



# **Facing up to Climate Change**

**The UNISON Scotland submission to the Royal  
Society of Edinburgh's Inquiry: Facing up to  
Climate Change.**

**May 2010**

## **Introduction**

This paper constitutes UNISON Scotland's submission to the major Inquiry by the Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE), entitled '*Facing up to Climate Change*'.

UNISON Scotland welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the Inquiry. UNISON is Scotland's largest public service trade union, representing more than 160,000 members working largely in the public sector in Scotland. Many of our members are at the forefront of protecting the environment and the quality of life for everyone in Scotland.

The RSE has said the Inquiry will seek "to raise awareness of the opportunities and the challenges ahead, both from climate change and from a move to a low carbon economy. It will attempt to identify how individuals, communities and industries can turn these challenges into a positive opportunity."

We will concentrate on what the public sector could be doing to lead by example on reducing greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change. In doing so, we will touch on the economic crisis and an international trade union response that emphasises a 'Just Transition'<sup>1</sup> to a low carbon economy.

## **The Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009**

UNISON is particularly pleased that the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 sets a statutory climate change duty<sup>2</sup> on all public bodies. The new duty says that public bodies, in carrying out their functions, must:

*Act in the way best calculated to contribute to the delivery of the greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets in the Act*

*Act in the way best calculated to help deliver any adaptation programme laid before the Scottish Parliament under the Act*

*Act in the way they consider is most sustainable.*

This duty will help ensure that the entire public sector, including councils and the NHS, plays its part in not just contributing to mitigation and adaptation work, but in the crucial role of leading by example. (Ministers should also set in place proper reporting and monitoring of the duty.) Individuals are limited in what they can do alone. We need collective action by governments, the public and private sector, communities, families and individuals. Public services are on the frontline in fighting climate change here and internationally. Well resourced public services can help set an example of sustainable operation and help protect us from those effects of climate change that are already inevitable.

## **Achieving the targets in the Act**

The Scottish Parliament unanimously agreed to the ambitious 42% and 80% targets in the Act. That cross-party political support will now have to be reflected in how our politicians work together in the coming years to make the often difficult decisions that must be taken for a just transition to a low-carbon economy.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Just Transition' recognises that support for environmental policies are conditional on a fair distribution of the costs and benefits of those policies across the economy, and on the creation of opportunities for active engagement by those affected in determining the future wellbeing of themselves and their families. TUC Report: [www.tuc.org.uk/touchstone/Justtransition/greenfuture.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/touchstone/Justtransition/greenfuture.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/climatechange/scotlands-action/climatechangeact/publicsector](http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Environment/climatechange/scotlands-action/climatechangeact/publicsector)

These decisions should include major energy efficiency initiatives across all sectors, massive investment in renewable energy, a shift in transport spending from aviation and roads to public and active transport, using procurement to help drive sustainable green policies and initiating green workplace action across Scotland. The public sector is vital in taking a lead and promoting best practice. The considerable employment benefits from these policies should be maximised through a 'Green New Deal'. This should be not just about creating jobs in new areas such as renewable energy, but about greening the economy as a whole. The jobs potential is enormous but requires government policies that support and encourage that potential instead of the crazy situation last summer when the Vestas factory in the Isle of Wight was closed, leaving the UK with no major wind turbine manufacturing facility, while there is only one of any scale in Scotland.

Trade unions see climate change as an urgent health and safety issue for the planet. With the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), we are calling for a comprehensive low carbon industrial strategy for Scotland, a transitional skills strategy, a Just Transition strategy and a green workplaces strategy. These should also take in adaptation measures. We welcome the May 2009 STUC/Scottish Government Communiqué on Climate Change<sup>3</sup>, which included agreement that:

*Addressing climate change can deliver significant economic, social and environmental benefits to Scotland. The creation of quality jobs through the transition to a low-carbon economy represents a major economic opportunity for Scotland.*

*The transition to a sustainable economy needs to be socially just so that all parts of society partake in the benefits of growth and responsibilities are shared fairly.*

*Addressing the economic, employment and social impacts of the transition to the low-carbon economy and adapting to climate change will be vital to building stakeholder support and delivering the necessary programmes of action.*

We look forward to the partnership working promised in the communiqué and welcome the support for quality secure employment, skills/training, green workplaces, Just Transition and for government policy on climate change contributing to "community cohesion and reducing inequalities".

UNISON strongly supports a balanced energy strategy, with renewables key, while also including contributions from clean coal (requiring investment in carbon capture and storage) and nuclear power. We oppose the privatisation or mutualisation of Scottish Water, which should remain under democratic control. The importance of democratic controls applies in many areas, including over regulation of the banks and the financial markets. This was stressed as part of the 'Jobs, Justice, Climate' themes of one of our big campaigns last year with the Put People First coalition. In our conclusion, we stress that action on Climate needs action on Jobs and Justice. They are interlinked and interdependent. These links are exemplified in UNISON's Food for Good Charter<sup>4</sup>. It encourages the use of fair trade and locally sourced, organic, sustainable food in schools, hospitals, prisons and across the public sector. Green procurement is effective.

Many of the above policies will require significant behaviour change (as happened in boosting recycling). There is a key role for the public sector here too, in raising awareness and facilitating such change, including in the workplace.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.stuc.org.uk/news/643/stuc-and-scottish-government-issue-joint-communique-on-climate-change](http://www.stuc.org.uk/news/643/stuc-and-scottish-government-issue-joint-communique-on-climate-change)

<sup>4</sup> [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/foodforgoodcharter.pdf](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/briefings/foodforgoodcharter.pdf)

## **Green workplaces**

UNISON has long campaigned on sustainable development and for action to green the workplace. This contributes to greenhouse gas emission reductions both at work and at home as employees bring ideas from home to work and vice versa. The STUC/Scottish Government Communiqué on Climate Change agreed on the need for policies to green the Scottish workplace.

UNISON urges the Royal Society to include in its report the importance of workplace action across the public and private sectors, including on adaptation.

We would highlight the lessons learned from the TUC Green Workplaces Project Report 2008-10<sup>5</sup>. These showed the importance of joint initiatives by trade unions and management in securing workforce buy-in and making significant reductions in emissions. The report also stressed the need for the active engagement of senior management and for putting in place formal structures, with time off for green reps to carry out environmental duties. More work on taking this agenda forward is currently being planned by trade unions in Scotland. UNISON's South Lanarkshire branch has recently secured funding for a trade union climate change project across several employers that could provide lessons for similar work<sup>6</sup>.

We want workplace action to also include work on adaptation. The 2009 TUC Report '*Changing Work in a Changing Climate*'<sup>7</sup> shows the need for employers to look at 'inward-facing adaptation' - the impacts on workers of adaptation measures and how they are designed, planned and implemented. Many employers have started, or are starting, to assess the impacts of climate change on their business planning, markets or services - 'outward-facing adaptation'. However, much more must be done on 'inward' adaptation, which covers things like: health and safety and climate hazards at work; "issues around statutory responsibilities and funding for dealing with extreme events such as floods: and about indoor and outdoor working conditions including workplace temperatures and equipment, clothing and shift patterns to deal with more gradual changes".

## **Financial crisis – a trade union response**

An apparent obstacle to implementing some of the necessary measures will be the impact on public sector spending of the recent financial crisis and the costs of the bank bailout. However, UNISON, along with many others, believes that the financial and environmental crises can provide the opportunity to lay the foundations for a fairer world instead of the existing systems which reinforce high levels of poverty and inequality and which have exploited the planet's resources to near breaking point. We dispute the need for urgent major cuts in public spending<sup>8</sup> and the 2006 Stern Review made clear that the cost of strong, early action on climate change is considerably less than the cost of delaying.

Scotland's Climate Change Delivery Plan, published in June 2009, stated: "*The economic costs of transformational change to Scotland's economy and society to meet our climate change targets are not high relative to total economic output over the next 40 years.*" With the political will, meeting the Act's targets is achievable.

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<sup>5</sup> [www.tuc.org.uk/extras/greenworkplacesreport.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/greenworkplacesreport.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [www.unison-scotland.org.uk/news/2010/marapr/3103.htm](http://www.unison-scotland.org.uk/news/2010/marapr/3103.htm)

<sup>7</sup> [www.tuc.org.uk/extras/adaptation.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/adaptation.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See UNISON's alternative budget: [www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/18887.pdf](http://www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/18887.pdf)

We are campaigning to highlight the need for continued stimulus to prevent a double dip recession, for investment in decent public services and a Green New Deal that will create jobs and deliver significant savings through energy efficiency measures. 'Spend to save' funds must be available to ensure energy saving schemes can be started straight away. We will oppose cuts that threaten important climate change action and monitoring; for example, cuts to Scotland's National Parks or to the Scottish Environment Protection Agency.

Stimulus funds and financial policies must be used to ensure banks, particularly those that received huge bailouts, make environmentally sound investments locally and internationally. UNISON has called for the bankers' bonuses tax to be made permanent, for a financial transactions tax, action on tax avoidance and a levy to make banks pay back the full costs of the bailout.

## **UNISON's internal green agenda**

UNISON has a strong internal policy, alongside our external campaigning work and efforts to build a network of environmental representatives. The union has introduced video conferencing, mains water coolers, energy efficiency measures, recycling and green travel to work policies. We will now be striving to make improvements in all these areas.

## **Conclusion**

Action on climate change is necessary for the world to survive as we know it. Action on justice and jobs will create the conditions for building a just society where people in every country are fairly rewarded for their labours, have decent jobs and public services and have hope for their children's future. Action on jobs without thinking about the climate would risk continuing the damage to the planet caused by high greenhouse gas emissions. Action on climate without looking at which countries have historically had the highest carbon emissions would be unfair to the developing world. Economic policies aimed at boosting jobs and switching to a low-carbon economy will not work without democratic and financial regulatory reforms to move away from the culture of greed, consumerism and exploitation that fuelled the credit crunch and led to massive market failure.

Some argue that going green is a luxury when public finances are tight. The reverse is true. We cannot afford not to green the economy. Jobs, justice and climate are inter-related and together provide the key to creating a better world.

Scotland's Climate Change Act has been significant internationally, as will be a legally binding United Nations agreement on climate change. But the most important thing we can all do now is make the changes that will protect the planet for future generations. We hope the Royal Society's inquiry will emphasise the need for a Just Transition and for workplace action in delivering those changes.

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