

What is Green Collective Bargaining?

(27 June 2017) In 1987, the United Nations published the Brundtland Report which argued that sustainable development to tackle climate change should be based on three pillars - economic, social and environmental. As economic activities produce most greenhouse gas, both the private and public sector must commit to environmentally friendly policies. “*Green collective bargaining*” is part of the response to climate change, since it links environmental solutions to social commitment so as to positively transform the economic efficiency of innovative organisations.

EPSU's 2011 discussion paper, *Impact of climate change on public services in Europe*, said that “*it was stressed in several discussions in EPSU that change starts at the work place. EPSU is committed to assist work place representatives by making information available on how environmental and climate change can be addressed at workplace level and collective bargaining*[\[1\]](#)”.

Even if *green collective bargaining* might be a new idea, there is a sense in which it has always had an environmental perspective. When employees negotiated to improve their working conditions, it could happen that at the same time they were helping create a *greener* workplace or getting their employer to adopt a greener strategy. For example, people working with asbestos - which was eventually recognised as a cancer-causing agent- were collectively fighting to have more protection and to limit its use, and this happened long before environmental issues were on the agenda[\[2\]](#).

EPSU believes that public service organisations should actively integrate *green* provisions into their collective bargaining. To assist local trade union representatives in addressing some of the issues, guidances been developed at both European[\[3\]](#) and national levels[\[4\]](#). The Trade Union Congress (UK) lists a series of benefits for unions in integrating green issues into collective bargaining. To name a few[\[5\]](#):

- extending the union consultation agenda
- achieving costs savings that can contribute to staff bonuses
- union renewal: making unions modern and relevant organisations that deal

with big issues

- encouraging employers to focus on green issues = creation of new green jobs
- staff engagement and, in the case of the UK, electing workers to act as green reps

Generally speaking, *green collective bargaining* is not yet very widespread, but some initiatives have already taken place[\[6\]](#), in particular in the UK. Without necessarily being as binding as a normal collective agreement, the TUC has proposed a *model of joint environment and climate change agreement*[\[7\]](#).

A few examples

A local example: the Joint Environment and Climate Change Agreement in Stockport

This *Joint Environment and Climate Change Agreement* (JECCA) was negotiated between public service union UNISON and Stockport Council[\[8\]](#). The Council aims to:

- reduce its carbon footprint through quantified and transparent annual targets
- work with staff, management and stakeholders on training and awareness raising
- work closely with Stockport UNISON to promote and encourage the just transition to a local low carbon economy, and have due regard for UNISON's corresponding objectives regionally and nationally. More information is available in the original document (see source below).

An example of trade union coordination: the inter-union network for environmental awareness (RISE: Réseau Intersyndical de Sensibilisation à l'Environnement)

The RISE project[\[9\]](#) refers to a common structure between the CSC and the FGTB trade union confederations. Its main goal is to support environmental actions in firms through reps' commitment. Financially supported by the Walloon government since 1996, RISE assists employee reps on environmental questions and on mobility. The issues addressed by the network include waste, energy saving, food and mobility and alternative means of transport.

RISE also offers training for reps and practical support for its members.

A Canadian initiative: the Work in a Warming World research project

The Work in a Warming World research project^[10] gathers all the “green” clauses from Canadian collective agreements that are publicly available. This initiative is interesting for three main reasons:

It indicates what kinds of action are taking place outside the European Union. The database has plenty of diverse examples from both private and public sectors, providing plenty of ideas for unions. The initiative shows how easy it can be to introduce *green* clauses into collective bargaining.

^[1] EPSU (Sophie Dupressoir), *Impact of climate change on public services in Europe*, 2011, p. ii.

^[2] Emmanuel Henri, *L’amiante: un scandale improbable*, Rennes, Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2007.

^[3] ETUC, *Green Workplaces. A Guide for Union Representatives*, Brussels, 2012.

^[4] Trade Union Congress (TUC), *Go Green at Work. A Handbook for Union Green Representatives*, London, 2008.

UNISON, *Greening the workplace. A guide to bargaining for greener staff travel plan*, London, 2009.

^[5] Trade Union Congress (TUC), *Greener Deals : Negotiating on Environmental Issues at Work*, 2010.

^[6] ETUC organised a conference entitled “Green Workplaces”. Some interventions cover examples across Europe. To see more: <https://www.etuc.org/green-workplaces-conference>

^[7] https://www.pcs.org.uk/sites/default/.../model_agreement.doc

^[8]

<https://assets.contentful.com/ii3xdrqc6nfw/1Lz5D2YWc8KuiqQc86ss4a/081427eefbb8e11346>

^[9] <http://www.rise.be>

^[10] <http://warming.apps01.yorku.ca/resources/green-collective-agreements> - https://www.zotero.org/green_agreements/items

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