

‘Tsunami’ of industrial action to hit oil and gas operators as 1400 offshore workers set to strike – from Unite the Union

From [Unite the Union](#):

Dozens of platforms in UKCS set to be brought to a ‘standstill’ with BP, Shell and Total hit

Unite the union announced today (Monday 20 March) that major oil and gas operators in the UK Continental Shelf (UKCS) face a ‘tsunami’ of industrial unrest within weeks as around 1400 offshore workers across five companies demand a better deal on jobs, pay and conditions.

Unite, whose members will take action at companies enjoying record-busting profits, predicts that platforms and offshore installations will be brought to a ‘standstill’ due to the specialised roles its members undertake.

The action will hit major oil and gas operators including BP, CNRI, EnQuest, Harbour, Ithaca, Shell and Total.

Unite general secretary Sharon Graham said: “Oil and gas companies have been given free rein to enjoy massive windfall profits in the North Sea; drilling concessions are effectively licences to print money.

“1400 offshore workers are now set to take strike action against these employers who are raking it but refusing to give them a fair share of the pie. This will create a tsunami of industrial unrest in the offshore sector.

“Unite will support these members every step of the way in their fight for better jobs, pay and conditions.”

The prospective action includes electrical, production and mechanical technicians in addition to deck crew, scaffolders crane operators, pipefitters, platers, and riggers working for Bilfinger UK Limited, Stork construction, Petrofac Facilities Management, the Wood Group UK Limited and Sparrows Offshore Services.

John Boland, Unite industrial officer, added: “Unite has received unprecedented support in favour of industrial action in the UK Continental Shelf. It is the biggest mandate we have received in a generation in the offshore sector. There is no doubt that this is directly linked to oil and gas companies reaping record profits while the workforce gets scraps from the table.

“Unite’s members are angry at the corporate greed being shown by offshore operators and contractors. Now these major global companies are set to face the consequences as dozens of offshore platforms will be brought to a standstill in a matter of weeks.”

Details of the disputes

Around 700 offshore workers at Bilfinger UK Limited are set to down tools after Unite members voted in favour of taking industrial action as part of a pay dispute. Bilfinger workers are demanding an increase above the base rate of pay set in the Energy Services Agreement (ESA) for 2022.

Meanwhile, 350 Stork construction workers are set to take strike action after Unite members also supported industrial action in a dispute over working rotas and rates of pay.

Unite members employed by Petrofac Facilities Management Limited on the FPF1 platform also voted in favour of strike action. Around 50 workers are involved in the dispute over

holiday entitlements. Offshore workers can be asked to work at any time for no additional payment. The operator, Ithaca Energy, has a 'clawback' policy of 14 days, double the industry norm of 7 days.

Unite members employed by theWood Group UK Limited on TAQA platforms similarly voted to take strike action. Around 80 members are involved in the dispute which is focused on a 10 per cent cut made to salaries in 2015 worth around £7,000 a year.

The mandates for industrial action follow the recent announcement by Unite that around 200 Sparrows Offshore Services workers will take strike action across more than 20 oil and gas platforms in disputes over pay. Strike action is set to hit various platforms from 29 March and until 7 June in a series of 24, 48 and 72-hour stoppages. This action will hit a number of major operators including BP, Shell, Apache and Harbour Energy.

A further two industrial action ballots are due this week at Petrofac BP involving around 80 workers (21 March), and at Worley Services UK Limited on Harbour Energy platforms involving around 50 workers (24 March) in disputes over pay. The pending ballot results could bring the final total to around 1500 offshore workers taking industrial action.

Unite [recently blasted](#) the UK Government's inaction on taxing oil firms as BP posted the biggest profits in its history as it doubled to £23 billion in 2022. BP's bonanza profits come after Shell reports earnings of £32 billion, bringing the combined total profits of the top two energy companies in Britain to a record £55 billion.

ENDS

Notes to Editors:

Ballot results in full

1. *Bilfinger – Yes to strike action – 97%*
2. *Stork – Yes to strike action – 98%*
3. *Petrofac Facilities Management Limited – Yes to strike action – 100%*
4. *Wood Group UK Limited – Yes to strike action – 93%*

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Our Power: Offshore workers demands for a just energy transition

An important new report from [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#).

Over the past two years, we've come together with offshore workers to build demands for a just energy transition. These workers developed 10 demands covering training and skills, pay, job creation, investment and public ownership.

We surveyed over 1000 additional offshore workers and over 90% agreed with these demands. This plan is comprehensive in scope, transformative in scale and deliverable now.

Below you will find a series of resources setting out the demands and the paths we can take to turn them into reality.

We need a rapid transition away from oil and gas that

protects workers, communities and the climate. But the government has no plan to phase out oil and gas production in the North Sea.

Oil and gas workers are ready to lead a just transition away from oil and gas, but they are caught in a trap of exploitation and fear created by oil and gas companies. Working conditions are plummeting, just as profits, prices and temperatures are soaring.

The UK and Scottish Governments must listen to workers to make this transition work for all of us. These demands lay out a comprehensive plan, which includes:

Removing barriers that make it harder for oil and gas workers to move into the renewable industry.

Ensuring safety, job security and fair pay across the energy industry.

Sharing the benefits of our energy system fairly, with public investment in energy companies and communities.

Workers have told us what they need for a just transition, now we need to work with them to make it happen.

Hear from workers



Our Power: Offshore workers' demands for a just energy transition

The [‘Our Power’ report](#) is a blueprint for a just transition in the UK North Sea.

Reproduced from [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#) with thanks to [Red Green Labour](#).

Scottish Government Energy Strategy – what’s wrong with

it and what we need to change

The public consultation on the Scottish Government's [Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan](#) ends on **Tuesday 9 May 2023**, writes Iain Bruce.

That means responding to it will be one of the first big tasks for the new leader of the SNP and Scotland's new First Minister.

The deeply disappointing [consultation document](#) was published on 10 January after a year or more's delay. It fails to build on the recent positive steps taken by Nicola Sturgeon towards opposing any more oil and gas extraction from the North Sea – after she came out against Shell's proposed Cambo oilfield following the mass protests in Glasgow at COP26 in November 2021.

The [consultation document](#) reiterates, at great length, the SNP Government's obsession with false 'techno-fixes' to the climate crisis, in particular hydrogen and carbon capture and storage. It ignores the pressure from environmental organisations and some offshore oil workers and their unions, for a just transition to renewable energy that is led by the communities and workers most affected. And it is partly at odds with the positive steps taken by Sturgeon herself and the outgoing SNP administration, through their [initiatives on 'Loss and Damage'](#), to recognise that a just transition must be just for the global south too.

In the coming weeks we need to build maximum pressure on the government to change the most negative aspects of this draft strategy.

The interview below with Mary Church of [Friends of the Earth Scotland](#), for the [Rising Clyde Climate Justice show on Independence Live](#), gives a lot of [important context and background](#) for such a campaign.

However, it is also important, for the climate justice movement in Scotland and for the radical forces in the independence movement, to understand and challenge the deeper contradiction that underpins this energy strategy, as it does almost all the Scottish government's economic policy. This is its attempt to combine progressive, humane and necessary steps on a number of environmental and social issues, with an inability or refusal to question the underlying systemic factors which hinder such action, and makes it necessary in the first place – in other words its unwillingness to challenge the priorities of the free market.

Link to Video:

Also on Facebook:

[Rising Clyde Episode 10: Scotland's Energy Strategy- leading the way or sitting on the fence? | We talk to Mary Church of Friends of the Earth Scotland, about the Scottish government's new Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan – where it needs to... | By Independence Live | Facebook](#)

7 March, 2023 (YouTube link added 10 March 2023)

Rising Clyde – latest issue of Scottish Climate Show on “Power To The People!”

The latest issue of Rising Clyde, the Scottish Climate Show hosted by Iain Bruce, is now available on YouTube via the

Independence Live video service.

In this episode, Iain presents activists from the new campaign on the cost of fuel – Power to the People, which is setting up groups across Scotland including in Glasgow.

The activists are:

- [Matt Kerr](#), Glasgow Labour Councillor for Cardonald ward
- [Frances Curran](#), former Scottish Socialist Party Member of the Scottish Parliament and trade union activist
- [Coll McCail](#), youth climate activist and member of Scottish Labour Executive representing young members

Watch the programme here:

Power to the People: Protest against energy price rises

[Power to the People Glasgow](#) has called a protest at the Headquarters of Scottish Power in Glasgow on Friday 12 August 4-6pm to oppose the huge rise in energy prices from 1 October 2022, due to be announced around that time:

**FRIDAY 12TH AUGUST
4-6PM
SCOTTISH POWER HQ**



   @PTTPGLASGOW
 **POWERTOPEOPLE2022@GMAIL.COM**

Power to the People Glasgow social media links and information can be found here: <https://linktr.ee/pttpglasgow>

The Power to the People slogan comes from the Left in the European Parliament and the European Left Party who have a really informative video about the European Energy Market here:

While the UK left the European Energy Market with Brexit, energy prices in the UK are based on the European and global markets and are still influenced by supplies from the EEA/EU

(gas from Norway, electricity from France, the single energy market in Ireland).

Previous Issues

Previous Rising Clyde shows on Independence Live can be found here:

[\(1035\) SHOW: Rising Clyde – YouTube](#)

Power to the People! Scottish Socialist Energy Summit – Glasgow 21 May 2022

POWER TO THE PEOPLE! SOCIALIST ENERGY SUMMIT: SATURDAY 21ST MAY – GET YOUR TICKETS BOOKED NOW!

12noon-5pm [The Renfield Centre](#), 260 Bath Street, Glasgow G2 4JP ([Directions](#))

This important event is being held by [Socialists For Independence \(SFI\)](#) in conjunction with [European Left](#) and [Democratic Left Scotland](#).

It will be an opportunity to talk and most importantly, organise around how we can fight back against the huge energy prices rises that increases fuel poverty and the next stage for the COP26 demands to fight climate change. The recent ScotWind sale by the Scottish Government has provoked [important debate](#) about what sort of energy system we need in

Scotland, both before and after independence, and how it can benefit the entire population especially the poorest.

We can't go on like this. Global warming is threatening the planet and energy prices are going into the stratosphere.

We need a drastic root and branch change. To do that we have to understand how we create energy in Scotland and who owns our energy. This summit is the first step in developing an energy plan where the people in Scotland own and control energy production and consumption for the benefit of the people who live here.

Speakers include:

- [Maggie Chapman](#) – [Scottish Green Party](#) MSP
- [Stephen Smellie](#) – [UNISON Scotland](#) Depute Convenor
- [Roland Kulke](#) – [Transform](#), [European Left](#)
- Stuart Fairweather – [Dundee Trades Council](#) & [Democratic Left Scotland](#)
- [Alan McCombes](#)

The event is open to anyone who has an interest in environmental issues and is concerned about how we in Scotland can effect positive change for both people and planet.

Tickets for the event are free and can be booked via Eventbrite – see link below:

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/socialist-summit-on-energy-tickets-318976165297>

The Facebook event is here:
<https://www.facebook.com/events/379869394006488?ref=newsfeed>

Come along and have your say!

You can follow **Socialists for Independence** on social media:

[Twitter: @socialists4indy](#) [Facebook](#) Web: <https://socialistsforindependence.scot/> (Members also have a Slack channel for discussion and regular fortnightly meetings)

Scotland's renewables sell-off – right direction, wrong road!

Scottish First Minister Nicola Sturgeon was over the moon when she reacted to the outcome of last week's sale of rights to develop wind farms off the coasts of Scotland, *writes Iain Bruce for ecosocialist.scot*.

The [ScotWind](#) auction of licenses to 17 projects covering 7,000 km² of seabed could lead to the generation of another 24.8GW of clean energy in the next ten years or so. That's two-and-a-half times the amount the Scottish government had expected, and two-and-a-half times the offshore wind capacity that Scotland currently has operating or soon to come online. It would effectively double the entire installed wind energy capacity of the UK, including offshore and onshore – providing, in theory, enough electricity to power more than half, possibly three quarters, of all the homes in Britain. Obviously, this could be a significant step towards decarbonising the energy supply this decade, which is essential to keep global warming increases below the critical level of 1.5 degrees Celsius.

On the main BBC Scotland news that night, Sturgeon said the nearly £700 million due to her government in option fees was just the start. As the projects were implemented, she expected £1 billion in supply chain investment for every 1GW of power generated. She called it “truly historic” in terms of the scale of the opportunity. An industry representative was even more fulsome. For Scotland this was a moment akin to the beginning of North Sea Oil in the 1970s. Two days later, the

First Minister tweeted a screenshot of a Zoom meeting she'd just held with executives from the multinational energy companies that had won the rights. They include BP, SSE and Shell, from the UK and the Netherlands, Iberdrola, the Spanish parent company of Scottish Power, as well as Vattenfall of Sweden, Falcke Renewables of Italy, Baywa of Germany and Deme of Belgium. Nicola Sturgeon said they'd told her how they would help to put Scotland at the forefront of offshore wind power globally.

ScotWind auction slammed

The ScotWind auction was immediately slammed by some on the left of the pro-independence movement. Their criticism centred on the fact that the licences had gone to foreign companies with little guarantee that future benefits, or jobs, would come to Scotland. Robin McAlpine, the former director of Common Weal, pointed out that the amount those companies paid for their licences was a pittance compared with what they can expect to make from selling the electricity they generate – they could pay it off with a couple of days' wind, he claimed. He also calculated that, per Gigawatt, it was barely a third of what the Scottish government had said it hoped to bring in.

These are serious arguments, and in the week since the auction results were announced they have gained traction in some expected, and unexpected quarters. [Conter](#) used a simplified version to denounce an alleged irrevocable turn to the right by the Scottish Green Party – a misplaced and somewhat sectarian criticism towards the base of the Scottish Green Party in our view. Anas Sarwar, the leader of the Scottish Labour Party, attacked the Scottish government at First Minister's questions in the Holyrood Parliament for selling out Scottish jobs and selling off Scottish assets *"to foreign multinationals with woeful human rights records"* (sic). He echoed the Common Weal argument that the Scottish National Party (SNP) administration's failure to deliver on its promise

to set up a state-owned energy company had led to this new “*privatisation*”. Neil Mackay went over the top in The Herald and accused the SNP of “Thatcherism-lite”. Common Weal has now developed its case in more detail in a 14 page report just published, entitled “[ScotWind: Privatising Scotland's Future Again](#)”. The left-wing Labour MSP, Mercedes Villalba, retweeted the report approvingly, demanding “*socialist ambition*” and a “*people's government*” that would “*advance democratic worker ownership of the economy*”.

Sovereignty

The counter argument, not only from the SNP but from some on the radical left of the pro-independence movement, points to the ever-present issue of sovereignty.

It questions some of the basic premises of the Common Weal argument, in particular the possibility of a devolved Scottish government, given the current limitations on its legal and fiscal powers, establishing a public energy company capable of taking on an electricity generation project of the kind and scale of ScotWind. It points out that these limitations are precisely one of the strongest arguments for independence. The reasoning runs something like this:

After the 2014 Independence Referendum, one concession from the government in Westminster was to transfer to Holyrood complete control over Crown Estate Scotland, the body that granted the ScotWind licences. That means the Scottish government is now, effectively, the landlord of the seabed up to 200 miles off Scotland's very large foreshore. As landlord, it can charge for the licences to exploit the resources, as it just has done, and when production begins it will be able to charge rent.

This is also the means by which onshore wind farms have already been bringing in a tidy sum for some of Scotland's big private landowners. Although such deals are shrouded in

secrecy, as far back as 2012 the Earl of Moray was reckoned to be making £2 million a year from the 49-turbine farm on his Doune estate in Perthshire, and the Duke of Roxeburghe just a bit less from a slightly smaller development in Lammermuir Hills. On a similar basis, the Scottish government might be able to charge as much as £400 million a year in rent, according to some calculations, as and when all the ScotWind projects start to generate electricity, although the Common Weal report estimates this income at between £50 and 90 million a year. In either case, it is still a pittance compared with what the companies stand to make.

Reserved power

However, the argument continues, energy policy itself, including taxation, regulation and ownership, remains a legal power reserved for the UK government. That means firstly that the tax paid by the corporations on their profits from wind power will go into the coffers of the Westminster government, not Holyrood. Nor would Holyrood benefit from the substantial fees for connection paid to the national grid.

Secondly, it remains very unclear what levers the Scottish government could use to ensure the companies keep their promises – for example to create supply chain jobs in Scotland – or even to control where the energy goes. There is currently nothing like the capacity to bring ashore and distribute an extra 25GW of clean energy, and apparently no plan to install the connections required, so it is likely that the companies will choose immediately to re-export a large part of the wind energy to Europe.

Thirdly, and perhaps most decisively, under the existing constitutional settlement, the Scottish government cannot nationalise all or part of the industry in order to ensure its aims are met. The National Energy Company mooted by the Scottish government in 2017 was an electricity **distribution**

company. The idea seems to have fallen victim to the pandemic and the more recent crisis in the UK's gas retail sector that has led to the collapse of over 20 energy distribution companies. There appears to be some doubt about whether the Scottish government with its current powers could set up an electricity generating company, but even if it could, it seems certain that the fiscal limits on Holyrood's ability to borrow would mean it could never raise anything approaching the amount of investment required to develop offshore projects on the scale of the ScotWind ones.

Alternative – towards radical independence

Whichever side of this argument you come down on, the issues of revenue and control, ownership and sovereignty, must be an important part of the alternative we need to develop as Scotland moves towards independence. The experience of other small, resource-rich countries, combining measures of nationalisation, raising royalties and rewriting the service contracts on offer to multinationals, may have useful lessons here, both positive and negative. And the efforts of Bolivia or Venezuela in the first decade of this century, to assert sovereignty over their natural resources **and** redirect revenue towards social spending, may have a lot more to teach us in this respect than Norway.

But these aspects are not enough. On their own they risk leaving us with a narrow nationalist, technocratic response, which will certainly be insufficient to address the gravity of the global climate crisis we face, and the depth of the changes we need in the ways we live. They have to be integrated into a wider, deeper, more ambitious and more urgent vision of the transition ahead, one that is inspired by the principles of climate justice that were expressed so impressively on the streets of Glasgow in November. If there

is one thing that we should have learned from the breadth and diversity of the protests during COP26, it is that such climate justice is inseparable from social justice, in all its dimensions. That means bringing together the rights of workers and working-class communities in the global north, including those who are affected by the dismantling of fossil industries, with the rights of those in the global south who are most affected by climate change, especially women, Indigenous communities and the migrants who will be forced to move on an ever vaster scale (including to Scotland), and with the rights of nature itself (something a future Scottish state should write into its constitution, following the example first set by Ecuador back in 2008).

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GMB trade union members, including striking bin workers, turned out for the Fridays For the Future demonstration in Glasgow on 5 Nov

Building a Vision

That vision needs to build out from three main pillars.

Firstly, we need **a transition that is just** – in the full sense of the word. Of course everyone, including the Scottish government, *talks* about a just transition. But it is not enough just to mention, or hope, that wind farms and other renewables will create thousands of jobs for those whose jobs must go in oil and gas. We need a planned transition which includes both, and many other kinds of job too, where the workers and the communities involved are not just consulted, but play a leading, decision-making role, so that they can choose and exert control over their own futures. We need not just some “green jobs” but a complete refocus and massive change to develop what has been called “green, purple and red jobs”.

Secondly, we need a profoundly different grasp of **what we are transitioning from and to**, and a much more creative vision of how to do it. We must not think of renewable energy simply replacing fossil fuel energy, so that electric cars can replace petrol ones while everything else goes on more or less as is. We need to reduce sharply the amount of energy we use, and that means radical changes to the ways we travel, where we live and where we work, how we heat our homes or obtain our food, and indeed profound changes to what we value for a good life, over and above the consumption of more and more stuff – stuff that too often has been hauled backwards and forwards across the globe before it gets to us. This means we also need a wider rethink of how we produce our energy. Obviously, nobody wants just to switch off the lights, so we may still need some large-scale clean energy generation projects like ScotWind. And the complexities of technology, supply chains and finance may leave us with no choice but to do some

business with big energy companies, for a limited period and on strictly regulated conditions. But all this needs to be put alongside, and subordinated to, a new emphasis on the local generation and consumption of clean energy – local energy that is publicly owned and controlled by the community.

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Thirdly, we need to make absolutely sure that **whatever we do to achieve this transition is not trashing the environment, living conditions or rights of other communities in other parts of the world, especially in the Global South**. Exactly how much balsa wood went into the wood resin sandwiched between fibre glass in those wind turbine blades? Which tropical forest was that balsa wood dragged out of? How much say did the people living there have, and how much benefit or destruction did it bring them? The same goes for the lithium in the batteries that will store all that clean energy. We can only ensure positive answers to these questions if we build on the close relations and solidarity with movements and communities in the South that flourished on the streets of Glasgow last November.

The transition to zero carbon has to be a shared and collaborative project across the world – part of a Radical Global Green New Deal – not a privilege for the North at the expense of the South.

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The Urgency of Independence

Here in Scotland, these three pillars are yet more arguments for the urgency of independence. They obviously cannot be achieved within the confines of the current devolution settlement. But this is also where the real weakness of the current Scottish government approach becomes clear. It is a weakness that runs much deeper than an alleged dispute over whether or not it could have set up a publicly owned generation company to take advantage of the ScotWind licences – important though that issue is.

The SNP-led administration likes to broadcast its green commitments, not totally without justification. Scotland's legally-enshrined target of zero carbon by 2045 is not nearly soon enough, but in Europe it is equalled only by Germany and Sweden. Scotland was the first and only country of the Global North to respond to the demands of governments in the South and make a symbolic pledge during COP26 – albeit a paltry £2 million – to a fund to pay for the loss and damage already suffered by those countries as a result of climate change. The latest ScotWind auction shows the government is taking seriously the need for big and rapid increases in renewable energy. Given the gravity of the climate crisis, these have to be good things, even if they are by a long way insufficient.

False Narrative of 'Net Zero'

The problem is that all of this is underpinned, and ultimately undermined, by the fact that Scottish government policy remains wedded, apparently unquestioningly, to the false narrative of *net zero* by 2045, with all its accompanying false solutions of negative emissions technologies and offsets, including carbon capture and storage (CCS), hydrogen, Bio Energy with CCS (BECCS) and nature based solutions to be used as offsets. This is the same narrative that the UK government as COP26 President worked hard to impose in Glasgow in

November; the same narrative that many fossil fuel companies are using to justify their continuing extraction of oil and gas through to the mid century and beyond; the same narrative that other core sectors of international capital, especially in finance, are using to back up their green capitalist revolution; and the same narrative that was called “The Big Con” by Friends of the Earth.

It is also the same narrative that was massively rejected by protesters on the massive demonstration in Glasgow on 6 November and throughout the COP.



Global Climate Justice campaigners march in Glasgow Nov 2021 (Photo: M Picken)

For core sections of the SNP leadership, this is a weakness that is embedded in their fundamental social democratic vision of society and economy, in their basic belief that, with a bit of a tweak and a bit more regulation, the free market can solve the greatest existential threat that humanity has ever faced. Well, it cannot! Many of the 100,000+ members of the SNP surely know that. So does the membership of their governmental partners in the Scottish Green Party. Even many Labour members and supporters know the free market does not work. That is why one of the greatest challenges now for climate activists in Scotland is to work with those people and with others, in the Indy movement, in the trade unions, on the

left, to *shift this narrative*, to dismantle the myth of net zero and encourage the movement onto a much more inspiring path – that of climate justice, which also means social justice and national justice.

26 January 2022

Iain Bruce is a member of ecosocialist.scot living in Glasgow