

Throughout our conversations with trade unionists and climate activists, we heard that there were few mechanisms for climate action within union structures and the lack of clear accountability for driving climate action at all levels. In particular, the importance of engaging grassroots members was stressed repeatedly, but this was coupled with acknowledging how difficult it can be to engage these members. Fortunately, we can share the methods and structures that those who spoke to us successfully used to engage grassroots members and enact climate action within their union:

## Workplace reps making climate demands

An example of reps taking on a proactive and influential role in constructing union climate structures is the University of Liverpool's UCU, Unite and Unison branch, who have jointly developed a model to integrate climate demands into negotiating and bargaining covering all aspects of working within a university. In particular, they emphasised the relationship between casualisation of the workforce and creating sustainable employment practices. This strategy has been encouraged by UCU's National Structure because climate demands are aligned with existing negotiations and bargaining demands between the union and employer, and acts as an example of how reps can have larger-scale interventions.

Green rep networks are another example of constructing union climate structures as they allow for workplaces to elect green representatives, whose aim is to raise awareness of environmental issues and promote green activities within the workplace. At present, UCU and PCS have more active green rep networks, with Unison, Community, and Unite trying to build up their networks. For many green reps, while a start can be made on modest day-to-day workplace policies such as recycling, energy saving, waste reduction etc., a significant challenge can be finding and implementing models for making wider changes. Attempts to do so can cause tension with other parts of union structures, where larger-scale action can be seen as overreaching into the industrial bargaining structure.

One way to address this is for green reps to work collaboratively with other workplace reps, identifying where their issues overlap and broach climate demands being part of bargaining demands. For instance, by highlighting how pollution affects workers who check-in trucks and cars arriving at the Port of Dover, PCS Green Reps have framed climate demands as issues of health and safety to highlight overlapping concerns with other workplace reps.

# ENACTING CLIMATE ACTION THROUGH YOUR UNION



## Between Staff and Members

One issue that was reported to us was that, despite organisations' climate demands being enthusiastically supported at a high level, there can be a gap between the top-level of union management and those on the ground due to capacity. Where national or regional officials are able to use paid time to enact climate work, it is often in 'policy assistant' type roles, with the demands and focus of their role meaning that they often lack capacity to engage grassroots union members. At the grassroots level itself, workplace reps face significant pressure and often lack the capacity to push climate issues in addition to their usual responsibilities. What is lacking is a structural mechanisms that sit between union officials and grassroots.

Power to the People Glasgow (PttPG), an energy campaign that brings together climate and industrial campaigning through shared demands, organised with the convenor for striking GMB cleaners during COP26. They found that convenors were extremely supportive of organising striking cleaners to participate in marches for COP26, which led to international climate activists learning more about the strike and supporting GMB cleaners. Due to convenors having a close working relationship with union officials while being representatives of a workplace, convenors acted as an excellent go-between the grassroots campaign and union officials.

## National Industrial Bargaining

In Unite's Chemicals Pharmaceuticals Process and Textiles (CPPT) sector, which represents workers across various high carbon industries such as glass and chemicals production, the Manchester-based Global Labour Institute (GLI) is regularly invited to run educational workshops based on consulting members for their key concerns. By inviting relevant experts and trade unionists from other countries to contribute, GLI supports the sector in confronting difficult transition issues which are faced in these industries. The workshops are held for national convenors the day before the CPPT's annual National Industrial Sector Committee, allowing this high-level planning to be attentive to key transitional demands developed by represented workers, such as necessary retraining and shared climate-related bargaining issues.