

Text of presentation by Ruby Earle, Platform, in the workshop 'Ending fossil fuels, and renewable energy - what would a workers plan for energy look like?'

Conference, 13 April 2024, ['Climate Justice, Climate Jobs: what struggles do we need to win and how?'](#)

For those that don't know, last year Platform in collaboration with Friends of the Earth Scotland published a report called ['Our Power'](#) - a set of ten demands which together form a workers' plan for a just energy transition in the North Sea.

This report - which was the first of its kind - came about through over three years of relationship building and organising with energy workers in the North Sea and their unions.

It started with my predecessors spending days on end hanging out in pubs in Aberdeen, meeting oil and gas workers who were heading out or just about to come back from working offshore.

It then developed into a survey of over 1,300 oil and gas workers - the first of its kind, where climate organisations were focusing on the conditions of the workforce and workers attitudes towards a transition.

Following this, we did 6 in-person workshops across Aberdeen, Edinburgh and Newcastle, bringing together offshore workers to discuss these issues in more depth.

Through these conversations key themes and priority demands started to appear. These were then verified through follow up telephone interviews.

Once the demands were finalised, we launched a survey of 1092 people in November 2022 to test support for the package amongst the wider workforce.

Participants were drawn from across the full spectrum of departments and roles in the offshore industry and brought a range of experience from their careers. Some were union members. Some weren't. Some wanted to move into renewables. Others weren't sure.

So what came out of this three year process?

Well. A set of 10 demands endorsed by over 90% of the 1,092 offshore workers surveyed; Unite Scotland, RMT, PCS and Unison Scotland; and numerous climate and environmental groups.

I won't go into every demand, but to briefly touch on some of what this workers plan for energy looks like:

- Workers wanted to be at the heart of just transition planning. One way to do this is to use Climate Disclosure Agreements to mandate every oil and gas company operating in the UKCS to facilitate the creation of worker-led just transition plans - formalised as collective agreements with unions in the workplace.
- Workers wanted: Clear, accessible pathways out of high carbon jobs, including a jobs guarantee for every offshore worker. Workers don't trust energy companies to act in their interests - they want cast iron guarantees from the government that their livelihoods and communities will be protected.

- Workers want a standardised training regime built to keep workers safe and support their transition into renewables, including an offshore training passport. So they're not forced to pay thousands of pounds to private training companies on certificates for skills they already have.
- Workers want strong rank and file unions and collective bargaining across the whole offshore industry. And universal rights, a wage floor across the UKCS, and effective and trusted whistleblowing procedures. Jake will obviously be able to talk way more about this - but every worker I speak to says the same thing: the offshore energy industry has been under regulated for too long. Any vision for a future energy system must include stronger rights for workers and unions.
- The final demand I will mention runs alongside all of these: Workers overwhelmingly wanted public ownership of energy production and distribution.
 - Only a publicly owned energy industry - they felt - would enable the creation of secure, unionised, and well-paid jobs. It would ensure the benefits of the energy transition are fairly distributed around the communities that support renewable energy generation, rather than paid out to private shareholders - and it would ensure we don't make the same mistakes with renewables as we have with oil and gas.
 - On this, so many of the energy workers I have spoken too, many of whom had worked in Norway and the UK, knew more than most the benefits of publicly owned energy companies - and could see the difference in how the profits of energy production had been used in countries where energy production was publicly owned, rather than a private industry.

So moving on to strategy: What do we do next? How do we build on the links created through this project? How do we win the policy demands reflected in this report? And how do we ensure workers are the ones leading the energy transition?

So fast forward a year and where are we at? What is stopping this from becoming a reality?

We have a governing party in the UK Parliament who (for a range of reasons, predominantly ideological) are opposed to climate action.

Instead of a just transition, they want to protect their profits and the profits of their friends, under the guise of protecting workers, achieving energy security or addressing cost of living.

We have a Government in Scotland widely seen to be failing on a Just Transition, exemplified by recent events at Grangemouth.

We have an opposition Labour party who, whilst adopting Just Transition framing, have little in the way of concrete policy and are ideologically committed to using the market and false-solutions to deliver the transition.

Perhaps most importantly and underlying all of this: is a strong and growing lobby of MPs in the net zero scrutiny group and industry representatives who have strategically and successfully undermined the case for climate action by pitting it against the immediate needs of workers (and therefore unions) and communities (and therefore the public).

Over the last 3 months I've been speaking to energy workers, union officials and climate allies about exactly this question - what battles do we need to be having to secure a just transition in the North Sea?

Through these conversations we have identified 5 key areas of work...which I don't claim answer all of these questions, but hopefully speak to some of them.

First we need to build the strength and commitment of the climate movement to be prioritising specific just transition campaigning. I think the progress made here has been really strong. Most groups campaigning for a phase-out of fossil fuels are also calling for a Just Transition - but there is a gap in terms of actual tangible policy demands and coordinated campaigning in this area.

Concrete policies that protect workers and communities must be central to all phase-out campaigns. 'And a just transition' can't just be a line tagged underneath anymore. The more the climate movement is prioritising just transition demands - like jobs guarantees, union rights, training passports - and showing genuine solidarity with workers struggles - the more hope we stand of building a united movement that can't be ignored or dismissed as 'anti-worker'.

Because there is also a lot of damage to undo - for the mistakes of past climate movements. One of the workers I've been speaking to recently who has been working offshore since 1999 always says that prior to the Our Power Project "the only thing he would have shared with the climate movement was a square go" Scottish for a fist fight.

We in the climate movement now need to show real solidarity with the workers movement - that their struggle is our struggle.

Second we need to be working within the trade union movements - and particularly industrial unions - to be building just transition campaigning. This is happening more and more but there is a gap in industrial unions, that represent those workers who have the most to lose from the transition. At Platform we are in the early stages of collaborating with Unite and RMT - who both supported the Our Power report - on some campaigning, likely on sectoral collective bargaining and mandatory just transition plans. Making the case that for climate action to be successful we need strong workers and union rights.

Third, obviously our politics is in a pretty bad way. But a potential incoming Labour Government does offer some (however limited) opportunity on a just transition. Currently their focus is on incentivising energy companies to protect workers. We need to be working with allies in parliament to but to push for tangible just transition policy that will protect the workforce and strengthen the movement. One example of this is Labour's New Deal for Working People which includes expanding sectoral bargaining to care workers. Calling for this to be extended to energy workers - as a key bedrock of a just transition - is, I think, really important.

Fourth we need to create a strong counter narrative in the media undercutting the increasingly dominant attack lines that phase-out of fossil fuels is inherently anti-worker and therefore must be stopped or slowed down.

I was speaking to an energy worker on Thursday who was calling me from a rig and he said he was sick and tired of reading in the news from industry spokespeople about what workers supposedly think and want. We need to be supporting these workers to get their voices heard in the media, and in Parliament.

Relatedly - we need to put fossil fuel workers at the heart of everything we do. At Platform, we are creating an Our Power advisory board to ensure the next stages of the work aren't shaped by myself, in London, who has never stepped foot on an oil rig, or even us in this conference room - but are shaped and led by those energy workers with the knowledge and experience of the industry.

Finally - we need to be centering international justice at the heart of our work. At Platform we are thinking about how we can do this more - whether that is through ensuring our alternative vision for the North Sea doesn't come at the expense of workers in the global south, or through showing solidarity with the Palestinian struggle right now, and targeting the deep complicity of energy companies operating in the North Sea.

In sum, and I'm sure it will come as no surprise as days like today are about exactly this, we need to focus our efforts on increasing links between unions, workers and the wider movement. But through tangible and focused just transition campaigns, centering workers' voices at the heart of this.

Only through this genuine solidarity will we be able to provide a challenge to the increasingly dominant narrative that transitioning away from fossil fuels is inherently unjust and anti-worker. This (more) united front, will be able to more powerfully call for a just transition that protects workers, communities and the planet.