

Class and environmentalism in the UK:

Trade unions in the energy sector

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ABSTRACT:

Trade unions, as the bastions of worker rights in the class struggle, have historically fought for workers in the societal realm. However, workers movements have a more complicated relationship to environmental issues. The middle-class British environmental movement, from its very inception during the Industrial Revolution on the other hand, has always had a class problem. In a country as hierarchical and class-based as the UK, is there scope for worker-environmentalist solidarity for a social-ecological transformation, a 'Just Transition' to sustainability?

The current politically fraught situation of trade unions in the UK, including a declining and aging membership, provides an undercurrent of urgency to the topic. How do trade unions officials in the UK negotiate the difficult challenge of squaring the short-term immediate aims of their members with the long-term aim of broad socio-ecological development – including social welfare and a habitable environment?

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1. Introduction

The unanimous scientific consensus regarding the looming human-caused environmental crisis has been out for some decades (I.P.C.C., 2014; Portier et al., 2017; Tapia Granados, Ionides, & Carpintero, 2012). We have crossed four out of the agreed nine planetary boundaries – climate change, loss of biosphere integrity, land-system change, and the altered biogeochemical cycles of phosphorus and nitrogen. Two of these, climate change and biosphere integrity, are core boundaries, which when significantly altered will drive the Earth into a new state (Steffen, et al. 2015). Over a hundred years of the ‘treadmill of production’ (Gould, Pellow, & Schnaiberg, 2004), increasing production and consumption, material throughput and the exponential escalation in the use of fossil fuels to support every part of our lives, in what Ulrich Brand (Brand, 2016) has termed ‘the imperial mode of living’, mean that we are now fast approaching natural barriers to growth. Of course, this pertains especially to the core industrialised countries in the global North. The crisis we are facing obstructs, or threatens to obstruct the continuation of our existing societal and economic system of capital accumulation. In addition to this all-encompassing existential threat the current regime of capitalist extractivism poses to the climate, Western societies are also facing multiple and interrelated crises in the societal and economic spheres, which are embedded in the larger environmental system. These include rising inequality, the restructuring of work, technological-change-induced unemployment, further deindustrialisation, ever faster investment cycles, and increasing financialisation, to name but a few. What can be done?

Although class relations in Western economies have changed since industrialisation, the onset of capitalism, and the birth of the working class, core class relations still ‘define both the structures that predominate in capitalist society as well as the most significant agents within’ (Hampton, 2015, p. 31). Historically, workers movements have been the social forces to *régulate* capitalism, if mostly in the societal realm. Workers movements have been at the forefront of fights for social democracy, employee rights and the right to health – as well as a healthy environment, yet this aspect has been more contentious (Räthzel, Cock, & Uzzell, 2018). Labour (in the form of trade unions) has had an ambivalent relationship with the environment, especially when the livelihoods of workers have been threatened, and has at points opted to side with capital in the expropriation of nature for profit (Jakopovich, 2009). Moreover, trade unions themselves have not necessarily been the vehicles for working class power, as the leadership of trade unions has also been co-opted by capital (Mason & Morter, 1998).

Both Marx and Engels viewed labour as an inherent part of nature, and workers as inherently natural beings exercising their mental and physical abilities on an external natural environment (Barca, 2013). A Marxist critique of capitalism thus focuses on the alienation of labour and the exploitation of the surplus value of the ‘natural’ fruits of labour and labour-power of the working classes. Consistent with an ecological critique of the exploitation of nature and ‘natural resources’, this exploitation is not only a matter of low wages and the theft of the products of labour (as well as the expropriation of nature), but about masking the relations of production through the wage form, as well as ideological explanations for the source of these profits (Barca, 2014; Barca & Leonardi, 2018). Capital has succeeded in privatising and appropriating nature *from* labour, thus creating the dualism of nature and labour (i.e. the ‘jobs vs. environment’ dilemma), while of course there can be no labour without nature. This dualism must be transformed to a concept of labour and humans living as an interconnected part of ecological communities (Räthzel et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, the post-ideological aspects of the current neoliberal accumulation regime in which we live – Mark Fisher’s so-called capitalist realism (2009) – not only depoliticises class conflict, but also shapes our understanding of what exists and is possible. Current ecomodernist debates on the Green

Economy create a ‘tranquilizing dispositive’ (Brand, 2016, p. 119), silencing criticism and lulling us towards inaction, while blinding us to the *Reals* outside capitalist realism – cracks in the system of accumulation which show that the system of the treadmill of production is *inherently* unsustainable, and cannot simply be greened (Spash, 2012).

While it is thus clear that there is an urgent need for a broad environmental labour movement to emerge, can this develop out of the existing trade union movement?

Union independence, willingness to fight employers, as well as a broad understanding of the role of a trade union in communities (and broader society) are all necessary for labour environmentalism to emerge, according to Jakopovich (2009). Looking to the United Kingdom, where trade unions and labour has been under attack since the Thatcher’s neoliberal revolution of the 1980s, the position of trade unions – both in terms of the societal power they hold, and their reach – has waned. In what has been dubbed ‘business unionism’ (Hyman, 2001), many trade unions have adopted the business ontology and business language of capital, acting as mediators and service providers, and depoliticising class struggle on their own part, in order to hold onto their waning power. This has been accompanied with the abandoning the fight for, and practice of, workers self-emancipation, while strengthening union bureaucracy (Daniels & McIlroy, 2009; Jakopovich, 2009; Upchurch, Taylor, & Mathers, 2009). It is unsurprising that many researchers in the field of environmental labour studies consider grassroots and rank-and-file activism as the way towards cooperation with other (environmental) organisations, and possible action for the environment, on a local, community-level (Barca & Leonardi, 2018; Gould, Lewis, & Roberts, 2004; Snell & Fairbrother, 2010), led by specific grassroots environmental activists from the bottom-up and within the union (Lundström, 2018; Räthzel et al., 2018).

Yet, there has been bottom-up action on behalf of climate activists in various organisations, including trade unions in the UK, since at least the popularisation of the climate crisis in the 1970s, continuing to today (Hampton, 2015). Could any change come from the union leadership – and how policy makers and officials in the trade unions think about the role of unions in the climate crisis? This research project has been inspired by these questions, and the wish to learn something about the way in which officials in UK trade unions think about the many contradictions of the climate crisis and the role of trade unions. Choosing the energy sector, where the climate vs. jobs dilemma is the most crystallised (Soder, Niedermoser, & Theine, 2018; Theine, 2016), and the case study of the UK, the following research question has been posed:

From the point of view of high-level trade union officers – how do trade unions negotiate the short-term aims of the immediate interests of their members, and the long-term aim of broad socio-ecological development, including a habitable environment and social welfare?

In four qualitative, semi-structured interviews, with high-level policy officers in unions in the energy sector, the general issues of the environmental labour movement and a just transition have been problematized. The unions were: Unison (“UNISON” - the public services union and biggest union in the UK with 1.4 million members)¹, Unite (“Unite the Union” – a general union with 1.3 million members²), and GMB (“General, Municipal, Boilermakers and Allied Trade Union” – a general union of

¹“UNISON: annual returns 2017”, *Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721211/36T_2017.pdf (accessed: 10.08.2018)

²“Unite the Union: annual returns 2017”, *Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/736675/95T_2017.pdf (accessed: 10.08.2018)

mostly industrialised workers with 614,000 members³), as well as the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the umbrella organisation of trade unions in the UK – a loose federation. After the short review of literature in Chapter 2 and the institutional overview of trade unions in the UK in Chapter **Error! Reference source not found.**, Chapter 4 will present the methodology used, and Chapter **Error! Reference source not found.** the empirical results of the interviews. Then an analysis of the empirical findings will follow in Chapter 0, and a comparison with the Austrian TRAFO-LABOUR project in Chapter **Error! Reference source not found.** Some concluding remarks will be offered in Chapter **Error! Reference source not found.**

³“GMB: annual returns 2017”, *Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721024/07T_2017.pdf (accessed: 10.08.2018)

2. Literature review

There is a growing field of research concentrating on labour, trade unions and environmentalism, dubbed ‘environmental labour studies’ (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2011). The underlying basis of research in this field is the shared normative belief that the labour movement, as a historically vital organised manifestation of popular power responsible for fighting for societal emancipation, has both a role to play, as well as a responsibility, in the climate crisis (Barca, 2014; Barca & Leonardi, 2018; Hampton, 2015; Jakopovich, 2009; Lundström, Räthzel, & Uzzell, 2015; Räthzel & Uzzell, 2011; Rosemberg, 2013; Snell & Fairbrother, 2010; Soder et al., 2018; Stevis, 2018).

Paul Hampton’s (2015) seminal book *Workers and trade Unions for Climate Solidarity*, (as well as his recent article (2018),) offers a clear and extensive overview of the interactions of trade unions with environmental issues in the UK, on multiple levels of analysis. Building on Hyman’s (2001) analysis of the trichotomy of trade union identities and discourses (market, society, class – with unions in the UK tending towards the market-class axis), Hampton (2015) maps climate discourses onto this triangle (see also: Räthzel & Uzzell, 2011). He distinguishes neoliberalist (markets), ecological modernisationist (state/society), and Marxist (class) approaches to the climate crisis as fitting Hyman’s trichotomy. Hampton advocates for a ‘Marxist political economy’ trade union perspective on the climate crisis, which challenges extant class relations and the structures of the crisis. There is huge variance between different trade unions in the UK (and abroad) in terms of how unions approach climate change within this trichotomy, as climate change responses vary depending on the industries unions are organised in, union leadership, and the ability of rank-and-file members to have access to decision-making and agenda-setting powers (Hampton, 2015, 2018).

Mason and Morter (1998) write about the experiences of the UK Transport Workers Union (T&G; now amalgamated into UNITE the Union – H.K.) from the perspective of local and grass-roots level engagement (see also Chapter 5 in Mason, 2012, for the updated version of the article). They argue that while the Conservatives have excluded trade unions from official state-level round-table-talks on sustainability, in reality, these have little influence on policy anyway. Trade unions and the TUC on their part have failed to take advantage of local-level developments in environmental policymaking (Agenda 21), and in trying to forge more links with the public and other actors and interests groups. The authors argue that the environmental justice platform could provide trade unions like T&G a new *raison d’être* and a possibility for union renewal as a ‘worker-citizen’ political trade union. Snell and Fairbrother (2010) also come to a similar conclusion with Australian trade unions, arguing that climate change offers unions a new sense of purpose – especially on the local level – by building solidarity with other movements for environmental justice matters. However, this would entail a significant level of radicalisation in terms of the aims and strategies of trade unions – as mentioned by other researchers (Barca, 2014; Felli, 2014; Jakopovich, 2009; Räthzel, Cock, & Uzzell, 2018). Since this radicalisation entails conflict, the already defensive position of unions also disables them from facing the contradictions and conflict inherent in the current capitalism accumulation regime (Jakopovich, 2009; Mason & Morter, 1998). The authors acknowledge that so far trade unions have been put in antagonistic position with emerging social movements because of an appropriate anxiety about jobs, but that unions must confront their needs to narrowly protect the jobs and interests of their members. This is paramount for a broader and renewed political unionism to emerge – a view shared by most researchers in the field.

Looking at the Austrian context of trade unions and climate policy as part of the TRAFO-LABOUR⁴ project, Soder et al. (2018) as well as Theine (2016) focus on Austrian trade unions in the energy sector,

⁴ <https://trafo-labour.univie.ac.at/home/> (accessed: 10.08.2018)

problematising the “jobs vs. environment” dilemma. They conclude that in the Austrian case, where corporatism ensures a strong position for unions, despite problems (including the ecological modernist outlook), strategic alliances between environmental groups and trade unions contain the possibilities of a broad new alliance for socio-ecological transformation. The Austrian case study and the TRAFO-LABOUR will be returned to more fully in Chapter **Error! Reference source not found.**, as a comparison to the research project at hand.

Stefania Barca (Barca, 2012, p. 61) criticises trade unions for failing to address broader issues and not questioning ‘the political ecology of industrial production and pollution in society’ both at the local and at the global level. According to the researcher, trade unions fail to draw connections between health and safety at the workplace and general struggles for healthy and safe environments, and (especially in larger, institutionalised unions) fail to question the paradigm of growth and productivism itself to address social problems, amounting to a similar criticism of union de-politicisation and lost class struggle, amongst other issues. The researcher uses the ‘treadmill of production’ theory of capitalist expansion (see also: Gould, Pellow, et al., 2004) to underline why green growth/ecomodernist approaches are not sustainable, and why the class struggle must be reignited (Barca, 2012, 2014). Jakopovich (2009) similarly argues that a major goal of labour–environmental cooperation must be to create a broad anti-neoliberalist alliance, to challenge the hyper-exploitation of workers, as well as social and environmental destruction. Although his work focuses on US trade unions (for US example see also Stevis, 2018; Stevis & Felli, 2015), his findings mirror those of many industrialised countries (for example the UK: Hampton, 2015; Mason & Morter, 1998; and Australia: Snell, 2018; Snell & Fairbrother, 2010). This argument is that the neoliberal assault on workers and trade unions has made jobs a priority, creating a service-style business unionist model. This model of unionism has strengthened the role of bureaucracy, and union co-optation, and made unions a de-politicised service provider. In our current business ontology, the necessity and practice of workers’ self-emancipation itself has already been abandoned by bigger unions, thus for a broader environmental-worker alliance the role of trade unions themselves must be repoliticised (this builds on the analysis of Hyman, 2001, about the market-society-class trichotomy of trade unions).

Jankopovich (Ibid.) also echoes the concerns of Gould, Lewis and Roberts (2004), who found that in the broad American “Seattle coalition” of environmentalists and unionists against the WTO in 1999, class divide and the biocentric environmentalism of environmentalists also helped to preclude the development of a stronger alliance. Gould et al. (2004), like many researchers mention the need for the environmental movement to become more class conscious and politicised, and to place the environmental health of people (anthropocentric environmentalism) more centrally in their constructions of ideology, for the development of a truly working-class broad environmental justice movement (Barca & Leonardi, 2018; Hampton, 2015; Jakopovich, 2009). The post-political condition of neoliberal capitalism means that environmental justice activists are preoccupied with regulatory agencies, blinded to the issue of the production decisions of capital in generating environmental risks (Mason & Morter, 1998); environmental activists must also explicitly challenge private ownership and the appropriation of nature by capital (Räthzel et al., 2018).

Felli shows that the international trade unions (ITUs) that he researched all had a comprehensive vision of change, as well as how to overcome the challenges posed by climate change, but with three broadly different forms of environmentalism that reflected political differences and selectivities for forms of action, alliance building and scales of action. The three strategies that ITUs employed were the ‘deliberative’ post-political strategy (most dominant); the ‘collaborative’ social-democratic growth strategy; or the ‘socialist’ strategy (Felli, 2014). Although the ‘socialist’ strategy was the only strategy to challenge the roots of the climate change problem – capitalist accumulation – similarly to Jakopovich

(2009), the issue of the general de-politicisation of work as well as the class struggle impedes the emergence of radical environmental alliances (Felli, 2014).

Accordingly, most articles mention the issue of ecomodernism, which depoliticises the debate of climate change. Trade unions in general have hopped on the ecomodernist train when it comes to issues of environmental health and climate change, as a way to show their environmental credentials while not creating conflict (and also not really facing the issue of climate change) (Jakopovich, 2009). The post-political ecomodernist, or “green growth” agenda is deeply rooted in the business ontology of neoliberal capitalism, scientifically impossible⁵ and does not challenge productivism, or the current political ecology of industrial production (Fletcher & Rammelt, 2017; Spash, 2012), or the conditions and relations which created climate change in the first place (Lundström, 2018). Overcoming the utopian and dangerous ideas of ecomodernism and green growth are seen as a major obstacle holding back real progressive alliances and politicisation by most researchers (for example: Hampton, 2015; Mason & Morter, 1998).

The focus of the Austrian TRAFO-LABOUR project and especially the work of Hendrik Theine (2016), on trade union policy officers and high-ranking bureaucrats in the energy intensive industries, has been instrumental in helping shape the research focus of the study at hand. While there is a broad and in-depth material on environment-trade union relations in the UK, no researcher has focused on policy officers in the energy sector of trade unions. Combining the Austrian TRAFO-LABOUR project research focus on trade unions in the energy industry, and applying it in the context of UK trade unions has thus provided the basis for this study. Sharing the normative belief that the labour movement (and trade unions, as the historic manifestation of workers’ power) have both a role to play, as well as a responsibility in the climate crisis, the aim of this work is to add to the existing literature on environmental labour studies.

⁵ For a discussion on absolute decoupling and green growth, please see for example Barrett et al., 2013; Jiborn, Kander, Kulionis, Nielsen, & Moran, 2018; Ward et al., 2016.

3. Trade unions and the environment in the United Kingdom: a short overview

Over the past thirty years, capitalist realism has successfully installed a 'business ontology' in which it is simply obvious that everything in society, including healthcare and education, should be run as a business. As any number of radical theorists from Brecht through to Foucault and Badiou have maintained, emancipatory politics must always destroy the appearance of a 'natural order', must reveal what is presented as necessary and inevitable to be a mere contingency, just as it must make what was previously deemed to be impossible seem attainable. (Fisher, 2009, p. 17)

After the growth of trade unionism and trade unions since the post-war era, the crisis of welfare capitalism in the 1970s produced a new post-Fordist system in the UK, in which capital was able to break the power of labour. British capital was aided in this by international financial and capital mobility, technological change, the oil crisis, an ideological shift towards monetarism, a right-wing populist media controlled by private capital, as well as a state in favour of capital, which used oppressive judicial measures to break the power of organised labour, and to set in place new structures which would restrain and limit labour for the foreseeable future (Hampton, 2018; Hyman, 1999, 2001; Jessop, 1991). The last four decades since the neoliberal revolution have seen an almost relentless onslaught on union rights and activities by the state in the UK, as well as the emergence of a new post-political capitalist realist ideology, which further hinders trade union possibilities for action (Mason, 2012). The price of the collapse of unionism, the decline of the regulative power of labour, and the de-politicisation of work overall has been a heavy one, especially on the most underprivileged members of society. Although the large scale privatisation of public assets, restructuring and shrinking of the state since the 1980s seemingly helped to resolve the crisis of welfare capitalism and stimulate an economic upturn, the long-term economic and societal price for this has been heavy – in terms of declining welfare, rising inequality, poverty, crime, and even malnutrition in children since the 1980s (Bambra, 2009; Pereira, Handa, & Holmqvist, 2017; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010).

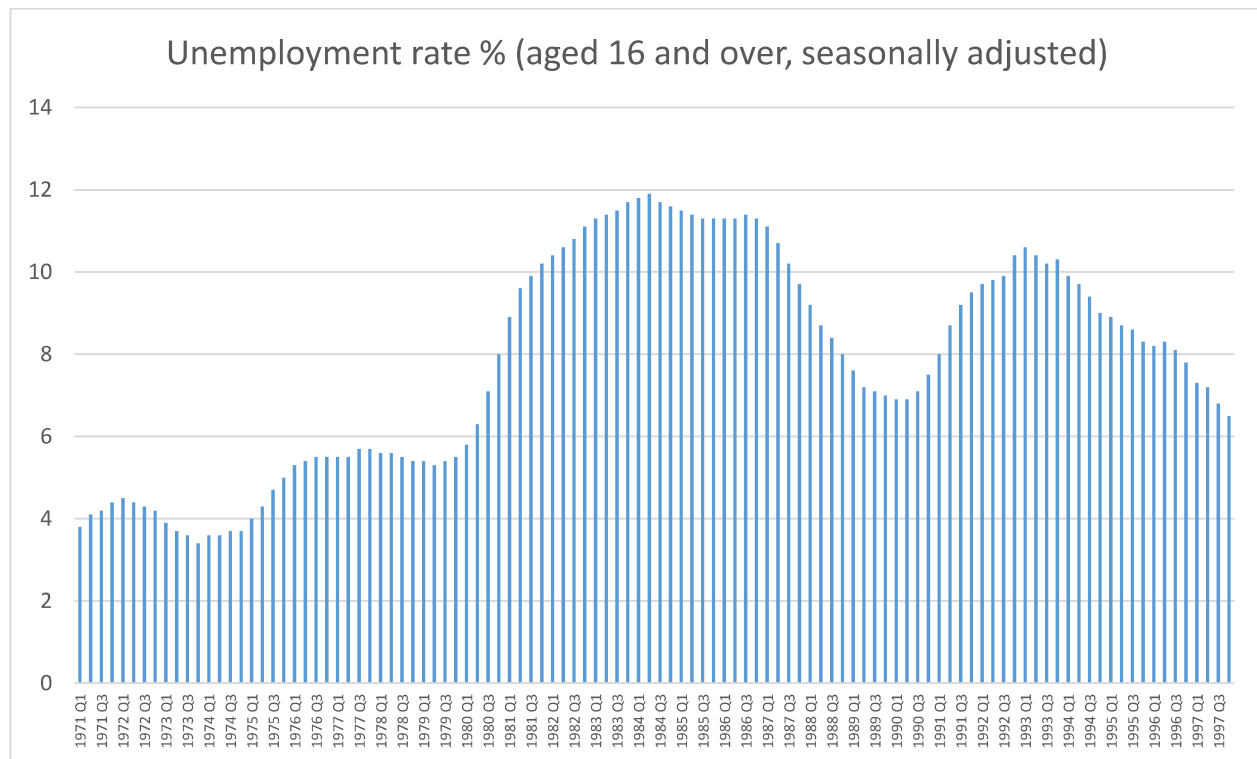
Looking at the period of neoliberal capitalist regime consolidation during Thatcher's primacy shows the extent to which 'state form and social policy are among the most important aspects of the modes of regulation governing an accumulation regime' (Jessop, 1991, p. 87). While Fordism and welfare capitalism involved an enhanced role for the state in managing labour on behalf of capital, the post-Fordist Thatcher regime saw a role for the state in breaking trade unions in order to flexibilise social relations on behalf of capital. A major reason for this was that the needs of capital had changed – while capital benefited from full time employment, rising wages and consumption levels (the workers as consumers) during the post-war boom of class compromise, the needs of capital had changed as welfare capitalism ran into crises due to the expansion of the welfare state (Jessop, 1991). Not only has labour been flexibilised and restructured (or 'recommodified') with the breaking of the trade unions and the loss of manufacturing industry, the very occupational structures of work have changed. This has brought mass polarisation and the hollowing out of the middle classes (Bambra, 2009; Hyman, 2001; Williams, 1997).

Neoliberalism also co-opted social democracy and de-politicised class conflict on the left. The response of the trade unions to the weakening of their position has also been to embrace policies and restructuring themselves in ways that were consonant with new business ontology. Unions have been encouraged to jettison collective practices in favour of providing individualised services for members, with an emphasis on individual financial services and representation – an 'expression of the decollectivization of employment relations' (Williams, 1997, p. 496). The arrival of 'New Labour' (or 'Third Way Labour') signalled, loudly, that the Keynesian consensus of the post-war period had thoroughly been replaced with the neoliberal consensus and business ontology of the post-Thatcher period, both in the (moderate) left and right. The Labour Party, for their part, refused to revoke the anti-union legislation of Thatcher in the pursuit of global industrial competitiveness and the denial and suppression of class conflict. The Conservative governments that have followed have since

strengthened anti-union legislation. The UK continues to have some of the heaviest regulations pertaining to trade unions and workers' organisations in the Western world (Bernaciak, Gumbrell-McCormick, & Hyman, 2014). It is interesting that despite neoliberalism's claim to be *against* regulation and for the liberation of markets and rules, this has only pertained to capital. Trade unions, since the neoliberal advent, have been overregulated – the fact that trade unions are not allowed to use online ballots in voting (on strike action) while the Conservative Party themselves are, is one example of overregulation that aims to limit the power of labour vis-à-vis capital (Williamson, 2016).

Apart from dramatically altering the legal framework within which trade unions functioned, another legacy of Margaret Thatcher was to wholly transform the British labour market. From having 1.4 million unemployed in 1979 (5.4% of the working population), the number increased quickly to 3.2 million unemployed in 1982 (10.7%). Figure 1 shows the fluctuation in unemployment around the 4-5% mark between 1971 and 1979, and the sharp increase in unemployment after Margaret Thatcher's ascent, eventually growing to 11.8% in 1984. In the post-war era unemployment had been around 2%, and although there was a deterioration of this in the 1960s and 1970s, the close to 12% level of unemployment suffered by British workers in 1984 was by far the highest in Europe. The Keynesian goal of full employment was scrapped, a problematic fact since social reproduction in the UK is tied to labour income and wage labour (Bambra, 2009). The enormous increases of unemployment thus led to the huge increases of poverty and the widening of the class gap. What the unemployment figures do not show is also the qualitative changes – the sharp decline in the traditional, full-time, secure, manufacturing jobs and the increase in 'flexible', insecure, part-time and self-employed work; the decrease in state-owned enterprises and the increase of employment in the private sector (Hyman 2001, p. 104).

Figure 1



Source: Office for National Statistics: 'Unemployment rate (aged 16 and over, seasonally adjusted).'

Source Dataset ID: CDID MGSX LMS. Release date: 15.11.2017

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/unemployment/timeseries/mgsx/lms> (accessed: 25.11.17)

One of the major transformations to come out of the qualitative changes in employment, the huge increases in the number of unemployed, and the regulation of trade unions, has been the huge drop in overt industrial action. The blow of the miners losing out against the state have made it clear for many that economic militant industrial action no longer works, and that the power of organised labour as a counterweight to capital is, and has been, on the demise (Hyman, 2001).

Importantly, the privatisation and restructuring policies of Thatcher had only been possible because of the Machiavellian co-opting of the middle classes, and the hiding and denial of class relations. Thatcher's success lay in the fact that she managed to persuade the middle that they could gain personally by siding with capital, and gain from a politically motivated privatisation of public companies and utilities, in a bipartisan environment. Although median-class voters had favoured redistributive policies before, in what Biais and Perotti have called 'Machiavellian Privatization', Thatcher was crucially able to both convince and provide panaceas to a large enough sector of the middle classes, to be voted back into office twice (Biais & Perotti, 2002). Thatcher did this through making sure that there were enough shares allocated to middle-classes in the newly privatised industries. The 'carrot' of strategic rationing and under-pricing of shares in firms such as British Gas, for example, was to retain power, by targeting a section of society and thus building political support. This helped to align preferences for privatisation and low spending amongst middle-class voters with those of ensuring successive Conservative power (Wen & Yuan, 2010). The 'commanding heights' of the British economy, including steel, civil aviation, telecoms, railways, electricity, water and gas, were thus delivered up for auction in what became one of the biggest transfers of wealth from the public to private interests. '(M)arketed to the people with soothing promises of a shareholder democracy', the privatisation of public assets and social housing not only allowed the attacks on trade unions, but together with deregulation lay the basis for the build-out of London-based capital markets, financialisation and the speculative real-estate boom (Guinan & Hanna, 2013). This class betrayal and the denial and depoliticisation of class conflict has had lasting repercussions on union abilities to mobilise along class lines.

The environmental movement has also historically been entrenched along class lines. In the Victorian era, ecocentric environmentalism emerged, as a distinct form of class antagonism by the middle classes towards the sooty squalor of urbanisation, industrialisation, and the working classes (Wilson, 2014). The inter-war years was characterised by the emergence of more and more environmental groups, which were by-and-large still concerned with purist and conservationist ideas about preserving "Godly" nature and the countryside (from the hands of the poor). It is no surprise that the trade union movement – concentrating rather on basic living and working standards, housing and sustenance for workers – did not have many crossovers with the environmental groups. As the rising toll that the Industrial Revolution and the 'second Industrial Revolution' had taken on the environment became more and more clear to citizens, the 1970s also saw the advent of the environmental movement as a force to counter the destruction of industrialisation. It was born out of the industrial destruction of the Second World War, the Great London Smog of 1952, and the British Petroleum's Torrey Canyon oil spill of 1967. The latter was one of the worst oil spills in the history of the world, as some 150 million litres of crude oil was spilt off the Cornish coast. In the 1969 Labour Party conference, then Prime Minister Harold Wilson, for the first time, mentioned the environment as a major concern for the country (Wilson, 2014). This was the first time the environment had been mentioned in a major speech of the Labour Party (or any political party) in the UK.

In the early 1970s the trade unions also began to engage with the growing environmental movement. The earliest significant reference to climate change in TUC literature was from this period, and came from John Davoll, Director of the Conservation Society. At the TUC Workers and the Environment Conference in July 1972, he warned that the burning of fossil fuels was changing the composition of the atmosphere and possibly impacting future weather conditions (Hampton, 2018). From the start, the TUC position on climate policy was one of ecological modernisation – stressing state intervention to deal with the 'market failures' of environmental catastrophes, supporting target setting and

regulation as a non-market based policy tools, emphasising the role of science and technology in overcoming climate and environmental concerns, focusing on social welfare and social justice in regards to the issue, and reiterating the importance of trade unions as legitimate stakeholder partners deserving a place in national discussions. The TUC's 'balanced energy policy' of supporting technological solutions, state intervention and 'multi-stakeholder interests', while formulated in relation to the oil price hikes of the early 1970s, was subsequently enlarged to include climate change as a major factor. Although an Environmental Action Group was established by the TUC in 1989, and many sustainability and pro-environment motions were passed, most trade unions have not left the convenient middle ground of ecomodernisation. Although it is clear that unions understood the implications and science behind climate change, the political implications of effective climate policy in terms of jobs and the living standards of workers, meant that most trade union leaders have appeared to have recoiled from following through consistently on climate policy (Hampton, 2015).

4. Research design and methods

To explore how high-level trade union policy officers in the energy sector view the contradictions between the immediate interests of their members, and the long-term interests of society, a qualitative research design has been followed based on both initial document analysis and semi-structured “elite” or “expert” interviews (Harvey, 2011; Richards, 1996).

Four unions with the most members in the energy sector in the UK – GMB, Unite, Prospect and UNISON – were thus chosen as subjects of study, as well as the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the umbrella organisation of trade unions in the UK. In the end, four interviews were conducted, around one hour on average, with representatives from Unite, GMB, Unison and the TUC. Within the narrow scope and time constraints of the research project, this was an appropriate sample size for the number of interviews conducted, and in line with the concept of ‘saturation’ (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Within these institutions, high-level policy officers were approached who were in the energy or environmental sectors, and responsible for or connected to the energy and fossil fuel industries. Unfortunately it was not possible to secure an interview with Prospect leadership, a much smaller, specialised ‘professional’ union with 140,000 members⁶. It would have been an interesting comparison to the general unions. The interviews were conducted in June 2017 in London, in the offices of the respective organisations, as is considered best practice (Harvey, 2011; Trinczek, 2009). Because of a (largely) shared normative background in the socio-political field, as someone interested in the revitalisation of the trade union movement, the interviews were amicable, and I was able to build up rapport easily. This also allowed for a more confrontational interview style (Harvey, 2011; Kreinin, 2018).

In the analysis and coding of the interviews the inductive category formation method was followed (Aberbach & Rockman, 2002; Edwards & Holland, 2013; Mayring, 2014). Mayring’s (2014) method of inductive category development for the qualitative content analysis was used. Keywords, themes and (possible) codes were noted down before the interview process. This a priori list was derived from previous knowledge, the subject matter and the formulated questions which I asked at the interviews (these included ‘the future’, ‘marketisation’, ‘socialism/solidarity’) (T.C.E.C., 2012). The qualitative coding programme QCAMap was used, as popularised by Philipp Mayring, to carry out three rounds of coding with the narrowed down categories observed in the first round (Mayring, 2014). The different categories and information gained through the coding process were further reviewed, summarised and organised through the analysis process.

⁶ “Prospect: union for professionals, union for life”, *Prospect.org.uk*. <https://www.prospect.org.uk/about/index> (accessed: 29.06.2017)

5. Empirical results

5. 1. Climate change: 'I think most people get climate change and get the need to change.'

During the category formation and analysis of the interviews, one of the more striking (if unsurprising) elements that surfaced was the extent to which trade union representatives, albeit some with caveats, professed knowledge and awareness of the need for change and general long-term problems emanating from human-induced climate change and the 'treadmill of production'. The pressing reality of climate change and trade union awareness of the problem was mentioned in 17 different places throughout the interviews. However, this was also tied to acknowledgments that change is not happening as fast as they (the interviewees) would like, or is needed, or that there are particular problems that need to be overcome.

I think most people get climate change, and get the need to change. It's the speed I suppose at which you do that. And how you do that. And what people may or may not be prepared to give up.

(Interviewee #1)

The GMB correspondent, while agreeing and accepting the reality of climate change and its impacts, always qualified this knowledge with either pessimism about society's ability to change things, the futility of taking any action, or the naiveté of thinking that change could happen. These were arguments to keep the status quo. When asked about how GMB policy in this field had changed, the respondent nevertheless conceded that the GMB had changed their policy and views on the topic in the past (for example regarding coal, a policy change unthinkable in the past):

For a long time GMB was pro coal... We're very clearly accepting that climate change is a reality. So we're not climate change deniers. By any means. But there is this interim period, which I have returned to again and again, between where we are now, and the amount of energy needs that can be reduced by renewables, and where we need to get to, which is something close to a 100% (...)

I suppose we have moved to a degree with the times. It reflects social change and the emergence science around global warming, right through sort of the technological changes that allow you to consider other stuff. So we recognise that coal fired power stations are the worst form of power to be produced. The best is always the renewable stuff like wind and solar, because there are less risks associated with that, but there is a viability issue... Nuclear is best, and zero carbon, absolutely reliable... risks associated obviously, the safe production... and of course what you do with the waste.

(Interviewee #1)

The respondent from the TUC summed up these different positions between the unions in regard to the issues of energy sustainability and climate change as follows:

All unions now are very well aware of the threat of climate change and of the need for sustainability. I don't think there are any climate sceptics in the current union movement, but of course we have members in fossil fuel industries and in heavy industries. (...) I don't think there is anyone in the union movement that doesn't recognise the challenge of climate change and the need to meet that challenge. We move forward as fast as we can, but sometimes that's not as fast as we'd ideally like to move forward.

(Interviewee #2)

While there were clear differences between union policies depending on where their members came from, the trade union representatives all expressed a serious concern with climate change and its

effects – even if they saw the role of trade unions in fighting climate change differently. Tied to this, the issue of trade unions being ‘member orientated’ came up 22 times in the 4 interviews. Sometimes as a reason for why trade unions had specific (anti-fracking, pro-fracking) policies, but also sometimes as a reason for not taking a certain action, or not supporting certain environmental groups.

We can probably make a better contribution if we take our members with us, than if we start campaigning for stuff that leaves our members in a place of fear.
(Interviewee #2)

Well I think that they [UNISON] are probably reflecting the views of their members [on fracking]. Which is predominately a public sector. Their policies will be shaped and driven in the same way that ours are. But I would work closely with a couple of UNISON officials, who personally would be pro-fracking. And, you know, think that the policy of the union is wrong. But they are like me, they are on wages. They get an opportunity, you know, to write that down, but that could have been voted down on the last week, if congress chose, you know, that could have been voted down and we would be in a different position. We'd still be in an agnostic position about fracking I guess.
(Interviewee #1)

5. 2. Energy worries: energy supply, fuel poverty, energy prices, re-nationalisation and fracking

Energy supply worries, fuel poverty, and the availability of affordable energy to working class people in general – as well as trade union members – was a major concern for the representatives. Two representatives mentioned energy renationalisation as a policy solution that would help the current situation:

You know we seek to work with the industries, the gas industry and whatever it is... we have a clear policy that [the energy sector] should be state owned, but it's not, and the companies exist to make money, and that's the reality of why companies exist(...) We are pro a nationalised energy sector policy, that goes without saying. That's just a given for us.
(Interviewee #1)

Since de-nationalisation, the workforce has been reduced by two thirds. It's phenomenal, the reduction, you know?... We are spending a disproportionate amount of money allowing people to pretend that it is a free market, when it is only 15% maximum that are switching, and the rest don't bother, and they end up on the cards... So, a low tariff would be our chief objective in energy, and the only way you can do that, we believe, is by a form of nationalization. And that's the important thing for the future.
(Interviewee #3)

While both Unite and GMB members mentioned the renationalisation of the energy sector as a prerequisite for fair fuel price, the Unite representative nevertheless had some reservations about nationalisation, too:

There's decisions about bureaucracy and nationalisation, and all state control, but that shouldn't mean that you should let it stop you, you just find ways of overcoming that. One of the things was that some nationalised industries didn't do that well with innovation.
(Interviewee #3)

The fair distribution of the costs of energy was one of the main concerns of the representatives, and came up 15 times in the conversations. In the case of the GMB representative, this concern was often

mentioned together with the issues affordability of renewables, as well as the geopolitics of fossil fuels and energy, and fracking – fracking, according to the representative, would provide the UK with secure energy self-sufficiency, and affordable fuel. The representative of Unite mentioned insulation as an important part of the costs of energy, as well as sustainability. Many speakers also mentioned the policy of an ‘energy price cap’ as necessary to stop the hike in prices.

Fracking and nuclear energy were also issues that came up regarding fuel security, fuel self-sufficiency and the issue of fuel poverty. As the interviewee from the GMB explained:

So, most of our power - both heating and electricity - is already coming from gas. Yet we are sitting on top... if you can get just ten percent of the shale gas that's underneath the UK, then that would give us energy self-sufficiency for 40 years. That's if you can get just 10 percent. So if we're going to use gas and we're not going to use shale from under us then where is it coming from? Well it's already been imported from the US. So, it comes in ships into Glasgow, imported shale gas produced under a less strict regime, we're importing it from Algeria, from Qatar, from Russia... so countries with poor human rights positions, back to that social justice stuff. It's always hypocritical.

(Interviewee #1)

5. 3. Job security and unions as wage brokers: ‘Generally, energy jobs are good jobs’

Unsurprisingly, during the analysis of the interviews, ‘well-paid jobs’ (16), ‘quality of work’ (16), and ‘environment vs. job dilemma’ (13) categories were four of the most prevalent sub-codes under the larger ‘jobs’ umbrella. The issue of large-scale job losses in the energy sector because of new measures were a major cause for concern. The TUC representative sums up the issue of the jobs vs. environment dilemma in the energy sector:

We used to have an awful lot of jobs in industry. We now have much fewer jobs in industry(...) and when industry changes there is always a lot of talk about how this will create new industries and jobs and the workers from the old industries can get these new jobs(...) if you're doing one of the old jobs... I mean it sounds great when people say there will be new jobs in new industries, but in practice that might not work for you(...) we have to recognise that the world of work changes, and we have to do the best we can to help out employees, but there is a difficulty. And in some of the old fossil fuel industries the jobs were well paid, and they were well skilled, and they were unionised, and the jobs that have replaced them are of lower skilled and lower value, and lower paid and not unionised. So, it's understandable that people in those jobs would have a fear about moving and for trade unions it creates a dilemma to defend our members. But we also want a sustainable planet because that's good for us, and that's good for everybody. How do we work through that dilemma?

(Interviewee #2)

The political climate, high inequality, lack of good and well-paid jobs, the (fear of) further loss of union membership are all issues which make holding onto, and fighting for, jobs in existing polluting sectors, or new polluting sectors (such as fracking) an attractive option for the unions in these sectors. Many of the speakers highlighted that jobs in the energy sector were well-paid and skilled jobs – during the interview both representatives of the TUC (Interview #2) and GMB (Interviewee #1) repeated the phrase ‘Generally, energy jobs are good jobs’ – and that although unemployment was going down in the UK, the quality of new jobs was bad. Newly created jobs were often precarious, impermanent, in the new ‘self-employed’ gig-economy, and not unionised.

As the GMB representative repeated:

We exist as wage brokers, and our jobs as unions is to look after people's pay and conditions, and make sure that they get a job and it's well paid. Unapologetically. And that's good for the economy as well(...)

As a trade union, we see ourselves predominantly as wage brokers. We do lots of 'social justice stuff', that's part of that, but most people join our union because they think that they'll get better pay, and at least they've got somebody they can turn to... Obviously we have, the more active people become the more they become interested in social justice, but to some degree that's peripheral(...) you have to do the first bit right, so you have to get the union's business model, which is to be successful, to have lots of members, and get them good terms and conditions, for them to cut you the slack really, to then be able to do the 'social justice stuff'. And all of those 'really important stuff' that are linked to trade unionism and socialism.

(Interviewee #1)

The representative from UNISON, in contrast to the statements of both GMB and the TUC explained that they did not think that the environment vs. jobs dilemma existed. Tying this to the idea of the Just Transition, the interviewee explained that:

More and more I have become of the opinion that reducing inequality, especially wealth inequality, is closely linked to environmental justice. No, I think we need to get rid of this idea that you can't have environmental fairness until you've sorted out social justice. Or vice versa. They are completely interlinked. It's as simple as air pollution. It's about actually trying to think up some joined-up bargain. No, I strongly disagree with that, as I would with the whole jobs vs. environment basis. It's about, it all links into the Just Transition (...)

And it is a really, really, really difficult conversation to, you know, to turn around and say to the bloke who is on the North Sea oil platform, who is going to lose his job. To tell him, don't worry, we're going to devise some kind of way to get you retrained, and before you know it you'll be fitting solar panels. It's not going to happen unless there is massive financial investment from the government. Like there was in America, with the retraining on the New Deal.

(Interviewee #4)

This view of the connection between jobs and the environment echoed that of the Unite representative, who also mentioned that the environment vs. jobs dilemma was something artificially created. This point from the UNISON representative set the interviewee apart from the GMB representative, and in a way also showed the multitude of opinions in trade unions in the UK. Nevertheless, the interviewee here touched on an important point – namely that the long-term welfare of working people and the country was also tied to the environment – and also that it was nevertheless difficult to tell workers whose short-term, and perhaps also long-term goals (employment, security, welfare) as workers in the fossil fuel industries were on the line, that they should support environmental concerns. Of course, in the long term it is also in the interest of people in the fossil industries that things change. Again, the interviewee here highlighted the issue of short and long-term planning, and the important role for the state (here mentioning a 'New Deal' – a hark-back to Keynesianism).

The GMB representative on the other hand went as far as to say that he would be happy for his children to have a well-paying job in the fracking industry if it meant energy self-sufficiency for the country, and also job security and welfare for his children (short term goals):

With the fracking you can still use the land. I wouldn't want one in my backyard or whatever, but if it means my children can get a job where they are paid 50,000 pounds a year, where we can keep the lights on... well it's a consideration.

(Interviewee #1)

It was interesting that he nevertheless noted that he would not like fracking to take place in his 'backyard'. Although the representative was wary of the impacts of fracking, the energy needs of the country and the need for good, well-paying jobs were more important than environmental considerations.

5. 4. The renewable energy sector and jobs: 'There should be Jobs, [they] should be green'

As well as the concern over the disappearance of the 'generally good jobs' in the energy sector, renewable energy sources and the move to renewable energy nevertheless constitute new challenges for unions. It was mentioned on ten different occasions during the interviews that climate and environment jobs in the renewables sector were problematic from this point of view. The GMB representative explained:

Wind turbines are the worst example from the point of view of UK jobs. I am a trade union official, unapologetically pro-UK jobs. That's good for our economy, the people that live here, wherever they come from originally and for our future. Wind turbines are almost worse than the solar panels in the sense that they are built in Scandinavia, brought across in Dutch barges, and connected by cables made in China. So effectively if we're lucky we get to assemble the bits that somebody else brings in. That's probably down to poor planning by successive governments, there's no party-political point there. Labour's record was poor, the Coalition Government, and then now it's the Conservatives around, but we've never had proper energy policy. We still don't have one now. And if you look at media stuff, you see me and colleagues just banging on and on about the naivety of that situation. It's not a party-political position.
(Interviewee #1)

The interviewee from Unite remarked that they did not see a trade-off between environment and jobs, and that they were happy the UK was gradually moving towards renewables and wind power. He was also happy that people from the wind energy sector were signing up to be members. He further remarked that Unite was the biggest union in wind power, however he also added (similarly to the representative of the GMB) that:

That's not difficult, because in wind power one of the problems with it is that there aren't that many people employed in it. Once it's built, it's built. And they tend to do maintenance from Germany. We have about 170 members in the north of England that do maintenance in the North Sea, and then if something breaks down they just take the turbine off the top and put another one on, and take that back to Germany to repair it, because there is no turbine manufacture in the UK(...) We have now got a Siemens Factory in Bolton which is producing the towers and the blades(...) But we are not doing the clever stuff yet, and we need to get into the clever stuff. And hopefully these things will have a much longer lifespan in the future and will generate maintenance contracts, because at the moment maintenance is virtually nil – other than changing the components. On the whole they lift them off and take them back, and plug another one in.
(Interviewee #3)

The representative also summed up their efforts when trying to recruit workers from a solar panel site, as follows:

The solar panels are Chinese, no production in this country. The people who install them were Portuguese, I couldn't even talk to them, because they couldn't speak any English. And there was this little ferret, the foreman, who was trying to get me off the site, saying you are not allowed on here (...). Because it's UK people buying it, you should not pay that amount of money and not expect to

receive some rewards from it as well as the electricity. There should be jobs, it should be green, if that's what people want. It should be all those things.
(Interviewee #3)

5. 5. Economic growth, Climate Change and Just Transition: 'Sometimes people talk about growth as it's a good in itself'

Economic growth, both in its connection to wellbeing, jobs and the climate was an interesting if contentious and contradictory topic, that was discussed in all the interviews. The interviewee from the TUC explained on the topic of economic growth that he did not see a reason for growth simply for growth's sake, but he nevertheless referred to the Stern Review (critiqued in Chapter 3), the essence of the green growth and ecological modernisation paradigm. When I asked whether green growth (i.e. decoupling of greenhouse gas emissions from economic growth) was possible from the interviewee, he said, 'Yes absolutely!', and went on to explain, as follows, that:

We certainly recognise the need for wages to grow and productivity to grow, but having said that sometimes people talk about growth as it's a good in itself. And we need to recognise that there is a trade-off between economic growth and the good life, and people having leisure time, and people having work life balance. And we can't grow in a way that damages or destroys our planet. You know, all of these debates we need to think about (...)

There are huge economic opportunities from the environmental agenda. Lord Stern produced a report for the last Labour government, which said there is a massive opportunity for green technology, and environmental goods and services. So, this is a source of new industry and new jobs, and we need to be a part of this. As greener technologies have developed, there has been less and less and less of a case for some of the old fossil industries TUC.

(Interviewee #2)

Despite arguing that green growth might be possible, the TUC representative was also criticising the role of growth as the determinant of how well an economy/society was doing, thus stepping one step above the simplistic ecological modernisation narrative, which still posits the continuation of economic growth as the ultimate goal.

The representative of GMB argued that both economic growth and lowering emissions (green growth) would be possible in the future – with nuclear technology, and other technological developments:

I mean it's quite a complicated definition as to what would constitute green growth. But we should continue to move continuously in that direction. I don't think that we can do it until we have the scientific breakthrough, and that's the problem. Until we go completely nuclear... It's possible if you go fully nuclear. If the world went fully nuclear. If there's enough Uranium.

(Interviewee #1)

The idea of the Just Transition (a move away from fossil fuels and a fossil fuel-based economy that would centre on social rights) also came up during all of the interviews. The TUC correspondent talked about this concept on three different occasions during the interview, also remarking, amongst other things that this concept was not clear enough, similar sentiments about the lack of clarity and clear policy in regards to mapping out the Just Transition were expressed by the UNISON representative:

There is a trade-off between jobs and environment. This is where the Just Transition our concept is so important. I mean industry changes all the time, jobs change all the time. My father or my grandfather would probably be in a situation where they would get a job in a particular industry and do that work for all their lives. The nature of work changes much faster now (...) I think the key for us is to establish what Just Transition means in practical terms(...) I think if we get successful examples of new industries being developed that do provide jobs for

people who are in the oil industries, albeit none of us like change, people go through those changes and they recognise the value in that, and they have new jobs. The more examples we have, the more easy it will be to convince people who are nervous of that that there are opportunities for them.

(Interviewee #2)

I think the union movement has some work to do to map out how it sees the Just Transition. We say Just Transition all the time. We need to sit down, plan out, map out what we actually think that means in terms of what work would need to be done to achieve things. Where are the jobs, what skills do we need, who needs retraining, how are we going to adapt the workforce, and at the moment, you know, I doubt anybody is even having the conversations about the skills for the future (...) It's not going to happen unless there is massive financial investment from the government. Like there was in America, with the retraining on the New Deal. It's going to be to that extent... It's a huge, massive project.

(Interviewee #4)

5. 6. Working with the government: 'Those are the people that you need to sit down with'

Many of the correspondents criticised the government for their successive policies in the fields of energy, and the environment, and this code cluster was tagged 17 times. Both the representatives of the GMB, Unite and the TUC remarked that the government lacked an industrial strategy:

When we first started talking about industrial strategy back in 2006... At the time, government didn't talk about this at all... they said 'You know, that's not really part of our economic policy' – this was the Labour government. And the industry lobby wasn't talking that language. And then with the financial crisis in 2008/2009 the government started looking afresh at how they structured their economic policy, and suddenly industrial policy was back on the agenda. And since then we've talked about the need for a worker voice in industry, that's probably the key thing we've talked about (...)

I think that's a challenge for unions but it's also a challenge for industry, and it's a challenge for governments, you know this isn't just our problem its everybody's problem because the UK economy produces a high number of jobs(...) but we produce too many low skill low value jobs, and that's an issue around our economic policy, and around our industrial policy, as much as it is around our energy and climate change policy. I think the answer to this is to recognise the role of sustainability and to think about sustainability in terms of economic, social and environmental considerations taking them all together.

(Interviewee #2)

That's probably down to poor planning by successive governments, there's no party-political point there. Labour's record was poor, then the Coalition Government, and then now it's the Conservatives around, but we've never had proper energy policy. We still don't have one now... An industrial strategy and an energy strategy are inextricably linked, and you have to get that right. Otherwise the welfare of the country goes backwards... we're going to have to get power from somewhere, so it's how we plan for that and what we do.

(Interviewee #1)

Interviewee #1 in fact often mentioned that they were not 'party-political', expressing a kind of post-political view of government as apolitical technocratic bureaucrats filling in necessary functions (far from the idea of the state as a social relation of competing interest akin to Jessop (Jessop, 1999)). The representative described working with the government as an experience of talking to someone who understands reality and the 'real issues' (in relation to the GMB's controversial position on fracking),

an experience of 'Preaching to the converted... (W)e can often say it as it is' (Interviewee #1). The GMB representative thus took a kind of pragmatic approach to working with the government:

In terms of the Labour Party and the Conservative Party who are probably in government in some sort of combination eventually, those are the people that are in power, so those are the people that you need to have some sort of relationship with. [The GMB and Unite] negotiated the settlement with the Energy Minister, to stop the striking nuclear decommissioning earlier this year. But those are the people that you need to sit down with and talk about it. At the same time, we used Labour Party politicians and others to help put pressure on that.
(Interviewee #1)

Despite criticising the government, the representative of Unite mentioned on working together with the current government as one of the ways that the union aims to increase its voice:

I mean the Tories won't listen to us on policy, because they are wedded to the private sector and finance, but what they will do is they will invite us in all the time, they recognise us as key partners in the development of the nuclear, for instance. And indeed, in the decommissioning of the estate afterwards... I'm meeting with them on that. Energy unions tend to be much more involved in the government than other parts, other unions, and don't tend to have the same hostile relations, because what you're doing is trying to maximize the skills, the job development, and the productivity within a framework. If you got to work with Tories, you work with them, but we would much prefer to work with the Labour party, and influence that, and develop a real green policy, you know, in terms of balanced energy.
(Interviewee #3)

The representative of the TUC mentioned that when the newly elected government team was settled they aimed to go and lobby the government to push their industrial policy agenda on carbon capture and storage (CCS):

Greg Clark was a Conservative Minister, who was actually very committed to industrial strategy, and Nick Heard who was his deputy, he came to speak at the launch of [the] Powering Ahead [Report]. And both were really keen on this industrial policy agenda, and sustainable industrial policy agenda. Greg Clark is still the Business Secretary, so that's good. I am not sure about Nick Heard yet. But when we have a settled team we like to go and talk to them about this agenda and try to push that forward. But obviously government policy is a bit up in the air as we're speaking. But when things settle, that's certainly something we will be lobbying on.
(Interviewee #2)

The representative of UNISON also mentioned 'Lobbying government, working a lot with the shadow cabinet now, for sure' to further the sustainable energy policies (Interviewee #4). The interviewer mentioned that local government was an important part of trade union lobbying in this area. They also mentioned the TUSDAC (Trade Union Sustainable Development Advisory Committee) forum as a place where these discussions would take place.

5. 7. Working with third sector, voluntary and environmental organisations: 'I will just be trying to talk facts and they will just say we need more turbines'

One of the questions I asked from the representatives was regarding their collaboration with environmental organisations and third sector organisations. The representative of UNISON explained that working together with third sector organisations amplified the union voice in areas where it had been discredited, for example, and that it was the duty of trade unions to stand up for the common good (and that thus they had a lot of common ground with third sector organisations):

There are lots of third sector organisations out there that are after similar things to what we are. From our perspective it also sends a message out. A lot of people from outside looking in, perceive the trade union movement as being all about their own ends, or only looking after their own members, and that is really not the case. We feel that we have got a duty to public services themselves, and we all rely on public services so we all rely on the services our members deliver. Working with third sector and community organisations provides a huge opportunity for us to reach beyond our normal audience. And I think there are a lot of people and a lot of decision makers who will listen to what third sector organisations say and might feel this kind of reticence about talking to the union movement, unless they're on the left wing, unless they're from the labour party, you know.

(Interviewee #4)

It seems obvious in many ways that the trade union movement would have many interests in common with third sector organisations in the field of the environment, but also diverging interests. Representatives often mentioned working together with third sector organisations in the social sector (because of the aligning interest of the social security and the social wage for their members and society), but environmental organisations were somewhat more contentious, because of the issues of job security in the energy intensive industries, as was expected.

Unite does! [Collaborate with third sector organisations] We [Unite energy sector] don't tend to... so much, in this sector, because third sector organisations tend to be against us. But yeah, we have a Community Network, don't forget, in Unite. I have Community branches and they're very much involved with the voluntary sector. We have a third sector membership, as well, which is rather large. We have a nodding relationship with Greenpeace, and various others of those bodies.(...) So there are unions that are obsessed with climate change, and that are going totally green on energy production, by which they mean no nuclear and basically wind and solar panel – well it's impossible! So yes, we have some links, but most of the time we tend to be on the radio slagging each other off (...) I would welcome the day, actually, where environmentalist accept that nuclear is not as damaging as they point out. (...)

Well our members, wouldn't want us to do that [work together with environmental groups]. They are quite vociferous in their [disagreement]. Don't forget Greenpeace! On top of one of the steps at Ferrybridge power station a few years ago! Our members are very health-and-safety conscious and thought it was the daftest thing they ever did, and they saw it as a threat to their jobs (...)

(Interviewee #3)

I seem to always find myself head-to-head with somebody from Greenpeace or whatever, where I will just be trying to talk facts and they will just say we need to build more turbines and when the wind doesn't blow you know you have to have something. So that becomes frustrating. That being said I mean there are increasingly people on, from the Green lobby, or the Green party accepting that nuclear is the way forward because it's zero carbon. Whatever energy form we have there are consequences.

(Interviewee #1)

While the representatives agreed that there were issues of contention with environmentalist groups, the TUC representative nevertheless stressed that the trade unions ultimately also shared the same goals, but that more should be done to help 'take members with', in order for the environmental and trade union movements to cooperate more effectively:

I think it's important for me to stress that the trade union movement is a friend of the green movement. We're a friend of the environment and we can plan for sustainable solutions. It's very important to us, it's very important to the people that work for trade unions but it's also very important to our members. I hope I haven't overemphasised the difficulties in this

conversation, because there is a genuine balance there. But you know in saying that obviously this provides challenges for unions representing members in fossil fuel industries. I wouldn't want to suggest that somehow were reticent about environmentalism because it is something that's really, really important to us. But we can probably make a better contribution if we take our members with us, than if we start campaigning for stuff that leaves our members in a place of fear (...) We have good relationships with Greenpeace, also E3G [environmental policy thinktank], there was a report that we produced about 18 months called "Powering Ahead" and I actually wrote that report for the TUC and I actually interviewed someone from E3G's office in Berlin for that, and E3G in the UK invites us to speak at their events, so there's quite a fair bit of agreement. (Interviewee #2)

5. 8. Working with industry and the private sector: 'Meanwhile in the big grey area in the middle we have to get on with business'

All trade union representatives considered working together with businesses in the energy sector to influence energy policy and outcomes in the sector, and to ensure that workers in this sector are represented. The GMB representative explained why the union was trying to forge links with the fracking industry, and why they supported fracking:

You know we seek to work with the industries(...) We have a clear policy [that they] should be state owned but it's not, and the companies exist to make money, and that's the reality of why companies exist. And well that's your part opposite, the polar position. And then meanwhile in the big grey area in the middle we have to get on with business. Their job is, as well as to make money, is to keep the lights on, and our job is to organise that and to make sure that the people that work in that industry are safe and well paid, and also that – when you put a view of consumers more wildly – that they don't get ripped off(...) (T)he [fracking] industry is emerging and growing, and we need to develop those relationships, and it's a bit difficult to do that if you're kind of one foot here one foot there. As I said I think the reality is that we will frack, because we need the gas. So, it's what do we do about that. As a union we don't generally sit on a position of morals around that, we organise workers. (Interviewee #1)

As mentioned previously, it was often difficult for unions to recruit in the renewable energy industry, and to forge links with these enterprises – although the Unite representative explained that the unions have kept trying. When I asked about the possibility of an alliance with smaller green energy providers, this idea was dismissed because of the way these companies functioned:

We do, yeah [have sought to forge an alliance with 'green capital']. But we haven't been very successful at it. So, I went out of my way to court Ecotricity. And for instance, they support the Labour Party. Anybody who buys their electricity from the Labour Party, because you can, gets a donation from Ecotricity to the Labour Party. Which we support wholeheartedly. But they don't like us, or don't see any reason for us. (Interviewee #3)

5. 9. International trade union alliances

The interviewees were also asked about alliances with other trade unions in Europe and in the world. All four interviewees mentioned the COP21 (2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference) negotiations in Paris, which were very important in terms of international solidarity in the trade unions, as well as the Just Transition debate. It was clear that this was a momentous event in terms of both energy and sustainability debates. Overall the interviewees had different views on the event. The GMB

respondent argued that taking action without international support was futile. President Trump had left the negotiations effectively removing the USA, one of the biggest greenhouse gas emitters, from the agreement. The responder was pessimistic about UK actions making a difference – in addition they would unfairly make the country face the pollution of others. The representative of the TUC was slightly more optimistic on this point, mentioning that despite President Trump leaving the negotiation table other entities in the US (for example US trade unions) were agreeing to mitigate climate change, even without the agreement of the whole country. Although the representatives had different views on how successful the outcomes of the Paris Agreement might be, the atmosphere of pivotal importance that the agreement was underlined by the sheer number of times it was brought up by the informants in the discussions.

In general, the interviewees also mentioned trade unions working together sectorally, and that there were some links with German and French unions in the energy sector and other industrial sectors – although not strong links of solidarity.

5. 10. Trade union trauma: 'We are talking going back to the miners' strikes of the 1970s'

Although I did not ask specific questions about the history of the trade unions, or the trade union movement, on many occasions the miners strikes and the 1970s were brought up by the interviewees about the modern day. The miners' strikes of the 1980s are a traumatic event for the trade union movement, and the upheaval of the strikes is something to be avoided.

This is something that was echoed by Interviewee #1, when talking about the implications of there being a disturbance in electricity generation:

We're back to... in the short to medium term we have to keep the lights on, we do, unless we're going seriously back again. We are talking going back to the miners' strikes of the 1970s, and stuff. If you turn the lights off, you can have anything you want. Only a couple of days of power cuts and rioting and looting and God knows what will come really, really, quick. So the reality is we have to keep the lights on.

(Interviewee #1)

Issues around the (public) portrayal of trade unions as institutions that are only interested in members' gains, is a topic brought up by the #4 interviewee themselves:

[A lot of people] will say 'I didn't know that unions were involved in this kind of work, I thought you were all paying conditions, I didn't know you had an interest in environmental or energy issues'.

(Interviewee #4)

Interestingly, this assertion directly mirrors the statement of Interviewee #1 from the GMB who, as quoted previously, mentions that:

As a trade union, we see ourselves predominantly as wage brokers. We do lots of 'social justice stuff', that's part of that, but most people join our union because they think that they'll get better pay.

(Interviewee #1)

The fear of both the public out lash against unions, as well as the loss of jobs during the neoliberal restructuring of work, strike and instability – the mines closures of the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher's ascendance and her war against the unions, were all represented as a stark reminder of what climate mitigation related restructuring could mean for workers in the energy sector today. The miners' strikes were also a stark reminder of what industrial action and politicisation along class lines had brought.

6. Synthesis

Overall, it became clear from the interviews that negotiating the short-term interests of members with the long-term aim of broad socio-ecological development, under the current conditions of strategic selectivity and a depoliticised capitalist realism, is extremely difficult for trade unions, and policy officers in the unions. Although climate change and related concerns were discussed, the immediate issues of fuel insecurity, fuel poverty, the abundance of cheap fuel, and the loss of quality, unionised jobs trumped long-term concerns for worker and environmental health. Interviewees were also against renewable energy and pro-fracking, if institutionally it helped create well-paid, unionised jobs. Much of the debate was also, as expected, based around win-win green growth and ecomodernism – although interviewees also questioned growth for its own sake. With respect to economic growth, the debate also echoed the ecological modernist approach of the New Labour government, and the trade unions themselves[^].

Working with the government – even with one fundamentally opposed to the very existence of trade unions – was the primary focus of these policy officers, while working with and influencing the Shadow Cabinet was also important. Trade union representatives in this sector were cautious of working together with environmental and third sector organisation who did not understand the issues that their members faced, and who could endanger jobs. Working with industry and business as a way of reaching short-term aims (including environmental aims) was also considered important, while international solidarity and working together with trade unions abroad on issues was not.

In terms of energy transitions, deindustrialisation and the trauma of the Miners' Strikes was still tied to worries about future transitions away from fossil fuels. It was pointed out that the 'unjust transition' of coal mining in the UK (which of course did not happen because of environmental concerns, but rather public policy) was an example of how not to move away from the mining of fossil fuels – overnight sky-high joblessness, poverty, the devastation of communities, and a lasting social scar. The Just Transition debate was important in voicing these working class worries in terms of the environment. Although there was no clear plan – and although the Just Transition debate itself was largely based on ecomodernist ideas – it was offered as a vague panacea to multiple actors and various mutually exclusive and antithetical aims.

Strategic selectivity with its myriad of issues (energy poverty, privatisation, loss of jobs, fuel supply worries, the rise of inequality, loss of membership), as well as the decades long Conservative campaign against the trade unions, including an ever more restrictive legal net surrounding them, have made the position of trade unions in the UK particularly difficult. UK trade unions are in a very exposed situation, due to the state's extremely antagonistic stance towards them. This limits the strategic choices of employee organisations, making apparent mismanagement an even more detrimental concern. It is no surprise that because of this, union policies and actions are often focused on the next step, not the long term, and internal disagreements/divisions may lead to dilution of implementation through the 'policy-to-implementation process' (Rigby, 1999, pp. 15–18). Political involvement is needed on the part of unions for positive improvements in the fields of labour and trade union laws, for the unions to be able to develop good responses to challenges facing them. Yet when they are in an exposed condition where they most need good strategic responses this is especially difficult, as it is often the absence of the legal and institutional frameworks conducive to trade unions that have caused the trade unions to become exposed (Rigby, 1999). This adds to the issue of strategic selectivity, as trade unions are more and more forced to concentrate on the issues of short-term survival, and not long-term sustainability. The (changing) legal and institutional framework of the UK within which trade unions must operate plays a hugely important role in conditioning the responses of trade unions – it is difficult to develop a good strategic response without legislative frameworks. It is therefore somewhat paradoxical that for trade union responses to be effective they must first be situated within a political and cultural climate that is sympathetic to collective interests and workers' representation.

The representative of the GMB was tasked with defending one of the most difficult positions (from the four organisations) from the sustainability perspective. Unsurprisingly, the arguments of the representative were mostly on the defensive, but also very much anchored in a post-political business-oriented understanding of 'reality' and 'the real world'. This rhetoric largely ignored the long history of trade unionism and its achievements in the UK in favour of a strictly present-tense view of future possibilities and best approaches to energy policy. During the less-than hour-long interview the interviewee used the word 'reality' 11 times, the phrase 'in the real world' 3 times, 'facts' 8 times, and even the word 'Realpolitik' to refer to the policy of GMB. Often the use of these phrases was used to pre-empt the possibility of debate. While the interviewee referred to there being a debate around the issue of fracking, the final outcome of the debate was precluded based on the 'facts', reason (we 'say it as it is') and 'reality'. This language of 'getting on with business' and 'living in the real world' is precisely the post-ideological language and the fake-reality of *Capitalist Realism* that Mark Fisher (2009) warned about.

There were three possible outcomes for the future of the UK in terms of energy production in the view of the GMB representative: either humanity would learn to store solar power and 'live out in the deserts and desalinate the oceans in an affordable way [where] everything will be a lush tropical paradise' which is unlikely... or 'the welfare of the country goes backwards and we're all going to live on the side of the mountains in tepees, which isn't practical with seven billion people', not a popular choice, OR (as was implied) we would continue using fossil fuels and fracking as a way to meet the energy needs of the country and be self-sufficient, the realistic, logical, sole solution – which nevertheless ignores the Earth's planetary boundaries. This highlighted the lack of any meaningful long-term vision on the part of the trade unions when it comes to tackling the climate crisis. The representative of the TUC simply said: '(w)ell I don't think we're going to go back to ploughing the fields' (Interviewee #2). Although the GMB interviewee was in the extreme position amongst the trade union representatives, this thinking by-and-large epitomised the short-termism and pessimism of the trade unionists in terms of how they saw the future. The choice over the future is clearly 'not so much between ecocentrism and cornucopianism as between a hard landing or a soft landing on the shores of a low-energy future' (Dobson, 2010). Confronted with the utopianism of continuing the consumption of the resources of 1.5 Earths and not expecting mass-scale changes, understandably leads to nihilism. When I pressed the GMB interviewee on the issue, he remarked that 'It may be too little, maybe climate change is irreversible. I know what we are doing is bad [for the environment]. I am drifting away from GMB policy into more philosophical stuff. But you're getting into that difficult position' (Interviewee #1).

According to Hampton's analysis, the trade union officers' responses varied from somewhere between the neoliberalist (markets) and ecological modernisationist (state/society) approaches within the triad of responses to climate change (Hampton, 2018). Marxist (class) approaches were missing, and if anything, already the idea of re-politicising class conflict was considered with suspicion (referring to the Miners' strikes). All three trade unions, although especially GMB, could be classified as a business union with antagonism towards the politicisation of topics like climate change ('*As a trade union, we see ourselves predominantly as wage brokers*').

If we consider Jakopovich's (2009) analysis that union independence, willingness to fight employers, as well as a broad understanding of the role of a trade union in communities (and broader society) are all necessary for labour environmentalism to emerge, it is unlikely that this will come from trade union policy officers in the management of unions in the energy sector.

7. Comparison with the Austrian TRAF0-LABOUR study

Worker organisations in the Austrian corporatist system are in a much less exposed situation, with more political power and ability to influence outcomes, especially since the most important power facilities are also publicly owned (albeit the Austrian energy sector has also undergone liberalisation in the last decades). Because of this security, it is no surprise that on positions of renewable energy the debate was also more forward thinking, since much of Austria's energy already comes from renewable sources. Nevertheless, employee organisations had in the past also impeded environmental aims because of the interests of workers in the energy sector, and corporatism itself had not necessarily helped environmental outcome (while helping push the power in the balance of the economy towards worker interests within the consumer-capitalist system (Brand & Pawloff, 2014).

While overall the institutional, state, legal and societal constraints and structures between employee organisations in Austria and trade unions in the UK are very different, the worries of representatives on many issues were parallel, centring on the need for the provision of quality (unionised) jobs, the liberalisation of the energy sector and related loss in job stability, the issues with job security and unionisation of jobs in the renewables sector, affordable energy for society and energy poverty. Ecological modernisation and green growth ideas – the decoupling of economic growth from environmental impacts – as a panacea to environmental problems, were expressed both by the organisations themselves, and by the interviewees, similarly to UK representatives (Soder, Niedermoser, & Theine, 2018; Theine, 2016).

In the case-study of Austrian trade unions in the energy sector, Hendrik Theine (Theine, 2016) referred to the concept of 'double transformation' as a dialectical approach that aims to go beyond the duality of self-interest and long-term common good concerns, when talking about the employee representatives' positions in the energy/environment debates. Assimilating both 'sword of justice' and 'vested interest' aspects, Theine saw Austrian employee organisations as also institutions where short-term reforms, and small-scale experiments within the market-based instruments and society could be seeds for larger future transformations. Theine (also, see: Soder et al., 2018) suggested that under the leitmotif of 'good energy for all', workers representatives should form alliances with local entrepreneurs and middle-class progressive groups, to strengthen local renewable energy production and infrastructure. He suggested this would be a way to strengthen both local and regional production, increase public and cooperative ownership, and fight against the short-termism of private for-profit financial businesses. These coalitions could then ensure a secure energy provision as well as quality unionised jobs, and re-establish energy as a basic public service (with private investors being side-lined in a complimentary role).

It is precisely this sort of local and sectoral alliance building which can create the seeds for change, and bring about the Just Transition necessary in Austria. In the highly divided society in the UK, where trade unions have been relegated to the side line of society since the Thatcher era, and class-tensions run high, there seems to be little space for such discussions – yet these kinds of small actions are also precisely the seeds of change that can bring about a Just Transition.

Snell and Fairbrother (2010) have explained that trade unions have increasingly been placed in an antagonistic position vis-à-vis new social movements because of a threat to jobs and livelihoods, while environmental movements especially have failed to integrate class consciousness and a working class environmental justice element into their efforts. It is well known that groups are likely to be more capable of expanding their plan and ties with other movements, when they are not directly on the defensive (Jakopovich, 2009). Because trade unions are highly exposed, this makes expanding their agenda harder. This is where the corporatist system in Austria makes it easier for *Arbeiterkammer* or trade unions to have the resources, time and energy to find common ground with environmental and third sector organisations.

In the UK, trade unions in the energy sector have fewer options for manoeuvre, are scared of further turmoil and decline in membership, they are working in a wholly liberalised sector in the case of energy, with both companies and the state somewhat antagonistic towards the very existence of unions. This exposed situation makes it harder for trade unions in this sector and in the UK as a whole to balance the short-term goals of their members and the long-term goals of socio-ecological transformation needed in society, largely focusing on the former.

The trade union movement in the UK is also very fragmented, with many unions in the energy sector working separately – albeit loosely tied together under the umbrella of the TUC. It is clear that for union revitalisation, and for a Just Transition the trade unions must focus on building a social movement unionism – through political action and labour-management partnerships, yes, but most importantly through coalition-building, reform of union structures, organising, and also international solidarity.

8. Conclusion

Trade unions in the United Kingdom are comparatively more exposed than many of their European counterparts, and thus less able to respond to long-term threats, and more scared of conflict – or politicising climate change (Hyman, 2001). Nevertheless, ‘unions have a broader range of strategic choice than most of us have imagined’ (Turner, 2004, p. 5). Turner merits six popular strategies with closer consideration: political action, coalition-building, reform of union structures, organising, labour-management partnership, and international solidarity (broadly similar to Mike Rigby’s somewhat more business-orientated analysis of trade union revitalisation research from the late 1990’s⁷). Five of Turner’s measures for revitalisation: political action, coalition-building (with environmental organisations), organising, labour-management partnerships, and international solidarity, were topics discussed during the interviews. Within the double-bind of both urgent union revitalisation and understanding how unions can better influence long-term socio-ecological outcomes (and negotiate short and long term aims), all six strategies will be looked at. Trade union revitalisation, and the aims of long-term socio-ecological transition and a *Real* Just Transition could potentially be reinforcing one another. Climate change is a possible new avenue for trade unions to find a new purpose and sense of meaning, and be a new vehicle for renewal (Snell & Fairbrother, 2010).

As was clear from the historic overview and the interviews, despite trying to influence government and work together with different administrations where possible, unions are currently not major political actors, having been side-lined under the successive Conservative governments of the Thatcher years, and also somewhat snubbed by New Labour. The situation has only worsened during the Coalition government and current Conservative primacy. While trade unions are keen to be consulted on energy issues, and working with successive administrations is a legitimate way that trade unions aim to influence policy, this approach only provided few real successes in the UK since the 1990s and early New Labour (Hamann & Kelly, 2004) and it has certainly failed to do so since. Within the stratified and weakened current position of trade unions, and the current constellation of power relations within the social-relational state, this approach to union revitalisation and influencing policy for long-term socio-ecological outcomes is less effective (albeit necessary).

The GMB and Unite representatives mentioned working closely together with antagonistic Conservative governments on specific policy issues (when they are consulted), as preferable to cooperating with environmental organisations for example – yet focusing on this approach under the current social-relational constellations of the state is not successful either for A) the revitalisation of the union movement, B) for achieving the long-term socio-ecological Just Transition needed. It is clear that a holistic approach to transformation must include the renovation of current forms of capitalist statehood instead of turning away from them – strengthening democratic governance, sustainability and the welfare state (Novy, 2014; Theine, 2016). On the other hand focusing too much on collaborating closely with power structures antithetical to these ideas and the trade union movement itself (especially under conditions of limited choices and union power), has not really helped as a strategy.

Coalition-building as a strategy for union revitalisation and for the achievement of long-term socio-ecological outcomes (including a Just Transition), is perhaps one of the areas in which trade unions in the energy sector have most failed to take action. Trade unions work closely together with third sector organisations in other areas, but antagonism towards environmental organisations in the energy sector, because of understandable short-term strategic-selectivity differences – despite long-term shared concerns – and issues such as nuclear energy, are a barrier to cooperation. Of course, trade

⁷ Rigby finds consensus around the following five different strategic areas: concentrating on firm-level partnerships and cooperation with enterprises on the single-business level (i.e. labour-management partnerships); having a qualitative bargaining agenda instead of a quantitative one (i.e. labour-management partnership); trying to influence decisions at a political level (i.e. political action); concentrating on responding to member and constituency needs on the micro level (i.e. organising and a reform of union structures); developing supranational ties and activities (i.e. international solidarity)(Rigby, 1999)

unions themselves are social-relational institutions – member organised, with members deciding on policy – with many diverging interests. For the long-term revitalisation of trade unionism and a Just Transition, this avenue to increasing the voice of trade unions must become a priority. Of course, for this environmental organisations also need to move beyond regulation issues to considering capitalism and class conflict, while including workers’ perspective (Mason & Morter, 1998). Yet this is also where trade union input in coalition building with environmental organisations could be helpful for environmental organisation, who could learn from the institutional framework and long history of trade unionism. The TUC representative remarked that trade unions are friends of the green movement, and the TUC-Greenpeace co-report on green jobs is a sign of increased cooperation in this area. As the UNISON representative also explained, working together on social issues with outside organisations can show society that trade unions are not only self-interested member-and-pay orientated organisations. Since climate change and environmental concerns are issues which are increasingly important to younger generations, working together with (younger, more vibrant, modern) environmental movements and organisations can also help trade unions with the issue of an aging and declining membership. Importantly, the trade union movement and trade unions must also change themselves to reflect changing times, to face the overwhelming problems facing society today, and to attract young members.

This is where the reform of union structures comes in – albeit not discussed directly during the interviews, this revitalisation strategy is crucial. As this touches on the leadership and politicisation of trade unions, this issue would have been contradictory to discuss with officers in trade unions, and would not be supported by an administration that has something to lose. As Pech explains: ‘one of the very faults of the contemporary European trade union movement [is] its ‘hyper-institutionalisation’ and its tendency towards a narrowly procedural approach’ (Pech, 2005, p. 7). The UK trade union movement is hyper-institutionalised with well-established, hierarchical structures, and little space for the voices and concerns of younger people, or the possibilities for change and new ideas. This is an issue for the survival of the trade union movement itself, but also for young people who are underrepresented by unions (and tend to work in fields where levels of unionisation are low), and are also in the most precarious work situations, i.e. in temporary, low-wage and flexibilised work. Trade union strategies, communication and internal democracy are not aligned to young members’ needs and interests, who are also not a priority. In the UK, a staggering 86% of surveyed young workers (below 30) admitted to knowing little or nothing about trade unions, despite being in favour of worker representation to the same extent as other age groups (Keune, n.d.). There is somewhat of a conflict of interest here for the high-level representatives I interviewed, who benefit from the current union structures and hierarchies, of course. It was clear from the interviews that despite some efforts (for example the Unite representative who tried to recruit in the renewable sector), structural changes to the institutions of the unions to increase membership and attract young trade unionists were not considered. For trade unions to revitalise, they importantly must become again, at least in part, a social movement struggle, which includes the reform of current union structures. The history of the trade union movement in the UK shows the illustrious past of social movement struggles. The current trade unions must take a leaf out of their own history book, or risk continuing decline.

The representatives I interviewed all mentioned the importance of being member-led democratic organisations – yet, especially when it came to the representative of GMB, this view of the union as a unit solely focusing on the closed (aging and declining) group of current workers was antithetical to revitalisation, increasing membership and achieving long-term societal and environmental aims. While unions must remain democratically-led organisations who voice the concerns of their members, they also must have a wider and more long-term and outward view. In terms of organising, the UNISON representative was the one to highlight the issue of low-level organisation, education and grass-roots work in increasing membership and acting in the interests of broader society. Here the importance of young members comes up again – since the so-called millennial generation is ‘more concerned about various aspects of the environment than any other age group’ (GPI 2014), revitalising trade unions through organisation must include focus on issues which are important to young members.

Labour-management partnership can contribute to the revitalisation of trade unions ‘when it is institutionalised, integrated with other union strategies, and, most importantly, when it is pursued in the interest of a broader social agenda’(Fichter & Greer, 2004, p. 3). The strategies of the interviewed trade union representatives, as well as the overview of trade unions in the UK show the lack of an institutionalised, common approach to labour-management partnerships. It is especially evident, when discussing the forging of links between single trade unions and the fracking industry, that labour-management partnerships in this sector are often not pursued in the interest of a broader social agenda, but rather in the narrow interests of workers in a specific field, business and sector. The crisis and decline of social-democratic unionism can be attributed to the accommodation of social democratic parties (and unions themselves) to neoliberal imperatives – the rejection of these imperatives, and a reorientation of trade unions to harnessing the spirit of new social movements must also extend to union cooperation and interaction with business and management(Upchurch, Taylor, & Mathers, 2009). Although collaborating with the energy sector was a method of increasing the union voice which was mentioned in many of the interviews, importantly, the broader social agenda in collaborating with industry was often missing. As a strategy of union revitalisation and in the interests of a Just Transition, labour-management partnerships must be a part of a wider framework and be embedded within the framework of fighting for a Just Transition. This is not to say that workers in the fracking industry should not be unionised, but the broader societal goals should form the centre of union approaches. How far the trade unions should pursue close partnerships with businesses and side with business (within the pre-existing structures within which workers must work) is a difficult question – especially for trade unions like GMB with many workers in polluting industries – but nevertheless an important one for union revitalisation and long-term socio-ecological goals.

International solidarity was discussed in all the interviews as a trade union strategy to amplify their voices in the energy and environment sectors. As was mentioned, the Paris Climate Conference, COP21, was a unifying moment for global trade unions, to fight for a worker-led transformation. The representatives also mentioned working together with other trade unions in European countries in the energy sector. Since the unions’ role in society in the UK is based on collective bargaining in the workplace and company-based mechanisms of attempting to regulate wages, the ‘low-road capitalism’ (low wages, low skill) and the employer avoidance of trade unions, antagonistic to corporatism, has overall also had an impact in the international solidarity and regulation that trade unions have sought internationally (Lillie and Martínez Lucio 2004). Because labour regulatory traditions and institutions are so weak in the UK, international trade union solidarity has historically been reduced to, at most, ‘establishing a basic, transferable framework of rights and employer responsibilities that can be applied to a wide variety of industrial relations systems and national political contexts... [UK] international union activity is based on a partnership approach and on hostility to militant approaches’ (Lillie & Lucio, 2004, p. 165). Of course, there are large sectoral and union differences in the UK, nevertheless, ‘national traditions frame distinct approaches to international action and the interrelations between national constituents of unions’ (Lillie & Lucio, 2004, p. 176).

As a strategy to revitalise trade unions and to fight for the long-term common goal of workers, real international solidarity and transnational trade union efforts are thus perhaps currently not realistic in the case of the UK. Nevertheless, as COP21 shows, UK trade unions are and wish to be a part of the trade union dialogue on international issues, even if this does not extend to closer ties or common action with international counterparts, especially for more radical transformative ideas. Increased competition globally, the further privatisation of public companies everywhere, as well as the common threat of environmental damage, and the ‘energy climbdown’, which will affect the poorest the worst, are all issues which tie workers, and thus trade unions together. Albeit energy sector workers in the UK do not face as much global competition as workers in the transnational production sectors, the example of the Portuguese solar panel installers shows, that more global (or at least European) solidarity is a necessity even in this sector. It is often in cooperation with wider social movements and other trade unions at home and abroad how current successful trade union fights have been organised. Although ‘the challenges resulting from neoliberal globalisation are decidedly different across sectors

and geographical locations, and... consequently, require varied and multi-pronged responses', nevertheless, 'trade unions would do well to recognise the wider social interests they are defending far beyond the workplace in order to gain much needed support at the local, national, and especially, transnational levels' (Bieler, 2012, pp. 374–376).

Political action, coalition-building, reform of union structures, organising, labour-management partnership, and international solidarity, are the six main responses of trade unions to revitalising the movement (Turner, 2004). In the case of the UK trade union movement, and the specific trade union affiliated representatives interviewed in the sector, it is apparent that albeit there were differences between the unions, political action and labour-management partnerships tended to be the most used strategies for furthering their specific agenda, mostly in view of the short-term. For trade union revitalisation in the UK and the long-term broad socio-ecological development of the country, coalition building with other movements, a reform of union structures and organising (to attract young members), and international (transnational) solidarity are crucial. These revitalisation efforts, when combined and made the focus of trade union policy, could aid both the long-term survival of an empowered workers' movement, and a socially and environmentally just future for the next generations.

The impending issue of climate change is not only a problem that should interest trade unions because it will impact them as workers and citizens, but also a unifying threat behind which the trade union movement could (and should) coalesce. The issue of a Just Transition is a vehicle for the rejuvenation of the movement globally, and especially in the UK. Currently, in the realm of climate change and the energy transition, the trade union movement in the UK lacks insight to its rich past history of success (in terms of radical human liberation in the period up until the miners' strikes), but absolutely lacks foresight to imagine future possibilities for the transformation of a revitalised trade union movement in a rapidly changing world. The disappointments of the last thirty years (the span of the trade union careers of some of the representatives) in the UK certainly cautions pessimism, but it is clear that in its current form, the trade union movement will neither be revitalised, nor be the social movement for social and environmental justice, and an energy transformation that is so urgently needed.

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