

Meeting 1

Yorkshire and Humber Just Transition Network

Minutes for the meeting held online 1pm 19 September 2023

The Yorkshire and Humber Just Transition Network is an open forum for green reps and other trade union activists to learn from each other (and each other's unions), develop (new) campaigns and strategies, share successes and setbacks, access (new) resources and events, and meet similar activists. Its intension is to work towards a just transition to a green society for Yorkshire and the Humber.

Invitees

Andrew Miles (a.j.miles@virginmedia.com), Catherine Porritt (catherine.porritt@neu.org.uk), Chris Butler (christopherbutler1@mac.com), Chris Page (chris@unison-rotherham.org.uk), Daphne Robins (daphne.robins@unitetheunion.org), Dave Douglas (dave.douglas@gmbactivist.org.uk), Dave Houlgate (david.houlgate@northyorks.gov.uk), David Lightfoot (david.lightfoot@leeds.gov.uk), Debby Cobbett (deborahcobbett@gmail.com), Dilys Beaumont (*email unknown*), Ellen Robottom (ellenrobottom@hotmail.com), Gerry Lavery (unitecommunityleedswakefield@outlook.com), Ian Sturrock (i.sturrock@tees.ac.uk), Jamie O'Dell (james.o'dell@prospect.org.uk), Jenni Crisp (crispjenni67@gmail.com), Jenny Patient (climateyjen@gmail.com), Jessica Fox (jessica.fox@hullcc.gov.uk), Jo Cutter (j.cutter@leeds.ac.uk), Joan Miller (joanmiller104@gmail.com), Julie Forgan (julieforgan@gmail.com), Kerri Tierney (kerri@unison-rotherham.org.uk), Kim Perry (kimlcperry@gmail.com), Lawrence Barfoot (lawrence.barfoot@homeoffice.gov.uk), Liam Murphy (liampatrickmurphy29@gmail.com), Martin Hickman (patrick.hickman@homeoffice.gov.uk), Martin Mayer (martin.mayer@unitetheunion.org), Nigel Parry (nigel.parry@unitetheunion.org), Simon Brett (simon_brett2003@yahoo.co.uk), Stephanie Hay (stephanie.hay@suma.coop), Steve Hansom (stevehbusiness@icloud.com), Teresa Moore (tmm914@icloud.com), Tom Kistell (t.kistell@shu.ac.uk), Tracy Pallett (tracy.pallett@hullcc.gov.uk), Zach Adams (zach.adams@nhs.net), Zoey Longley (Zoey.longley@leeds.gov.uk)

Attendees

Catherine Porritt, Daphne Robins, Dave Douglas, Debby Cobbett, Dilys Beaumont, Ellen Robottom, Jamie O'Dell, Joan Miller, Kerri Tierney, Lawrence Barfoot, Martin Mayer, Tom Kistell, Tracy Pallett, Sam Perry, Simon Brett, Steve Hansom, Zoey Longley (17)

Apologies

Ian Sturrock, Chris Page, Jenny Patient, Jo Cutter (4)

Welcome and consent (Sam)

Sam welcomed participants and secured unanimous consent to recording the session for the taking of minutes and to adding all participants and invitees to an open email group, sharing addresses so that any member might contact anyone other member.

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[Quoted text in these minutes is from the recording made by MS Teams.]

Introduction (Sam)

Sam said:

So, formally: Good afternoon and welcome to the inaugural meeting of the Yorkshire and Humber Just Transition Network!

For those who don't know me, I'm Sam Perry. I'm the Green Bargaining Officer at Yorkshire and Humber TUC. And that means that I'm interested in helping you, your unions, and your colleagues get interested and active in shaping the transition that we must go through to a greener society.

For a long time, as you'll appreciate, very little was happening in workplaces to address the climate and environmental emergency. There was a lot of action outside workplaces—but even that at a lower level than today—, but not much within them. We saw a smattering of recycling bins and signs asking employees to switch off lights when not needed. And, just to emphasise the lack of action, fully half of all the carbon that human activity has ever released into the atmosphere has been released since the Kyoto Protocol—designed to limit greenhouse gas emissions—was agreed in 1997. Which is to say that it didn't feel like society thought this was much of an 'emergency'.

But, sort of all of a sudden in the last couple of years, organisations of all shapes and sizes have now started to commit to net zero targets or to plan to reduce their environmental impacts in some way. And that's progress and partly the result of trade union actions and lobbying already carried out, but we have to ask, Is it good enough? Will it make a difference? and, Will the changes make Yorkshire and the Humber better or worse?

Obviously, every organisation and locality should be taking action and devising a transition plan for the future, but the problem with plans devised by bosses and local leaders, as we all know, is that they often don't have a focus on us, on workers. As trade unionists, we have established ways to secure safer and healthier workplaces, better training, and better work-life balance for our colleagues, but these climate plans and climate adaptations have been or are being, in the main, devised behind our backs. And that's worrying. These are often the only long term plans that organisations are making and their viability and whether they work for us needs to be examined.

The TUC, for its part, has called for a Climate Action and Jobs Plan for every workplace, created by trade unionists or by a collaboration between bosses and union reps. The thinking of the labour movement here is that, without our involvement, there is no way we will get the 'just' transition to a greener society that we all want and that the Paris Agreement committed the UK to seeking.

However, the fact is that very few workplaces (or governments, for that matter) have Green Transition Plans which have had any input from their workers. And a part of the issue here is that green reps (i.e., engaged environment-aware trade unionists on the ground in workplaces) are still relatively scarce and we're not very well organised on planning for net zero in our workplaces and in our local authorities. There's been a lot of campaigning at national and international level, but not so much directed towards

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workplaces and local government. On greening and safeguarding workplaces, there's also not been a huge amount of coordinated or cross-workplace campaigning and activity, either within unions or across the whole labour movement.

Hence, our new Network. Our thinking is that we collectively can become more than the sum of our parts—sharing experience and ideas, successes and failures, knowledge and resources across the region and between unions and branches.

We've got public and private sector unionists signed up; workplace activists and retired members; branch chairs, green reps, community activists, and political allies. And together, I think we can have a real stab at making the case forcefully and effectively that the climate and environmental crisis is a union issue; that we must be consulted on or, better yet, the driving force behind transition plans; that workers have valuable perspectives and ideas; and that Yorkshire and the Humber cannot have a 'just transition' without us. Big picture: The intension of the Network is to be a space for unionists to work towards a just transition to a green society for Yorkshire and the Humber.

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The labour movement can't not be a democratic movement, and so precisely what this group looks like and how we work needs to be democratically devised. However, being that we've not met like this before, I suggest using the chair's prerogative to have this as our agenda:

- A roundtable where everyone introduces themselves, says what environmentalist or climate change work they're doing (if any—we'll all be at different stages on this so it's really not a problem to say that you've not managed to do much yet)*
- Once we've all introduced ourselves, let's explore some of the initiatives and approaches mentioned. I'm thinking here that this cross-pollination naturally results in empowerment for others and also guides us towards thinking about what we want to do as a group*
- After that, we'll have a chat about how this meeting should work going forward, and decide on a few points*
- And finally, we'll hold space for anything else anyone wants to add*

Roundtable (all)

Sam asked everyone to introduce themselves and their work.

- Catherine Porritt (NEU) is the health and safety and environment rep for her NEU branch, and also active in organising *With Banners Held High*, which has always had a strong green seam.
- Dave Douglas (GMB) has worked at British Gas (Centrica) for 23 years and been a rep for 16 of these. His region is North East, Yorkshire, and the Humber and he's been active thinking about just transition for the sector over the last two and a half years especially. He's particularly interested in harmonising terms and conditions across the green and fossil sector.

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- Debby Cobbett is an environmental rep for UCU Yorkshire and Humber Retired Members branch and the green rep for York Trades Council. She's also organising York Environment Week.
- Dilys Beaumont is an alumna of Yorkshire and Humber TUC, a retired member of Unite Community, and a principal organiser of *With Banners Held High*. She was also a green rep for a time but discussion of 'just transition' wasn't prominent then.
- Ellen Robottom has been an environmental activist for a long time but she realised that the movement needed '*serious organising within and through trade unions and workers more broadly*' so expanded into trade union circles too and is now the Environmental Officer for Unite Community Leeds, Wakefield, and York, but still campaigns fairly widely. She's one of the authors of the *Climate Jobs* book, and has recently been working on a pamphlet-sized edition for West Cumbria. She's also active in organising *We Make Tomorrow*.
- Jamie O'Dell has a background in the environment sector and is now an organiser for Prospect, working on energy and just transition.
- Joan Miller has been a climate activist for about 15 years. She's a Unite Community member, in South Yorkshire Climate Alliance, and convenes South Yorkshire Green New Deal. She believes that links with trade unions are vital and, especially, that green reps need statutory powers, like health and safety reps.
- Kerri Tierney is from Rotherham local government UNISON branch. She's a green rep and part of UNISON's regional green network. She sits on Rotherham local government climate change board and is growing in confidence on intervening there since having participated in the TUC's Workers and Agents of a Just Transition course.
- Tom Kistell is library systems manager at Sheffield Hallam University and UNISON environmental officer for the university branch. He's had a lot of experience with workplace sustainability networks and engaging with employers in practical ways. Recently, that's involved organising around cycling and sustainable travel, bolstered by the access the union has provided.
- Lawrence Barfoot is a civil servant in the Home Office, based in Sheffield, and a green rep in PCS. He's got links with XR. He went back to university recently to study environmental sociology. He's keen on us applying pressure on national government policy and expanding out 'just transition' to global justice, especially exploring issues involving immigration, on which he's written a draft motion for national conference.
- Zoey Longley works for Leeds Local Authority in air conditioning and heat pumps. She's a self-described 'transition' sceptic, not challenging the need but worrying about implementation.
- Martin Meyer is secretary of Sheffield Trades Council, and is a retired bus driver. He recognises the different interest within his union, Unite, on the transition and what 'justice' means—he stresses the need to decarbonise but also to provide jobs and training for those in carbon intensive industries. He's involved in the South Yorkshire Climate Justice Coalition which joins together various groups. He stresses that he and the coalition '*have absolutely no faith in this government: All they're doing is actually*

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putting fuel on the flames [...] But we're almost equally critical of the Labour Party', especially around the delays and caveats in the £28 billion climate programme. He said also that 'We have no faith that big business is going to come to the rescue. They're part of the problem. So, it's about socialism. It's about communities taking back power'.

- Tracy Pallett is a longstanding Unite member and has recently been elected an Environmental Rep for her branch in Hull and East Yorkshire local government. She's particularly interested in sustainable travel and is writing an article for Friends of the Earth on this shortly.
- Daphne Robins is another Unite Environmental Rep at Hull Council, as well as a Learning Rep, Equalities Rep, and Unite tutor. She is conscious that she lacks green rep facility time so she consciously blurs the boundaries between her roles to be able to work on them all. She also believes education is key to climate action. She works in economic development, seeking the balance between economic, sustainability, and social benefits in her work. She's looking to develop carbon literacy (or similar) training for colleagues.
- Simon Brett is a PCS rep for HMRC based in Leeds. Management are starting to include staff in their climate plan discussions a little, but not greatly and the union hasn't been able to get much access, so he's keen to share practical experiences with other unionists.
- Steve Hansom is from Sunderland, where he's partly retired and active in the Trades Council. He laments that groups on climate change are often talking shops and he's keen that this is not that, but a group that takes action. He also appreciates the value of education.
- Sam explained that his particular focus is on the opportunities of housing retrofit, that (unusually) this is a growth area which could increase employment, training opportunities, and good-terms public sector employment, while also putting community justice at its heart. He said that he's working closely with Yorkshire's local authorities, combined authorities, and housing associations to make the case for joined-up work, largescale and long-term investment, more apprenticeships, better links between colleges and work, and community engagement.

During the introductions, there was a discussion in the chat:

- Anonymous: *'South Yorkshire Climate Alliance has been working with Barnsley College to adapt a Carbon Literacy course for college staff. There is training on offer and it would be great to adapt it to TU training. We also adapted it to community groups.'*
- Tracy: *'Perhaps we could have an annual get together in a central part of the region?'* Imagine Leeds was suggested.
- Tom: *'Would especially welcome advice from people on how to carve time out of your working week to do environmental work.'*

A brief discussion on the value of carbon literacy courses followed. These were described as useful not only for their content but for their 'question you bosses' messaging. Tom recalled how a CL course he attended was the setting for a really fruitful generalised

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discussion on sustainability and worker-led actions, which seemed to cross multiple political leanings.

How should the Network function?

Sam led a discussion on how the Network should function. He proposed meeting roughly monthly for an hour and a half on MS Teams to discuss a particular theme each time, allowing a deep dive and opportunities for organising actions. He suggested themes such as negotiating green rep facility time, retrofit, divestment of pensions, negotiating tactics, collaborations with civic society/government groups, or an exploration of a particular campaign.

- Ellen suggested that one session could be an exchange of views on how to create alliances and bridges between trade unions and wider climate campaigns.
- Martin suggested that we *'limit it to two topics [per session]; so one could be a kind of organising/bargaining kind of topic like the one you just suggested and the other one could be a particular theme like, for instance, retrofit.'* He also highlighted his involvement in the Better Buses campaign and volunteered to speak on this and/or public transport generally at some time.

The mood of the meeting seemed to suggest agreement with the proposal.

ACTION: Sam will set up a Doodle Poll to find the next meeting date.

Sam also suggested that future meetings be recorded so others could catch up later. There was general agreement to this.

AOB

Sam mentioned that Labour for a Green New Deal have asked for green activists in the labour movement to complete their survey so they can start building their activist database.

ACTION: Sam to circulate LGND survey details.

Sam advertised an event for York Environment Week on 28 September which the TUC is hosting in person in York and online about trade unionism and environmental activism.

ACTION: Sam to circulate YEW details.

Sam said he'd share the Yorkshire and Humber Green Rep Linktree with the group, containing resources that might be of use. If anyone else has anything that they think we'd benefit from adding to this, please send it to sperry@tuc.org.uk

ACTION: Sam to circulate Linktree details.

Catherine appealed for delegates to discuss and submit ideas from their workplace or green groups they're involved in to the trade union delegation to COP28, led by Jenny Cooper (NEU) and Tony Wright (UNISON). Please contact her as soon as possible, but definitely before 6 December, on catherine.porritt@neu.org.uk.

ACTION: All to send Catherine information for TU delegation to COP28.