

Meeting with the Labour Party shadow minister Rebecca Long Bailey and Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED)

**Portcullis House, Westminster
Wednesday 1st November 2017**

Report by Martin Mayer UNITE

(See end for participants list)

Sean Sweeney (TUED) began by thanking Rebecca Long Bailey for the meeting and explained the background to TUED, its global perspective on climate change and its links with trade unions across the world. The Labour Party's stance on climate change and commitment to public ownership is very welcome and has opened up political horizons and international debate. Now there is a need to develop detailed policy proposals for the next Labour Government. TUED UK Group is well placed to provide a level of expertise on the one hand and a clear trade union perspective on the other which could be invaluable. Possibly no other trade union forum can offer this support.

Rebecca Long Bailey responded that she had only a small team to work with and welcomed the offer of help. The energy market is rapidly changing and issues of public control and accountability not to mention energy prices are all pressing political challenges. She mentioned that new nuclear power facility (Hinckley) in which the Government has a controlling stake is highly expensive and badly structured (French and Chinese) but essential non-carbon energy. Meanwhile green energy such as offshore wind has fallen dramatically in price but is highly variable in output.

TUED UK group members made a number of points:

- Public ownership and control is essential as we cannot rely on the market to deliver
- What should we take back: the Big 6 or just the new green energy generators, and what form should that take? Municipal ownership also has a role.
- Just transition must be more than just words. Thousands of well-organised trade union members are employed in fossil-fuel generation and they must be protected
- Regional initiatives (e.g. led by Yorks and Humber TUC) to use social dialogue to encourage a shift to low carbon alternatives in heavy industry need to be supported
- Fuel poverty can be averted by public funding of insulation programmes and energy efficiency measures
- The renewable energy sector is worth £600B and growing, providing good union jobs
- Citizens stand to gain real benefits from greener energy – lower bills, cleaner air, and a future for our children

- Greening electricity production is well advanced but gas is major challenge if we are to decarbonise energy by 2030. Is Hydrogen an alternative?
- Research and development of alternatives is key and a wider understanding of the science behind carbon gas storage, hydrogen from methane etc
- Fracking is highly unpopular with citizens wherever testing is being started and does not offer a carbon-free alternative. Labour is right to oppose fracking

I pointed out that whilst the TUC Congress this year did for the first time agree a comprehensive policy statement on climate change and public ownership, unions like UNITE have reason to be nervous about the changes that lie ahead. We have thousands of UNITE members in fossil fuel energy production and they must not be made to pay the price with their jobs for a transition to a green carbon-free future. Unions cannot control this process so we must insist that a Labour Government takes real responsibility for ensuring a just transition. That means protecting jobs, retraining and relocating workers in the high tech green energy sector or in other high skilled jobs. Labour's Investment Bank has a role here.

I also raised the positive message from the One Million Climate Jobs booklet which demonstrates the positive economic benefits of investing in a greener economy. It produces much needed good jobs, stimulates economic recovery and helps to reduce the deficit. Policies like improved public transport, insulation programmes, zero emission council house building and investment in green energy are all very attractive manifesto pledges.

Rebecca welcomed the help offered by TUED-UK group. The Party needs help, and she welcomed the initiative from TUED UK Group to propose a working group to work with her department. She offered to develop a "terms of reference" memo that would highlight areas that need attention.

On behalf of TUED UK Group, Sean Sweeney thanked Rebecca and welcomed the prospect of an ongoing dialogue on essential policy issues.

Footnote from Sean Sweeney TUED:

Sean Sweeney has since emailed the participants to remind us that in a country where an extremely favourable scenario has presented itself we do not have the capacity to take full advantage due to the lack of financial support from UK unions to TUED

"In narrow material terms, the UK is presently taking resources out of TUED, and not putting any in. We are "running on empty" as they say in my neck of the woods. And it's not for lack of asking. We are also moving

forward in Europe and gaining support for this work (more details soon). But the work in Europe is also been propelled, at least in part, by what is happening in the UK.

*Politically, we are in a **very** good position, at least relative to recent years. In the UK, we have both unions engaged in a consistent way, and people like David Hall (PSI Research) and Mika Minio (Labour Energy Forum) that bring technical knowledge combined with clear politics. We are also interfacing with and learning from other campaigns--GJA, Climate Jobs, etc. But we must continue to take the initiative. I think we all agree on this".)*

Footnote from Sampson Low, UNISON

I didn't have a chance to update colleagues at the pre-meeting on developments in UNISON. Briefly,

- We will produce an activist guide on pensions, climate change and fossil fuel disinvestment in early 2018 as a result of motion passed at our annual conference and it will include what unions can do through collective bargaining and what trustees can do within the fiduciary duty and consistent too with our conference policy to drive out excessive charges made by the legion of financial advisors and fund managers. We have previously highlighted the excellent work done in this area by the staff pension fund at the Environment Agency.
- Separately, both our energy conference and national conference have passed motions to investigate viability of hydrogen (with carbon capture and storage) gas in the current UK gas pipe network and this work is underway with a presentation received from the H21 project in Leeds.

Best wishes, Sampson

Sampson Low
Head of Policy
UNISON

TUED UK Participants

UNITE the Union, Martin Mayer
UNISON, Samson Lowe
GMB, Bert Schouwenburg
GMB-NW&Ireland, Neil Smith
PCS, Sam Mason
TSSA, Fliss Premru
BFAWU, Adele Carlyon
National Education Union, Sophie Ward
Yorkshire & Humber TUC, Bill Adams
Public Services International Research Unit, David Hall

Greener Jobs Alliance, Phillip Pearson
Labour Energy Forum, Mika Minio
Trade Unions for Energy Democracy, Sean Sweeney