



Inside this issue

People power the case for public ownership

Just transition

the future of
energy jobs

Stand together

bring back
collective pay
bargaining





Message from Matt

As I write this intro to our energy magazine, we are in the midst of a general election, a general election for which the outcome will be known when you come to read it. Although the election is in part dominated and caused by the Brexit situation, it is another subject we should really be talking about non-stop. If there is somewhere we need more hot air, it is in us talking about the challenge of climate change and how we address this as a nation going forward. The UK is already committed to net zero by 2050 and if you understand the scale of this, you will be concerned that we are not even on the starting blocks for the race of a lifetime. Failure really will have consequences.

One of the things I am proud about in my work, is that in the debate on climate change – UNISON has really led the way in illustrating how we as a country can achieve net zero in a deliverable way, protecting our members' jobs, protecting the most vulnerable, protecting public services and bringing people together. UNISON has developed three policy objectives and mapped them out. They are:

A national plan for domestic energy efficiency to ensure every UK home meets an EPC 'C' rating. No substantial progress can be made to achieve net zero without this measure being delivered. Poor housing is contributing to global warming and sustaining fuel poverty. Measures to decarbonise heat are meaningless if that heat disappears through your poorly insulated roof or windows. Such a plan would create over 130,000 sustainable jobs and could be afforded by recycling the energy cost savings that energy efficiency provides.

Prioritising the development of hydrogen technology so the UK becomes the global leader. The deployment of hydrogen boilers in the home will mean that the decarbonising of heat will become a reality – not simply a must do without any hope of delivering it. If we can fast track electrolysis technology using renewable electricity, we can make necessary changes simply without massive disruption to consumers and in doing so create the hydrogen economy that will pave the way for hydrogen transport and industrial processes. We are the biggest staff union in the gas industry, so we know what we are talking about.

Energy retail in public ownership. This is essential if we are to carry people on the journey to decarbonise people's homes. It is our members who, day in and day out, engage with the millions of energy customers in the UK. Let's harness those talents to create a force for good. Public ownership will protect the consumer and bring people together.

Whatever the outcome is of the general election, we cannot wait much longer to get started, in fact we have already delayed far too long. We need action and we need a workforce capable and in place to deliver. It is all well and good trying to find the perfect way of doing things, but remember we don't have a blank sheet of paper and we don't have unlimited resources. Let's harness what we have and put it to good use, securing a future for our members' jobs and the planet. UNISON in energy is leading the way, long may it continue.

Energy

Contents

4 Power to the people

Public ownership for a green age

7 Just transition

Protecting energy workers' jobs for the future

8 Going for growth

How to attract new members

9 Together we stand

Why we need to return to collective pay bargaining

10 Not so smart

The trouble with smart meters

11 Profile

Tony Grieve looks back on decades of activism

Editors

Diane Church and
Jenny Mill



Message from Dave Prentis

“We shouldn’t underestimate the scale of the challenge we face. Decarbonisation can’t be forced: we need to win public support”

This stark warning has been reinforced by Extinction Rebellion’s recent protests, by images of plastic on the ocean floor and by Sir David Attenborough’s compelling documentaries.

The science is clear and has been for decades. Only recently and with irony, it was BP themselves that warned that while global emissions rose at their fastest rate since 2011 last year, progress on climate change remains slow.

Across the world, the calls for a green new deal are gathering pace. Politicians of different stripes are asking for fundamental changes to the global economy that tackle inequality and climate catastrophe at the same time. In America, charismatic Congressperson Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has electrified the debate, bringing genuine hope that the world’s biggest economy might finally become a leader in tackling climate change.

In the UK too, campaigners have begun to sketch out a plan for a different kind of economy that works for the many, yet preserves the environment.

However, the fight against inequality and injustice must be at the heart of whatever solutions are found. The most vulnerable and worst off in society must be protected from paying a high financial cost for heating and lighting their homes.

There is a simple and straightforward answer: public ownership of the energy retail market – that is those companies that sell energy to consumers. It would address the urgent need for action on climate issues by encouraging customers to focus on renewable alternatives, while also delivering a better deal for consumers. Public ownership would also ensure protection for the jobs of thousands of staff in the energy sector.

Competition between suppliers such as British Gas, SSE and Npower is creating complexity for customers and a lack of clarity over tariffs, prices and value for money – and putting important jobs at risk.

Although there has been talk about public ownership of energy networks – the wires and pipes that heat our homes and give us light – UNISON believes it is the retail sector where the real power lies. Importantly, it is where we can win the hearts and minds of the public. If a future government was to create a dominant national public energy purchaser and retailer, a real focus on decarbonisation could begin with immediate effect, and at a lower cost than many alternatives.

This would enable the government to demand that producers focus on increasing renewable and low-carbon energy. A nationalised retail market would also mean that a future government could protect consumers, slash costs for the poorest and ensure nobody is on an

extortionate legacy tariff.

Nationalisation would create a “green army” working to decarbonise UK homes and businesses. Customer services and sales staff would have their time freed up so they could focus on helping consumers become more energy efficient. Renewable forms of energy like solar panels or converting homes to greener hydrogen boilers would become the norm among consumers.

We shouldn’t underestimate the scale of the challenge we face. Decarbonisation can’t be forced: we need to win public support. Our thousands of members in energy call centres around the UK will be at the forefront of the battle to get to net zero.

Public ownership of the retail sector could be achieved for less than £6 billion – a fraction of the cost of nationalising the energy networks and a more efficient way of tackling the climate crisis than any other private sector solution. It should be central to any government’s plans for the future. Affordable energy, a national drive towards renewables, removing the flawed and false competition from the household energy sector, providing fair tariffs for consumers and ensuring the retention of vital unionised jobs and pay.

We must tackle the crisis of climate change, and with it inequality in society. This way, we can begin to challenge them both together.

Dave Prentis is general secretary of UNISON.

Public ownership for a green age

Nationalise the retail arm of energy companies. It's the best way to protect the planet and jobs, says UNISON's Power to the People report.

UNISON has called on the government to bring into public ownership the parts of British Gas (Centrica), SSE, E.ON, EDF Energy, Npower (Innogy) and Scottish Power (Iberdrola) that sell consumers energy.

Published in the summer at the national energy conference, the Power to the People report explains how nationalising the retail arms of the big six energy firms would significantly boost the UK's bid to become carbon neutral by 2050.

In recent years, the retail supply sector has gone from being a cash cow to barely profitable – and it is now estimated that these essential assets could be acquired at a low cost of between £6bn and £9bn.

"Nationalisation would provide job security to thousands of workers currently employed by the big six energy firms," said UNISON general secretary Dave Prentis. "It would also help deliver the government's carbon neutral target, make us all more energy efficient and mean cheaper bills for everyone."

There are currently over 34,000 workers employed in the big six domestic supply companies and many of these staff are based in large regional call centres spread around the country. Public ownership of the big six could protect this huge workforce from potential loss of quality jobs and

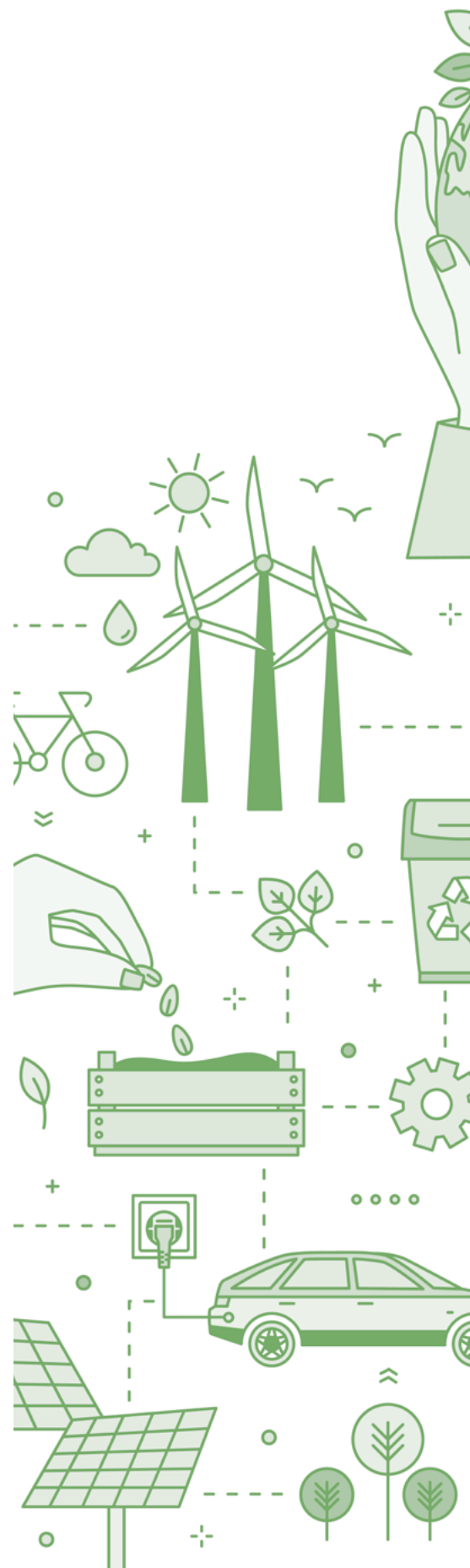
employment rights. For example:

- all existing staff could be TUPE'd across to a new national or a regional energy supply/retail authority, with labour conditions protected
- public ownership would stabilise quality employment in places such as Sunderland and Cardiff, and for many female and part-time workers
- sectoral bargaining and pay and conditions could be most simply applied if publicly-owned supply companies employed the majority of the workforce
- new workers could be taken on through modern apprenticeships to deliver programmes, such as energy efficiency or public education.

"The climate crisis is a fundamental threat to the future of the planet, but the UK won't get to net zero emissions on a hope and a prayer. Proper action is required and quickly," concluded Dave.

National Officer Matt Lay, concurred: "Public ownership is the only way that low carbon targets can be met. Our workers will be the ones who have to deliver the green revolution. It won't happen while the industry is fragmented and the only goal is profit."

"The climate crisis is a fundamental threat to the future of the planet, proper action is required and quickly"





How Power to the People would be delivered

The UK has 20 million homes. A single public retailer would have huge clout in negotiating wholesale prices. It would also be able to predict prices effectively – protecting consumers from price shocks and supply issues.

A single retailer could also allow supply decisions to be taken in the national interest in the long term, such as green energy solutions and the development of increased energy storage to protect supply.

Keep energy bills affordable

A single national buyer for energy would be able to apply genuine pressure on generators, not just to lower the purchasing costs, but to also drive the greater use of renewable or clean energy production. This is critical if external investment is to be attracted to increase renewable and clean generation capacity.

The publicly-owned supplier could also make long-term, sound economic choices about renewable energy options and issues such as SMART metering, which have been a disaster under private ownership.

Energy bills are going to have to rise to pay for decarbonisation. One single energy purchaser is in a much stronger position to ensure that these costs are distributed and to protect bills for poorer or vulnerable households.

Improving energy efficiency

At present, the energy workforce is fractured, demoralised and uncertain of its future.

The challenge of developing an expanded and skilled workforce to assess, persuade, organise and deliver in-home improvements to address decarbonisation will be massive. Just getting UK homes up to an EPC rating of C will require more than 100,000 extra workers over a 15-year delivery period, as the UK has some of the worst housing stock in developed economies in terms of energy efficiency.

A green army of thousands of workers could begin helping consumers reduce their energy consumption, bills and the country's emissions. Solar panels and greener hydrogen boilers could soon become the norm.

Green revolution needed

The Committee on Climate Change (CCC) says that current plans to reduce greenhouse gases to agreed targets are insufficient. The UK will not only fail to reach net zero by 2050 but it will also fail to achieve the 80% reduction promised by the government. The CCC said that “challenges across sectors must be tackled vigorously and in tandem, beginning immediately” for these targets to be met. Nationalisation would enable this to happen.



Developments in SSE

UNISON has been in negotiations with SSE management about the impending sale of the SSE retail business to OVO energy.

Following the failure of the SSE/ Npower tie up, SSE made it clear that it remained committed to offloading its retail

division so it could focus on other core energy priorities. The decision of SSE was criticised by UNISON as short-sighted but nevertheless we have also been looking at what the future has in store. UNISON lead officer for SSE – Gerry Crawley from the Scotland region has been in positive discussions with SSE and

OVO and now has had commitments that UNISON will be recognised in the new OVO-owned business – pending regulatory approval of the sale. This will help ensure that all those members who are moving over to OVO will be protected and under collective bargaining arrangements. We will be doing all we can to make sure the move is successful and that members are treated fairly and consistently. These are worrying times and being in a trade union is one way to help secure a better future for all impacted by this development.

Npower losses

UNISON was very disappointed when E.ON announced what many had been fearing – the closure of large parts of the Npower business with the resulting loss of 4,500 jobs and the eventual closure of the majority of Npower offices/contact centres.

This announcement followed the takeover of Innogy (the owner of Npower) by E.ON which was completed last month.

We understand that this will be devastating news for many of our members, coming as it did, right before Christmas.

UNISON has been informed that job losses and site closures will take place throughout 2020 although full site closures are not likely until the later part of 2020 – and possibly into 2021. During this time it is proposed that Npower customers will be migrated over onto the E.ON platform.

Over the coming days and months, we will be doing whatever we can to support impacted members in Npower and ensure members' rights are protected. We have received early assurances that Npower redundancy terms will be honoured in full and that some £500 million has been set aside to meet restructuring costs. A full consultation with the trade unions is now taking place and we will be seeking answers to a number of questions and seeking further assurances on the available support for employees. What we will not do however is make false promises on measures we cannot deliver.

UNISON is deeply concerned about the state of the retail energy market which has ultimately led to this happening. Thousands of jobs have been lost in the sector and many suppliers have gone under. It cannot carry on this way which is why we have advocated for a public ownership model which would preserve jobs and help tackle climate change.

We will endeavour to keep you as up-to-date as we can on progress but if you have any questions, suggested ideas or mitigations, please contact your local UNISON rep so these can be fed into the consultation process and answers given.

Keep energy jobs safe

What will the green revolution mean for me? Is my job safe? These are the questions energy workers are asking as the industry restructures to tackle climate change

Last year, the four main energy trade unions: UNISON, GMB, Unite and Prospect agreed a list of key demands to protect workers' jobs as the energy industry shifts to low-carbon alternatives.

"There are over 200,000 members right across the energy and energy-intensive industries," said UNISON's head of policy, Samson Low. "This is what our members want for their families and their communities. The test for any just transition is whether those most affected are allowed to lead the debate and have ownership of the priorities. If not, it cannot be a just transition."

What does a just transition mean?

T training and skills development

Workers affected have fully funded access to quality training and skills development to support them through any adaptations required, or to take up new opportunities.

R relocation is fully-funded and voluntary

Workers have access to jobs in other geographic locations with fully-funded relocation packages agreed with trade unions and worker take-up of these opportunities is voluntary.

A adapting to the reality of climate change

Energy workers have the insight and skills to provide a unique viewpoint on, not just the challenges of climate change, but also the complexity of solutions required to tackle it.

N new jobs with comparable terms and conditions

We need a focus on the quality of jobs needed for a low-carbon economy.

Too often the quality of work is an afterthought. New jobs need to be equivalent in skills, conditions and pensions. This means giving workers a voice and recognition of unions.

S secure supply of affordable energy

It is essential that energy supply is secure, reliable, works in the interests of the nation and is affordable to all consumers with costs shared on an able to pay basis.

I influence and a voice over future policy

Unions and workers affected demand a seat at the table at which key decisions are taken on the transition. They should be able to contribute to solutions, not simply be told after the decision is made.

T taking a long term and sustainable view

We need a long-term plan with decisions taken to secure a long-term future for all, not one simply based on continued short-term profits or convenience. If workers are to be affected by transition, it must be for worthwhile reasons and deliver long-term rewards.

I industrially focused and supporting a balanced energy policy

Decisions taken need to ensure the UK remains a competitive employer with a strong manufacturing base (not exporting carbon-intensive jobs overseas) and a balanced energy policy which builds on existing strengths and current infrastructure to address climate change.

O oversight and ownership

Energy policy must serve the public good. We need oversight of the transition policies and a full review of the ownership status of energy assets in the UK.

N no communities left behind

We must recognise and react to the impact that closing carbon-intensive production brings to local communities and invest in them to bring about long-term renewal.



Building bridges in the workplace

How can you increase membership against a background of outsourcing, redundancies and staff freezes? Recruit existing workers. We asked branches for their ideas

1. Make it fun

It's all about talking to and connecting with non-members in the workplace. Introduce events and activities that appeal to everyone, such as a Christmas hamper raffle or Easter egg free draw. Lunchtime quizzes with prizes can also attract new people. Social activities are a good way of opening a conversation with non-members.

At one recent recruitment drive where Scottish Water held a free draw, they signed up around 20 new members in two hours.

2. Be visible

Make UNISON visible in the workplace. At EDF branch, workers wear purple t-shirts every Monday to identify UNISON members and activists. "If they see us, they're much more likely to join us," said one activist.

Fill your workplace with UNISON merchandise too: mugs, lanyards, badges, bags and pens. It all helps to raise UNISON's profile.

Some branches have head-and-shoulder shots of UNISON activists in communal places like kitchens, so that other workers know who they are.

3. Good communications

Many branches produce a monthly email newsletter. It's a great way of sharing UNISON's successes and of keeping employees aware of what's going on in the company. Social media is ideal for connecting, particularly with younger members. If you're not confident about using Instagram and Twitter, why not get

some of your younger members involved by asking them?

UNISON Scotland Young Members committee has developed a 'How's Yer Heid' campaign around mental health and committee member Elidh Payne has produced a magazine about mindfulness with activities to help reduce the stress of working in a call centre. Both have proven popular.

4. Attracting young members

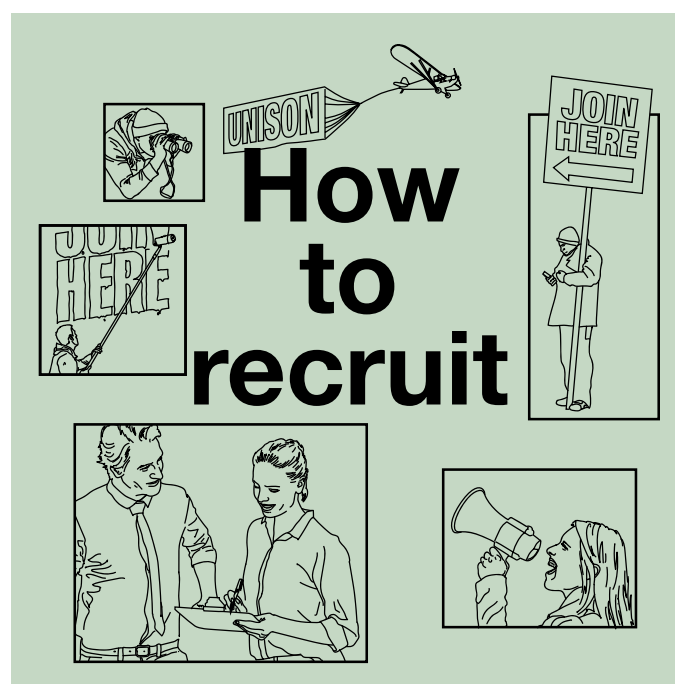
Another way of attracting young members is by paying the subs for modern apprentices during their training. It introduces younger workers to the union and gets them involved early on. And once they qualify, these apprentices are more likely to recognise the benefits of being in UNISON and want to continue their membership.

5. Supporting members

Many members can be put off becoming stewards because they don't understand how the union works, what's involved or who to turn to for help. EDF has introduced a mentoring scheme for new stewards, which includes clearly explaining the branch structure and having someone to turn to for support and advice.

6. The bigger cause

At Scottish Power gas branch, members have joined up with the Simon Community to help rough sleepers and vulnerable people in Glasgow. UNISON has set up clothing stations at work and also collects donations of toiletries and high energy foods. Working together on a common cause helps build bridges and provides another opportunity to share UNISON's achievements with employees.



Reversing the race to the bottom

Minimum rates of pay and conditions across entire industries are needed to reverse the constant attack on energy workers' rights

In most European countries, collective bargaining is the norm. Many companies also have workers on company boards and in Germany – Europe's largest economy – almost half of board members in large companies, must be workers or their representatives.

Addressing delegates at the recent energy branch seminar, John Hendy QC, Institute of Employment Rights, spoke passionately about the need for sectoral collective bargaining (SCB) to address inequality. Sectoral collective bargaining is bargaining on behalf of an entire industry nationally, covering all the workers and employers in that sector.

"Sectoral collective bargaining is nothing new. For 60 years it was accepted by governments of every shade in this country until it was attacked by the Tories in 1979. Since then, many industries have been on a race to the bottom.

"Today workers' rights and conditions are at the whim of employers. There's a 'take it or leave it' attitude and no negotiations whatsoever. The individual worker is powerless. We want to create an economy that offers workers secure jobs, an opportunity for career progression and a fair wage and pension."

How does SCB work?

UNISON and other unions currently negotiate your pay and conditions with your employer for all workers. Under SCB, employers would be legally bound to negotiate pay and conditions with workers for ALL employees in a sector – whether it's energy, social care or education.



"Today workers' rights and conditions are at the whim of employers. There's a 'take it or leave it' attitude"

What are its advantages?

Most importantly, all workers are protected and can be sure their interests are at the heart of business planning. Workers in workplaces that are union-organised enjoy better pay, better conditions, better prospects, better health and safety protections and better rights.

SCB sets minimum conditions for each sector and they're flexible. Each sector can identify its own priorities.

Why would employers agree to SCB?

Under a Labour government, employers would be forced to agree. But there are advantages for

employers as well as workers. Every employer wants their workers to work at the lowest possible rate of pay to extract maximum profit. But when a pay rate has been agreed for the same job across the whole sector, all employers are in the same position.

SCB also removes the threat of workers coming from overseas and being paid a lower rate – they would be paid the same as everyone else – so this ceases to be an issue. Bad employers wouldn't be able to undercut good ones.

As a whole, employers have a mutual interest in ensuring workers have enough money to buy the goods and services that the employers are producing and selling. It creates more money in the economy and stimulates growth and production and jobs, which is good for everyone.

At the moment, 14 million people in Britain live in poverty and nine million of those live in households in work. The current system is broken. Our workers are amongst the most insecure, underpaid and stressed in Europe.

Why is it needed?

To create a fairer and more equal country. With the loss of SCB, a far bigger share of the cake now goes to shareholders. In 1976, almost two-thirds (65.1%) of GDP (gross domestic product) went on wages. By 2018, this had fallen to less than half of GDP (49.4%). It might not sound much, but this is billions and billions of pounds and the divide between rich and poor gets wider every year.

Smart meters ‘vital’ but UK not ready

News from this year’s energy seminar in Cardiff

Extensive smart metering will be vital to attain net zero emissions by 2050, according to Kayte O’Neil, head of strategy and regulation at the Electricity System Operator (ESO). The ESO is responsible for providing all homes and businesses across Britain with electricity.

Speaking to delegates at this year’s energy branch seminar, Kayte explained: “By utilising integrated smart systems, we can get much more value. What’s needed is a shift in the skill sets of electricity workers so that an efficient smart system can be delivered. We need to build an increasingly connected world. Coordination and collaboration will be critical.”

However, UNISON national officer Matt Lay said that

while there was no doubt about the need for smart meters, current government policy isn’t fit for purpose: “Smart technology is available and ready, but the government isn’t.”

Smart metering will enable data about electricity demand to be constantly updated and shared to ensure supply is maintained – whether it comes from hydrogen, wind power, nuclear or another source.

But the introduction of smart metering in homes has been “a disaster, with rival companies competing and poor communications with consumers,” says Matt. “There has been a complete lack of policy coordination and despite government predictions the adoption of smart meters is still incredibly low.

“A new centralised, coordinated policy will be necessary if the next generation of smart meters are to be more successful.”

The winning team



Left to right: Ann Forsyth, Gary McEwan, Angela Greenhalgh and Matt Lay

This year’s Mike Jeram Award, which is awarded to the energy branch with the biggest increase in numbers of new members each year, was won by the Utility Services branch.

“Well done to Utility Services,” said national officer Matt Lay.

“Increasing members in these difficult times is to be applauded.”

Meanwhile, SSE branch in Scotland (pictured left) won the award for the largest percentage increase in members this year, the Donna Marie Lloyd Award.

Keeping positive in changing times

Tony Grieve of UNISON's national energy executive has fought for workers' rights through decades of increased privatisation. Now retired, he reflects upon the challenges and highlights of his trade union career

Q: How did you first get involved with UNISON?

I started working in accounts collection for SSEB (South of Scotland Electricity Board) in 1983. A couple of years later, there was a bit of hassle in the workplace. I decided that the best way for me to have a voice – and to actually protect myself while dealing with the issues – was to get more involved with the union. I became a shop steward in 1985.

Q: What was it like working in the electricity industry then?

It was very, very different! I've always lived and worked in Glasgow and when I started, retailing wasn't a separate industry. In general, everything was handled locally: electricity, engineering, appliance repairs and customer accounts. I spoke to customers at a public counter about their accounts and would organise for them to have an extension or more time to pay if they were struggling.

Q: What happened when privatisation was introduced?

UNISON was active locally in opposing privatisation. We led campaigns and marches but, by then, BT and British Gas had already been sold off and the public thought their bills would be cheaper. Once SSEB became part of Scottish Power, there was a quiet period for a while. Then Scottish Power bought ManWeb – one of the English networks and operators – and staff across the whole industry were reduced. The constant pressure on pay, pensions and conditions has continued ever since.



“UNISON is a massive, brilliant organisation that supports people. It's good to know you've made a positive difference”

Q: How did you come to join UNISON's energy service group executive?

Through my time at the branch, I did various roles, such as welfare officer, and I gradually got more involved with local negotiating committees. I did that for a few years and then, when a couple of my colleagues retired, I joined the national executive in 2005. Becoming chair of the executive was a proud moment for me. I was then vice-chair for a number of years.

Q: How do you feel about the electricity industry now?

Well, for me, it's a no-brainer that electricity should be in public ownership. It's got to be the way forward. I just don't believe that utilities or essential services

should be in private hands. Iberdrola, which owns Scottish Power, makes billions a year, of which only about half a billion is made in the UK. Admittedly they pay tax and they're a good tax employer, but those entire profits would go to the government if electricity was in public hands.

Q: Why has UNISON been so important to you?

A: I've got lifelong friends here and a confidence I never had when I was younger. The confidence to stand up and actually speak for myself – and for other people. It's a massive, brilliant organisation that supports people. It's good to know you've made a positive difference. You don't always win, but even when you lose, the loss isn't as bad as it would have been if you hadn't intervened. You've always got to try and take a positive stance. And to see people smile when they get their pay rise or a bonus or whatever we've managed to negotiate, that's priceless too.

Q: What plans do you have for your retirement?

I've actually got no idea what I'm going to do. I've just completed the purchase of a new house in Spain with my husband and I fly back to Alicante tomorrow. But my entire working life has been with Scottish Power, UNISON and NALGO and they've been a huge part of my social life too, so it's certainly going to be different.

One thing I am thinking of doing is an Open University degree. I never went to university, so if I could get my head around the reading, I'd love to do a degree in economics. I'll let you know how I get on.

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£11,001 - £14,000	£7.85
£14,001 - £17,000	£9.70
£17,001 - £20,000	£11.50
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