgow. The COP26 coalition trade union caucus is organising union/worker blocs - let's make Unite's presence massive.

We're also hoping there will be youth strikes on Fri 5 Nov - let's ensure there is some solidarity action in every workplace too. COP26 won't deliver what we need, so it's essential we implement the action points about organising, bargaining and taking action round climate at workplace level. That has to include resisting the anti-union laws which make it hard to strike over climate.

One of the barriers to effective action for a just transition is the promotion by industry of techno-utopias to enable them to continue their destructive business as usual. Of course technology has an important role to play. But we can't allow it to distract us from tackling the main issues.

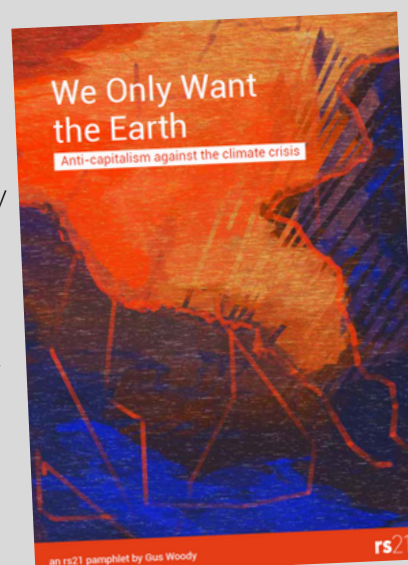
A massive programme of renovation is needed to slash emissions from existing housing and other buildings, alongside building new zero-carbon homes. This would also help tackle fuel poverty. We need a huge expansion of free and high quality public transport, as well as of renewable energy production, storage and distribution. All this requires lifelong climate education, good pay and conditions, and occupational training to support rapid a rapid expansion in jobs.

Unfortunately some of the motions (Composite 9, M63) recycle business propaganda. Electric vehicles have a part to play, but these need to be public - it's not sustainable to have similar car ownership with batteries made from rare minerals. Similarly Hydrogen is being promoted by those with a vested interest in making it from fossil fuels rather than reducing energy use. We can't rely on Carbon Capture and Storage. It's in its infancy, is highly unlikely to scale up enough - and it is being promoted by businesses that want to use the captured carbon to make fuel to burn. If we can make it work we will need it *on top of* reducing energy use. We can't rely on new nuclear. Quite aside from the dangers and the carbon costs of handling waste for millennia, it takes far too long to come on stream.

One of the biggest scams being perpetrated at COP26 is 'net zero'. Many countries and companies are relying on 'offsetting' their emissions with unproven carbon capture or paying poor countries to plant trees. These plans add up to more than the available land. There is no substitute for dramatically reducing energy use and expanding renewables.

Big changes are already beginning as a result of climate change. Business is trying to maintain profitable business as usual for as long as possible. If workers don't set the agenda we will see whole communities destroyed, worse than the destruction of coal mining in the 1980s and 90s when change was imposed on an emergency basis. Instead, we need to fight for realistic plans to decarbonise, based on a just transition.

The climate crisis is no accident. Since its birth, capitalism's relentless drive for profit has led to society taking more from the wider environment than it returns, faster than it can replenish. It has coped with this with a variety of temporary fixes, including technology, that merely delay the reckoning. Climate breakdown means this generation faces that reckoning.



**We only want the earth:  
anti-capitalism against the  
climate crisis.**

New pamphlet, out Nov.

# 2021: Threats & Opportunities

The global Covid crisis and the Tory Brexit have thrown industrial relations up in the air.

Patterns of demand in the economy have been transformed. Some employers have made a killing, while others groan under debt. Many have seized the opportunity to ram through changes to working practices or cut pay and conditions through fire and rehire.

With inflation now at 4.8% and likely to remain high thanks to the gas crisis and other factors, pay is a hotter issue than for years. Labour shortages in some occupations - from HGV drivers to hospitality - are improving workers' bargaining power and driving up wages. Even Johnson claims to want higher wages. But poverty pay remains widespread, including for health and care workers. The Tories are holding down public sector pay and restricting workers' rights.

There couldn't be a better time to have Sharon Graham as our new General Secretary. The process of creating and strengthening industrial combines has begun. As a union covering many sectors we are well-placed to take advantage of weak employer associations by taking coordinated action.

There is much to be done. We need to stamp out the traditions of partnership and concession bargaining that are so widespread in Unite - they don't deliver for members. Workplace organisation needs rebuilding in Health and Local Authorities if members are to pass the undemocratic ballot thresholds and stop their pay cuts.



*Go NW bus strikers celebrating beating fire & rehire*

Our new more combative GS presents an opportunity for members, but it's up to us to take it. We need to put the case for resistance in every workplace and build the power to win. We need to win members over to a radical and militant response to the cost of living, Covid, climate, housing and care crises. We need to build left networks and traditions of solidarity in every area and sector, not just rely on the GS, officers, or the organising department.

## READ MORE...

- Democratising Unite
- Unite, the Labour Party and PR
- Migration and the labour market
- Covid
- The right to strike, the Police Bill and direct action
- COP26 and workers' action for a just transition to a decarbonised economy



# Democratising Unite

Sharon Graham has promised members a Democracy Commission to increase member engagement as well as democracy and accountability. This can't come soon enough.

Unite's structures appear democratic on paper, but in practice they fall badly short, with many barriers to participation and activity.

The three-year election cycle makes it harder for new activists to get involved or for workers to replace ineffective representatives. The many layers of the structure delay motions from workplaces and branches reaching decision-makers, with many being 'lost' along the way. They also exclude activists without good facility time and result in some people filling multiple roles, having less time to report back. Unless you are 'in the loop' it's hard to find out what's happening in Unite's structures - reports need to be more widely available. Rule 18.7 must be implemented and GDPR not used as an excuse to prevent RISC members communicating with each other or those they represent. Committees grind to a halt if their servicing officer is unavailable or unhelpful. They should be able to elect a lay secretary if they wish.

The proposals to give budgets to various constitutional committees and help them develop campaigning plans should help bring them to life. At the moment, most Unite resources sit in regions while most members work for multi-region employers. Unless the employer is a high priority for an effective National Officer, it's hard to coordinate work across regional boundaries. Of course there's still a place for geographic organisation - particularly to deliver solidarity and for organising workers less tied to a particular occupation or industry.

Every member deserves a functioning branch (and not just when there are GS nominations!). Branches should be supported, but if they can't operate, encouraged into an appropriate merger.

Sharon Graham is right to argue that paper policies change little without action. Given the attacks on the right to strike and protest, we need to revisit Composite 13 from 2016 and M117 from 2018 on the right to strike and use of direct action tactics. What other good policies are gathering dust?



Labour's defeat in the 2019 general election was a big setback. The Labour right is now on the rampage, and we are all paying the price for the failure to take them on. Who now thinks the Unite delegation was correct to vote against conference policy and block mandatory reselection for MPs?

With Starmer in charge, Corbyn and many good activists suspended, the BFAWU bakers' union disaffiliating in response to the attack on their President, and Marcus Rashford being widely seen as the leader of the opposition, our GS is right that there's no point waiting for Labour to solve our problems, and that we need to prioritise our own struggles and building power rather than pouring energy into unproductive Labour infighting.

We do need to ensure that rotten politics in Labour don't infect Unite. It's good to see motions 54 & 55 defending free speech on Palestine, even if the definition of antisemitism in M55 is too simplistic.



BFAWU President Ian Hodson

We must resist cuts - even when Labour councils implement them.

We should back C14 (motions 92, 93 & 95) which argues against First Past The Post (FPTP), despite the fact that the case made is flawed - it's wrong to treat the Lib Dems as part of the left. Many on Labour's right see no hope of beating the Tories without further moves right, rather than giving hope to the millions who don't vote.

FPTP makes it harder for left alternatives to Labour to develop. Why should BFAWU or the millions who want more than Starmer offers be denied a political voice?

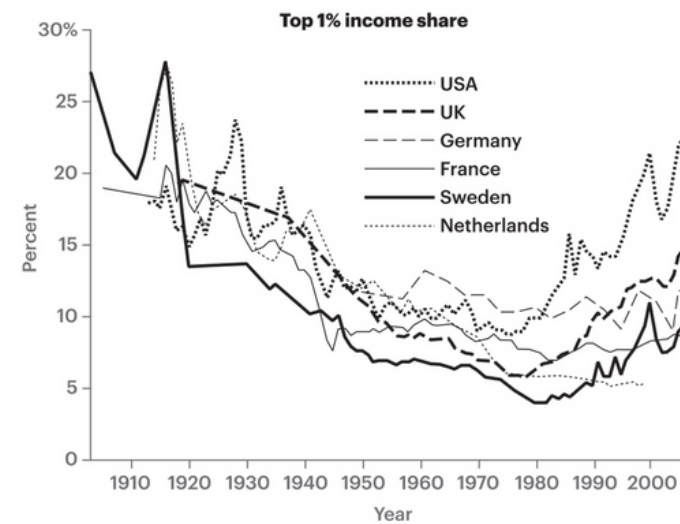
At the next Rules Conference we also need to reform Unite's own elections. It's a scandal that we still use FPTP for GS elections, forcing members to speculate about who 'can win' rather than supporting their favoured candidate. The nomination threshold should be lowered too, so lay members can stand in future.

# Migrant rights

Some on the right are seizing on the current labour shortages to reinforce the mistaken argument that restricting migration raises pay.

Of course it's true that employers seek to exploit anyone seen as marginal to the workforce - not just migrants but often women, young people, old people, disabled people and the unemployed. And of course it's true that excluding thousands of workers from certain jobs can create a short-term labour shortage and temporarily boost the pay of those still allowed to work. We should take full advantage of such labour market disruption when it happens.

But it's not the presence of marginalised workers that produces low pay - it's weak unions. Germany, Ireland, Austria, Sweden, Spain and Estonia all have a higher proportion of foreign born workers than the UK. They all have higher productivity, smaller proportions of low-paid workers and less unequal societies.



The graph above (from *Inequality and the 1%*, Danny Dorling) shows the share of income going to the top 1% declining through the 20th century until around 1979, then rising. UK Union membership peaked in 1979 at 13.2m, then declined to 6.2m in 2016, since when it has recovered slightly.

Attempts to restrict migration make migrant workers more vulnerable to exploitation. Instead we need to build unity with them - whatever their immigration status - to fight for better pay and conditions and against the hostile environment. Migrant workers have been at the centre of impressive struggles - including strikes at several hospitals and the current strikes at London Parks and SAGE care home.

TUC leaders fought for decades against women taking many jobs for fear they would depress wages. Today almost everyone agrees that fighting for equality is more effective. Let's not have our kids seeing us how we see these sexists now.



Photo: Steve Eason

# Rights to strike & protest

Unite needs to step up its opposition to the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Bill. This is an opportunity to link our struggles against anti-union laws with others fighting for democratic rights and against racism. Composite 17 is right to highlight the wider assault on our rights including the surveillance state. It is a disgrace that Labour abstained on the SpyCops Bill.

# Avoidable Covid crisis

The Covid crisis didn't need to be like this. With full sick and isolation pay, a functioning public sector Find, Test, Trace, Isolate and Support system, safety enforcement, workplace ventilation, clear information, international aid and a waiver on vaccine patents we could have had fewer deaths, less Long Covid, shorter lockdowns, and less economic pain. As usual, the already disadvantaged were hit hardest.

M152 is right to demand an inquiry and to talk about future crises. We may see further Covid variants, and we know that environmental damage is making pandemics more frequent - this won't be the last.

# rs21 revolutionary socialism in the 21st century

rs21 is a group who stand for socialism from below. We are feminist (firmly trans inclusive), anti-racist and internationalist. rs21 is run democratically by its members who are involved in movements including health and social care, migrant solidarity, workplace organising, housing, anti-fascism, climate struggles, equality, benefits, resistance to state repression and international solidarity. Get involved!