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# Trade Unions and Climate Change – action in the workplace and beyond

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# Climate change – a union issue?

- “It is within our gift, within this generation, to either save or destroy the planet we live on. It all boils down to the choices we make now.” Frances O Grady, TUC Deputy General Secretary, 2008
- “Climate change and environmental destruction are key issues that will impact upon the union’s membership and their families across all sectors throughout this century and beyond, according to the vast majority of scientific opinion” Unite/Amicus National Executive, 2007



# Why are unions so concerned?

- Solidarity with the next generation – less than 10 years to avoid the ‘tipping point’
- Solidarity with workers in the poorest countries, who are already feeling the effects
- Impact of rising fuel prices on job security, and on living costs (also, increased regulation)
- Stern report



# Trade union solutions

- Training and education in the workplace and beyond
- Organising around the issues
- Making environment a bargaining issue (including specialist committees and agreements) – scope for workplace action
- Making link to Health and Safety
- Campaigning for policy change
- What we do, not just how we do it
- Don't need to be scientists!
- **The power of collective action**



# GreenWorkplaces project

- Aimed to deliver these solutions, working with:
  - Carbon Trust
  - TUSDAC
  - 8 workplaces – British Museum, TUC, DEFRA, Scottish Power, Corus, Friends Provident, Kew, Argos
  - Unions including PCS, Unite, Unison, Prospect, Community, FDA, GMB



# British Museum (PCS, Prospect, T&G, FDA)

- Establishing concerns – survey, meetings
  - Awareness day with green groups, attended by a quarter of staff, new members too
  - Training course – 80 applicants for 20 places
  - Energy audits carried out by green reps, allowed facilities time
  - Committee set up, meets regularly with energy figures reported, joint agreement
  - Involves members at all levels, from security and cleaning staff to curators
- 7% of electricity    11% of gas    301 tonnes CO2\*
- **Negotiated commitment that the 'new wing' would be 'zero carbon'**

# Scottish Power

- Low awareness of environmental policy – only 25% knew
- Concerns about temperature, lighting conditions, IT wastage and travel were top
- Working through JNC, initiatives include:
  - Started with 'quick wins' - recycling mobiles, hippo water bags
  - Installed motion sensor lighting, solatube system, change to IT policies, web based reporting, environmental intranet site and web based reporting
  - Link with ULRs, and to home energy issues, also working with H&S and internal comms team
- Saved 4% of electricity

# Where next?

- UMF project, CRC
- Training courses – online, Tolpuddle
- Use guides to plan workplace activity, including making arguments to management and union colleagues
- Keep in touch on [www.unionreps.org.uk](http://www.unionreps.org.uk) and [www.sustainableworkplace.co.uk](http://www.sustainableworkplace.co.uk)
- Policy and campaigning – TUSDAC, rights for green reps, CCCTU
- TUC Green Conference 16<sup>th</sup> June





# A final thought...

“The task ahead of us is  
never as great as the power  
behind us”

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*