

CLIMATE CHANGE A TRADE UNION RESPONSIBILITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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(i) INTRODUCTION

This discussion paper begins with the acknowledgement that climate change is a fact and we do not need to rehearse the arguments for and against, though we do need to look at the necessary responses to this, focussing on the actions that education unions can take, and specifically those working in higher education. It is furthermore acknowledged that higher education is a very large user of energy across the world, both by virtue of the large physical structures it occupies, and by virtue of the movement of staff and students into and between them. Academic staff, through their teaching and research roles, also have a key role to play in promoting sustainable development.

EI World Congress in Berlin carried an Executive Board motion on quality education present and future. In this, the Executive Board was mandated to "include in the programme and budget, strategic means of both informing and acting on the urgent issue of environmental awareness and global warming, such actions to be undertaken at the individual community, national member organisation and international organisation level".

We therefore take this as a starting point, with a view to developing how work within EI and among its affiliates can contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions throughout the world. In an address in September 2007 outlining the ILO's "Green Jobs Initiative", General Secretary Juan Somavia said "Addressing the threat of climate change will entail a transition to new patterns of production, consumption and employment." Education must be part of this transition and EI and its affiliates must play their part.

(ii) INDIVIDUAL OR COLLECTIVE ACTION

While individual action to reduce energy use, and therefore carbon emissions, is an essential part of any global strategic approach to climate change, it is argued that it is collective action that will be most effective over a period of time. Whilst all individuals can contribute, it is always possible that one individual's thoughtful reduction in emissions can be easily cancelled out by another person's thoughtless increase. It therefore follows that it is primarily through collective action that substantial inroads into the reduction in carbon emissions can be made. Trade unions are therefore extremely well positioned to use their organisation and collective strength to engage with this issue.

If the question is asked why climate change is a trade union matter, then we only need to look at the effect that climate change can have throughout the world. That it has the potential to bring about dramatic change that can result in famine, floods and

increased danger to and unsettling of human beings, indicates the necessary involvement of trade unions from a humanitarian perspective. It will also be people in the 'Global South' that will be worst affected by these developments. The fact that workplaces are a major source of carbon emissions further emphasises that it is an issue for trade unions to be engaged with. But a more focussed argument is that in reducing carbon emissions from institutions such as higher education establishments, there is a strong likelihood that the terms and conditions of those people working there will be affected. It is also possible, as the ILO General Secretary puts it "that we must also prepare for job losses, and support workers and enterprises in shifting to new ways of working that reduce emissions."

Reduction of carbon emissions is a matter for the education trade unions to be concerned with. Trade unions organise in the world of work and within educational establishments; they will be pivotal to helping employers reduce their carbon emissions. There is a responsibility laid on them to be aware of the dangers of climate change, and to respond to this through their relationship with employers and governments.

An Example of Carbon Emissions

City University Environmental Impact

In order to appreciate the level of carbon emissions emerging from typical university establishments, it will be necessary to undertake research, though little has so far been undertaken. However, there is one example in the UK as follows:

City University in the United Kingdom is a medium sized institution based in London. It has undertaken a carbon emission study and found the following facts:

- City University has 23,680 students who originate from 157 different countries
- They have 2,126 staff who originate from 70 different countries
- The university is involved in 31 international partnerships

As part of the university's carbon management programme, the institution has calculated the basic carbon footprint of the university after looking at some quantifiable elements such as building energy use, academic and staff travel and waste centre landfill. They work out that these contribute an annual carbon emission of 12,283 tonnes. This has been worked out as equivalent to filling 69,834 typical double decker London buses, or 8,336 olympic sized swimming pools. 87% of these emissions relate to the energy used in buildings.

As a simple example of the energy use and carbon emissions of an institution, this is particularly enlightening. City University is an average sized institution, and there are those much bigger in the UK and elsewhere in the world which therefore have higher levels of carbon emissions.

(iii) THE ROLE OF EDUCATION TRADE UNIONS

Universities have begun to take the issue of climate change more seriously. For example, one thousand universities have signed up to one of the various environmental charters (Kyoto, the Tailores Declaration or the University Charter for Sustainable

Development)¹. However, the extent to which the campus trade unions have been involved in drawing up and monitoring these plans is open to question.

Because they are collective organisations the education unions, and specifically higher education unions, can gather their members' interests together and agree collective action in relation to climate change. Already in the UK it has been agreed that branches of the University and College Union (UCU) in each university and college should consider electing environmental representatives whose role would be to monitor the carbon emissions of their institution, and seek to negotiate with management about reducing these and developing more environmentally sustainable practises.

The introduction of environmental reps at branch or regional level is a fundamental building block on which the whole approach to climate change within the trade unions can be built. The local committees of unions negotiate either with their employer directly or in some countries with government. It is at this level that greatest change can be effected by individual groups of people acting collectively, and making demands on their employer or on the local or regional government, to introduce changes that reduce energy use and therefore carbon emissions.

In the UK for example, it is envisaged that environmental or climate reps would have the following role to undertake:

- 1 To identify with whom they would negotiate. In the UK this would be with the university who acts as the employer and who recognises the union as being a relevant body for negotiations.
- 2 To determine that climate change and carbon emissions are a relevant matter for negotiation. This could be difficult where trade unions are only recognised for bargaining on pay and terms and conditions. However, a reduction in carbon emissions, if for example it reduces the amount of heating available in a lecture theatre or alters the times of lectures to when there is more daylight, clearly has an impact on terms and conditions. Furthermore, if the university would introduce a policy of home working or home location to reduce commuting, this would impact on terms and conditions and is therefore relevant to bargaining.
- 3 To organise and recruit new members around the issue of climate change indicating that the union is active on this new issue.
- 4 To bring issues to the university's attention that are relevant for negotiation and will reduce carbon emissions in their institution.
- 5 To respond to management initiatives aimed at reducing energy use and carbon emissions.
- 6 To protect 'whistleblowers' who raise concerns about an institution's activities which affect the environment and increase carbon emissions.

In a survey of UCU negotiators at university and college level, 18 (out of 93) responded that environmental issues were already on the bargaining agenda, and 17 had negotiated time off normal duties for negotiating and training.

¹ Sponsored by either the International Association of Universities, the University Leaders for a Sustainable Future or the COPERNICUS-CAMPUS initiative.

Issues for Carbon Emission Negotiation

In order to understand how environmental or climate reps might work at the local or regional level, it is useful to identify the possible areas of carbon emission reduction that might be proposed by the trade union, or by an employer or government to which the trade union has to respond. Some of these can be quite controversial.

1 Use of Buildings:

In the Northern hemisphere it is perhaps surprising that we have our most intense use of university buildings, laboratories and lecture theatres etc during the colder and darker months of the year. This has been a tradition over many years reflecting the culture of the growth of industry and the need to escape from the workplace during the summer for summer holidays. However, if there were to be serious reductions in carbon emissions from university buildings, one major way of doing this would be to reduce the use of buildings during the darker colder months of the year, and increase their use during the lighter and warmer months.

This is likely to be very controversial, particularly with academic staff who have seen the summer months traditionally as a period for research. However, it is possible that a shift of a week or a few weeks in terms times or semester times to decrease the use of heating and lighting in university buildings could significantly reduce the carbon emissions of an institution. Proposals of this sort may well be introduced by employers or government, and therefore trade unions in higher education need to be aware of the possible consequences and impact on members, but equally they may want to make proposals themselves having once discussed it with their membership.

2 Commuting and Home Working:

Many academic staff find that periods of time, particularly research and marking of examination papers, are better done from home, rather than in offices in the institutions where they can be disturbed on a regular basis. Some institutions in the UK have home working agreements. It would be better to have a wide-scale and consistent approach to home working that would enable academic staff, as well as students, to spend less time in the institution and therefore less time commuting to work. Again this is a matter for negotiation, and the requirements of different departments and different subject areas could be different, as could the arrangements in different cities and locations. However, reducing commuting patterns and enabling home working to grow as an alternative by the use and distribution of new technologies should be a policy that higher education institutions consider instituting as a regular feature.

In addition to this, car parking policy in institutions, which is often a cause of great concern to the staff members, is an issue for consideration. Car sharing or reduction in car use will affect the travel patterns of staff and students alike, but such policies would need to be integrated with public transport arrangements.

Some universities have introduced policies that require individual academic staff to live within a closer distance to the institution. Where these have existed they were not introduced for environmental reasons, but for access reasons in order to enable staff to attend the university at short notice either to deal with issues in laboratories or the welfare of students. However, this could be thought through again, in the sense that the domiciled location of academic staff and students should be such that the carbon footprint of the institution is reduced. There are enormous issues relating to culture,

community and personal freedom involved in such decision making, but clearly it is a policy that could be considered in order to create benefits in terms of carbon reduction.

3 Staff and Student Travel

This is a potential area of great conflict when looking at the issue of climate change. It is clear that in the globalised higher education system, the increased mobility of staff and students between various parts of the world is something that is a great benefit. The increasing diversity of the academic and student body is of great value to the exchange of ideas, to academic freedom and to increasing the security of the world. However, it is environmentally unfriendly, and in particular in the US/Canada, Europe, Australia and New Zealand where a large number of students come from overseas, it is clear that the carbon footprint of certain universities, notably those that are attractive to places like South East Asia are particularly high because of the travel requirements of the students. Therefore the question arises whether alternatives to this sort of provision should be sought. For example capacity building in those countries who regularly send students abroad could be considered as alternatives rather than attracting students to travel large distances.

4 Changing Work Patterns

Introduction of new technologies or new materials into the workplace to reduce carbon emissions will have an impact on technical and support jobs. For example, changing existing energy provision to cleaner and more sustainable methods, solar power, wind power and introducing material recycling schemes and different waste management arrangements, will impact on skills and work patterns. Jobs may have to change, staff may have to re-skill, and training including time off may have to be negotiated. Any job loss in such transitions will be a matter for trade union negotiations.

5 Trade Union Responsibilities

EI and its affiliates need to respect the fact that they too are significantly large organisations with substantial carbon footprints. To negotiate with employers and government whilst at the same time being relaxed about our own carbon emissions is untenable. Within our own organisations we therefore need to seek ways of being greener, and reducing carbon emissions.

The move to put EI World Congress on a four year cycle rather than three year was therefore a welcome if inadvertent means of reducing our carbon footprint. Unions will have to question the need for face to face meetings involving considerable travel when email exchanges might suffice. We should also consider use of different technologies as alternatives. However, there are inherent tensions in this, especially when this is seen as reducing the democratic process. Careful and imaginative thought will have to be given to managing reduced carbon emissions, whilst retaining democratic arrangements and the vital support and solidarity to be gained from regular face to face contacts.

(iv) THE ROLE OF THE PROFESSION

Academic, research, administrative and support staff working in higher education also have professional roles which whilst they can overlap with areas of trade union responsibilities, can also be outside of them. It is therefore equally important that members of education unions in EI see their roles as professionals as being relevant in

relation to promoting sustainable development. Seeking to influence the policy of an educational institution from a professional perspective can have many aspects. For teachers and researchers the encouragement of climate change research and its impact on the world could be a priority, as could be the greening of the curriculum. Those in administration and support positions may find aspects of the institutions contractual arrangements with outside providers challengeable in relation to carbon emissions. Those in technical positions may find an institution's energy policy wasteful.

1 The greening of the curriculum

Universities and colleges operate at the highest educational level often pushing at the frontiers of knowledge and research, and their curricula should engage with this issue in as wide a way as possible. In recent years initiatives to promote Education for Sustainable Development (EDS) or 'greening the curriculum' have become more widespread in universities. Whilst recognising the barriers and challenges to this agenda (e.g. crowded curriculum, perceived irrelevance in certain subject areas, often limited staff expertise and institutional commitment) universities and campuses could, with support of specialist professional bodies and government funding, look to have elements added to courses that explore environmental sustainability and carbon emission impact. Awareness of climate change is something that needs to be introduced at campus level as a regular feature of all courses offered.

There can also be very practical aspects of learning in relation to climate change that can be applied to educational courses. For example:

- At the University of Nîmes in Southern France, in March 2007, a programme was devised with the objective of promoting the behaviour of "eco-citizens". Concentrating on the promotion of waste management and economising on energy use a university wide campaign under the title 'Unîmes pour l'environnement' engaged staff and students in target setting, market messaging, event organisation and active programmes thereby providing practical demonstrations of environmental awareness linked to social psychology theory.
- In City College in Plymouth, a course is run for local businesses from across the city to identify ways to save money from improved environmental practises.
- Bedford College in Southern England is a centre for excellence in green energy, providing training for small businesses in installing and maintaining solar panels, wind turbines and bio-mass technology.
- Park Lane College in Leeds runs a "reduce your carbon footprint" course managed by a team of conservation and environmental tutors who lead learners through practical energy saving techniques, and the science behind climate change.

There are many more examples of this that need to be shared between countries and institutions.

2 Research, Academic Freedom and Whistleblowers

Protection of staff who find themselves challenging their peers in their professional role for reasons to do with climate change will need protection. This will be necessary whether the concerns are raised through formal channels or by 'whistleblowing' in order to expose unacceptable practises by an employer. Emphasising the importance

of academic freedom for academics and researchers working on climate change will also be vital. Support networks of academics worldwide can be built not only through academic contacts but also through EI, and ways of protecting those colleagues under threat from governments or institutions unwilling to accept research findings need to be explored.

3 International Level

At international level the principle issue that arises from the professional perspective is whose responsibility is it to reduce carbon emissions. It can be argued that it is the developed nations who are most responsible as they have introduced large amounts of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere already, and it is their activities whose effects the world is now suffering from. However, at the same time many developing countries are, because of the level of their technology, currently pumping large amounts into the atmosphere. It is clear that there could be different levels of responsibility, and at international level among the education unions, it should be EI's responsibility to argue both with governments and with environmental bodies, that different levels of responsibility apply within different countries and their education systems.

Developing sustainable education in certain countries will arguably be a greater priority than emphasising measures to reduce carbon emissions. A balance of responsibility between developed and developing countries in relation to climate change, and actions relating to it, will therefore be needed. For example, capacity building within certain countries could be engaged in as an alternative to attracting staff or students away through the process of the brain drain.

EI is well placed to institute a new approach by education unions worldwide to the whole issue of climate change. EI can act as a source both of inspiration and of information as well as an educator to ensure that education unions in different countries take their responsibilities seriously in this regard.

(v) RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 It is recommended that all EI affiliates consider the introduction of environmental representatives at local, regional and national level whose role would be to negotiate over the introduction of measures to reduce carbon emissions.
- 2 It is recommended that EI helps stimulate the development of an international network of scholars working on climate change to help protect their academic freedom.
- 3 It is recommended that EI considers drawing up priority areas in which affiliates should be expected to give greater consideration to reducing carbon emissions.
- 4 It is recommended that EI continues its work on looking at levels of academic migration and mobility, but also places this within the context of climate change.
- 5 It is recommended that EI organise an international round table on the issue of climate change so that all affiliates can exchange ideas and experiences.