

# Saving the world now

## No sacrifice, just green jobs

In Britain there is a trade union campaign for One Million Climate Jobs. **Jonathan Neale** describes why this campaign will lower unemployment and also save the Earth and its people from disaster. And what's more, he sees great potential for a similar campaign and jobs in South Africa.

In Britain the campaign for One Million Climate Jobs has the support of climate activists and unions for postal workers, lecturers, civil servants, white-collar transport staff, journalists, fire-fighters and Unite, the largest industrial union.

We have a simple idea. There are two and a half million unemployed people in the UK. We have work that needs doing to stop climate change becoming a catastrophe. So the government should put a million people to work now to save the planet. That would get the economy moving again.

In some ways, this model happened in the Second World War when governments world over controlled the economy to make weapons fast to kill as many people as possible. They spent money they didn't have and that didn't bankrupt them instead it pulled the world out of the Great Depression.

We want to do the same now, but in order to save lives.

### CLIMATE CHANGE MADE EASY

The climate globally is warming because humanity is putting 'greenhouse gases' into the air. The most destructive gas is carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), which comes from burning coal, oil and gas.

Climate change is already hurting many parts of the world but the larger danger is 'abrupt climate change'. Scientists are worried about this because of what they know about the past.

The world has gone back and forth between ice ages and warm periods. When it cools, the temperature and the CO<sub>2</sub> in the air go down gradually, at the same rate. When the earth's atmosphere warms, the temperature and the CO<sub>2</sub> increase gradually together.

Then, suddenly, the temperature and the CO<sub>2</sub> explode. This can happen in 20 years or less. Scientists are not yet sure what causes this. They also do not know how long we have before we hit abrupt change. A guess is 20 years but it could be 50 or more, or five years or less.

One statistic is worrying. There were 100 parts per million of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air more in warm periods than in the ice ages. In the last century we have put another 105 parts per million into the air.

If we hit abrupt change, the climate will be destabilised, there will be many severe weather events like hurricanes, and there will be drought in some places and flooding in others.

This will happen in the global economic and political system of capitalism. In this system, abrupt climate change will have three main effects.

Firstly, there will be famine where rains fail.

Secondly, there will be hundreds of millions of refugees from drought, famine, floods and storms. These refugees will come to borders patrolled by men and women with machine guns. Across the border, racism will grow to justify keeping these desperate people out.

Thirdly, climate change will alter the balance of geographic and economic power, and governments will go to war to try and reverse it.

An example of how climate change causes famine, refugees and war, is Chad and Darfur. In Dafur the rains failed in 1969 and have not returned so herders and farmers are killing each other for disappearing grass.

We cannot know the scale of abrupt climate change, only that hundreds of millions will die. In the meantime, ordinary, slow climate change has moved into Swaziland, Ghana, Kenya, Bangladesh, Pakistan and many other places.



The Winchester Green Party joined Britain's largest public sector union, Unison, to protest cuts in services and to demand green jobs.

The good news is that we can solve the problem now. We already have the technology which is not monopolised by the Global North as every bit is available in both India and China.

### GREEN JOBS

There are thousands of things we need to do. Three of them will make the majority of difference. Globally, we need to cover the world with renewable energy – wind and solar power. We need to refurbish all leaky buildings in the world and we need to replace cars with buses and trains.

It will cost money and governments and corporations say they can't afford that.

But what does 'cost too much' mean? It means jobs.

When the banks were in trouble in 2008, we learned that the money is there. The Federal Reserve Bank can find \$400-billion on a Tuesday by lunchtime if the banks need it. The money we are asking for in the UK is far less than the British government gave to the banks. If planet Earth was a bank, governments would already have saved it.

Climate jobs are not the same as 'green jobs'. Green jobs can mean anything. Climate jobs mean that we directly put less CO<sub>2</sub> in the air.

Of the million new jobs we want in the UK:

- 400 000 workers will make wind and solar power, so we burn less coal and gas to make electricity.
- 300 000 will work in public transport, so we burn less oil.
- 175 000 workers will insulate leaky houses so we burn less coal, oil and gas heating them.

These will be new jobs. We want the government to hire one million *permanent* workers in 12 months doing these jobs as public servants.

Some people in high carbon industries will lose their jobs. But because the new jobs will be government jobs, it can guarantee retraining and a new job for every displaced worker. This is important or workers and unions will be set against each other on the question of green jobs.

### GLOBAL CLIMATE POLITICS

To grasp the importance of campaigning for climate jobs now, we need to understand climate politics internationally.

Until about 2005 the dominant position on climate change amongst the corporate elite was protect the oil companies and do nothing. George Bush was their spokesman.

From 2005 many of the corporate elite started thinking as they read the same science that we do. They understood climate change and they have children and grandchildren. And they own the world so why would they destroy it?

Corporates were also wedded to neo-liberalism so they wanted action within the limits of the market. But stopping climate change requires massive government investment and it can't be done within market limits.

The Kyoto Agreement showed the problem. It was a sincere attempt to reduce climate change, but so riddled with market loopholes it could not work. The leaders of this new approach to climate were politicians of the centre right: Merkl, Sarkozy, Blair, Gore and Schwarzenegger.

In 2008 climate politics changed again because of the economic crisis. Suddenly, each corporation was in desperate competition with others. No part of capital was safe. General Motors the largest industrial corporation in the world for 50 years went bankrupt in 2009. Whole countries are going bust – Greece, Ireland, Portugal with more to come. And the major national governments feel they cannot spare the money to stem climate change.

In 2009, at the Copenhagen talks, five men met for 45 minutes and destroyed the hope for a global agreement on climate – Obama of the USA, Wen of China, Singh of India, Lula of Brazil, and Zuma of South Africa. They were countries with lots of coal. The country most responsible was the richest and most powerful, the USA. All five acted together, and other world leaders backed them.

After Copenhagen, many climate campaigners lost heart especially as many NGOs see their



role as lobbying governments. As governments moved away from doing anything, many NGOs moved away from climate activism.

The scientists held firm. They kept telling the world and nature kept telling us too.

### NO SACRIFICE, JUST JOBS

We now know that the governments of the world will not take serious action in the short term. So we have to make them. That means mobilising the only force we have – six billion people. And that's why climate jobs are important.

Environmentalists are mostly well to do, white and Northern. Now we need to mobilise majorities. Climate jobs can do that. People need jobs now.

Also, environmentalists often talk about what we have to give up to stop climate change. But if we start with sacrifice, we can't build a mass movement among workers and peasants in Africa, Asia, Europe or North America.

Climate jobs are not about sacrifice. They are about work and dignity. They are about ordinary people having more. We can build a mass movement on that.

Our plan for Britain can cut CO2 emissions by at least 75% in 20 years. That's not a lot in global terms but if we win a million new jobs in one country, workers across the world will want to win the same. Then we can stop climate change globally.

It's not an easy fight. The odds are against us. But we have a chance in the UK.

Last month I went to planning meetings in Cape Town, Durban and Johannesburg for a South African climate jobs campaign. It was clear that a campaign in South Africa would be different from the UK.

For one thing, more South African CO2 comes from making electricity, and less from heating houses, because most people don't have heating. Any campaign in South Africa will also be for affordable electricity and warm housing for the majority. Also South Africa is an agricultural country which is already hit by climate change.

The meetings made me feel the South African climate jobs campaign will be stronger than in the UK. I was impressed by the range of union officials present, and by how much they knew and

had thought about climate change. The academics also knew more than we knew when we started in Britain. Crucially, South Africans have infinitely more experience of struggle than in Britain.

It won't be easy in South Africa either. But it is possible.

This is important because of the United Nations climate talks in Durban in December. One outcome could be that world leaders do nothing, and then the politicians, activists and NGOs go home and give up.

The other possibility is that there is a big, spirited, united march calling on the leaders of the world to act. This is possible – 130 000 people marched in Copenhagen, mostly Danes. Durban has twice the population of Copenhagen.

A march of that size won't happen unless the unions mobilise. Climate jobs are key to that mobilisation.

We won't win at Durban but if the march is big enough the climate activists will see, and we can make sure the fight spreads deep and wide in the South amongst the working class. And maybe we can take a million South Africans and their families out of misery.

To make that happen activists have to recognise that workers are big people. There is an idea that only middle-class Europeans care about climate change. It's not true. South African and British workers are smart enough to understand science and big enough to embrace great causes.

It's hard for workers and unions to fight for their own jobs. But climate jobs can give people confidence because they are also fighting for a million other workers, for the future of Africa, and for all humanity. <sup>16</sup>

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