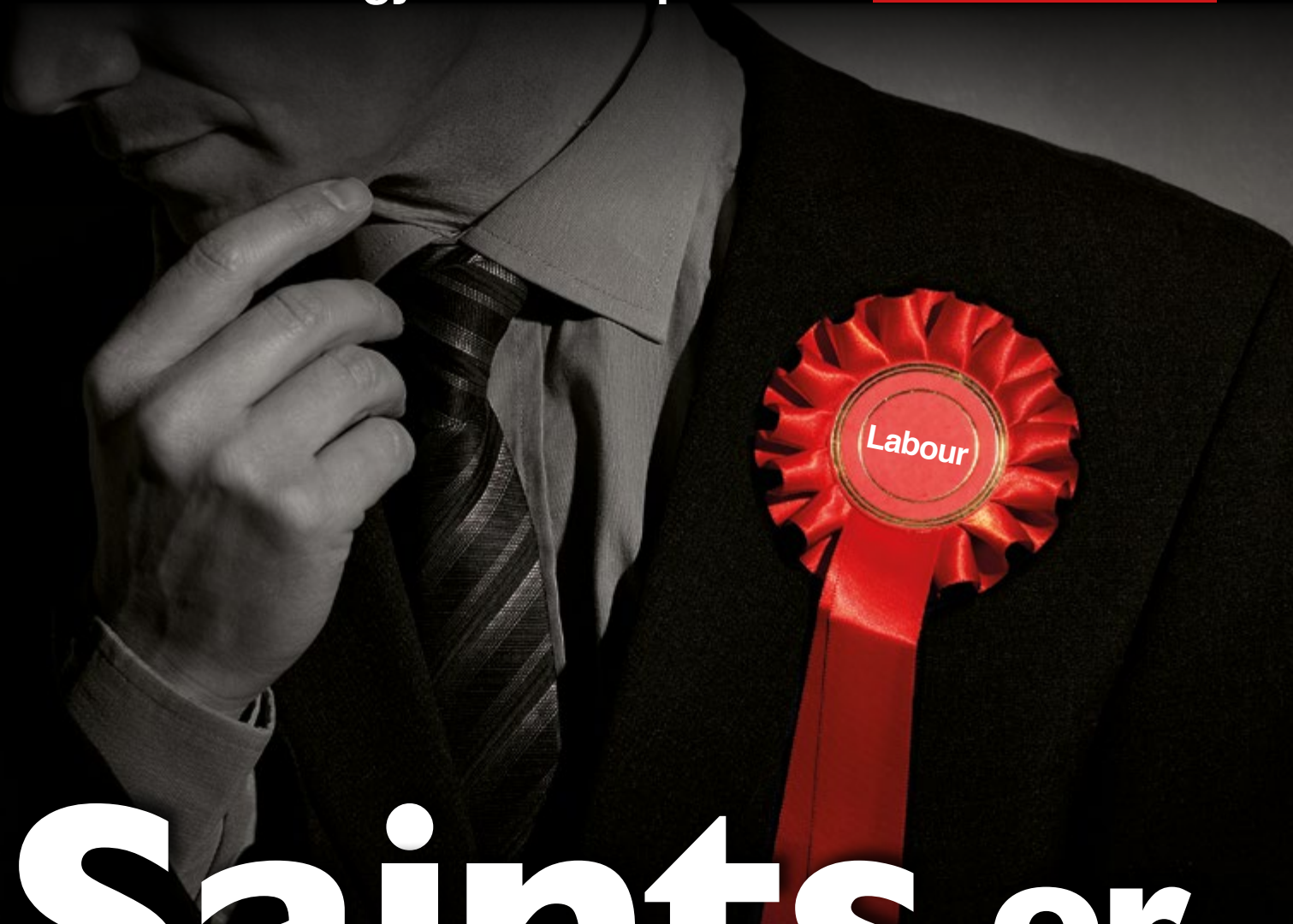


energy



OUTRAGE

offshore energy workers speak out **FLASH BULLETIN 4**



Saints or Sinners?

Will our new Government support offshore energy workers?



Welcome to our Election Special **OUTRAGE4**

Welcome to our Election Special looking at what this Labour Government might do, perhaps could do, and in the opinion of some members, what they absolutely should be doing! No doubt you will have your own opinions, please send these in as they will help us in discussions with the new Ministers responsible for your sector. We would also like any questions you think should be put to the Government. We might push

these to MP's and ask them to be raised during Prime Minister's Questions. This is a critical stage with the offshore energy industry, some serious questions need answering!

We also have our usual mix of feedback and opinion on issues that matter to you. Thanks to all those who took time to write in. You can send feedback, opinion, and questions to: oilc@rmt.org.uk



It's good to talk

RMT National Secretary Darren Procter (third from right) met with the Labour Leader, Keir Starmer (centre) and his Energy spokesman Ed Milliband (first on left) during a visit to the port of Holyhead earlier this year. The First Minister of Wales, (at the time) Vaughan Gething, (second from left) was also in attendance. This meeting happened several months before the Labour Party swept to power with a massive majority at Westminster. Darren was accompanied by a group of RMT member reps.

Darren reported that both Starmer and Milliband were receptive to the points made by RMT around the need for a 'Just Transition' for offshore energy workers. Issues around employment protection, regulation, health and safety, and training were touched on during a short meeting. These are issues which will need serious consideration for this Government if they are to deliver on pre-election promises.

Saints or Sinners

Members have been sharing their views about Labour taking power, and it's been a mixed bag. There's relief the Tories have been wiped out, there's hope for improvements in worker's rights and protections, but there is also real concern about offshore. A lot of members think Labour will put them on the dole with their plans on tax and licensing for oil

and gas. Members are questioning the "so-called" concept of "Just Transition." Others are highlighting the lack of employment opportunities in renewables zero-hour contracts, precarious work, agency exploitation.

Will Labour be the 'Saints' of offshore energy, and deliver a transition for all? Or will they be 'Sinners' and sacrifice sections of the industry and thousands of jobs? Currently, everything hangs in the balance, dangling precariously on the Labour vision which is, GB Energy. We are

told this will be a publicly-owned energy company, creating thousands of secure, well-paid jobs. Not only that, they say UK taxpayers, energy billpayers and communities across the country will benefit from their plans to develop a home-grown energy company. For some of us old enough to remember, this sounds like the 'British National Oil Corporation' (BNOC) which Labour created and the Tories quickly dismantled and sold off as soon as they came into power! We consider the issues.



We don't need a 'vision' – we need a plan!

GB Energy

We don't know enough about the Labour vision, "GB Energy" (GBE) to say confidently what it might deliver. As one member put it; "I'm not holding my breath on GBE working! A major energy company on something like £8billion over 5-years? No chance!" Our offshore members are well versed in costs for development across the sector.

We also don't know what GBE will actually do? Will it invest in renewable projects like wind, hydrogen, solar, or will it produce its own energy? As indicated, £8billion over 5-years probably won't cut it, so private investment will be needed. Labour came to power on the ticket of "CHANGE" but is relying on the market actually 'change'? Surely this is the same Tory led free-market political policy which Thatcher put in place when she sold the British National Oil Corporation (BNOC) nearly 40-years ago? A policy that failed workers and the country!

Some in the press suggest there's a plan for GBE to work with Crown Estate (apparently the King owns all the seabed!) to free up more money for investment. Again, nobody is clear on what this might deliver. At the moment the only thing we can say with any confidence is what Ed Milliband, the new Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero, said - he expects it to be five years before GBE will start to turn a profit. Really! And if you get voted out in five years where does that leave us? Remember BNOC!

Offshore energy workers and communities are looking for a great deal more from this Labour Government. 'Change' should mean just that, a different way of working, a move away from what has gone before.

A Plan

What we desperately need is a plan. What the plan should deliver is - real and meaningful 'change' which deals with the issues that matter most to workers and communities, the people this government are supposed to represent!

Look at Norway; a \$1.6 trillion sovereign wealth fund, producing hydrogen, doing carbon capture, manufacturing compressors run on hydrogen, fuel cells, electric and hydrogen powered ferries, and the list goes on!

Look at Denmark, or just one city, Esbjerg; the local municipality controls the port, there's around 5,000 jobs in the wind sector (in a population of just 70,000) they have just signed a \$1billion investment plan with a Danish pension fund, PensionDenmark, which is jointly owned by Trade Unions and Employers, and Denmark also has an extensive manufacturing base.

Members feel the change needed in the UK is captured by industry commentator Dick Winchester who sits on the Scottish Governments Energy Advisory Board. Writing in Energy Voice in early June, he said;

"About ten years ago the writer and New Yorker magazine cartoonist Tom Toro published his now famous cartoon showing three children and an adult around a campfire in the middle of a desert with the caption "Yes, the planet got destroyed. But for a beautiful moment in time we created a lot of value for shareholders."

"Whilst funny in that it was a perfect example of cynicism it also reflected reality as it was then and indeed, pretty much as it still is today."

He finished the article saying;

"Tom Toro was right; shareholders are controlling the agenda. This can't be allowed to continue. At some point consumers will need to take back control.

[] ...an all-electric monopoly on energy is no more acceptable than a fossil fuel one. Shareholders' interests mustn't rule. The planet's and the people's interests must."

Other members pointed to a quote from a journalist who has covered the energy sector for 40-years. Jeremy Cresswell did an opinion piece about the GB Energy idea and his views were pretty much the same as our members. One line reads;

"I fear that any GB Energy stakes in developments will be miniscule bordering on pointless. In any case, the UK State should simply take 5%, 10% or whatever of every project completed, end of."

Norway and Denmark have public investment and ownership. They take a share of the risk, equity stakes, and secure a share of profits. Both countries have a plan.

We could quote other analysts and journalists but you get the drift, give us a plan! There is in fact a plan available; "Our Power – Offshore Workers Demands for a Just Energy Transition." This report/plan was produced by the Climate groups, Platform and Friends of the Earth Scotland. It took them almost 2-years to complete and involved over 1,000 offshore energy workers. We've reproduced the "demands" of the plan across pages 4 & 5, the full report can be read at the link below.

<https://platformlondon.org/app/uploads/2023/03/Our-Power-Report-1.pdf>

Is "Our Power" a credible plan? This is what the General Secretary of the STUC, Roz Foyer said about it;

"In stark contrast to Industry reports and Government consultations about a Just Transition, this research starts from the perspective of workers – enabling them to identify their key demands and only then developing policy proposals that flow from these. The recommendations should be seriously considered by policy makers."

RMT, Unite and other trade union members participated along with workers from across the sector. The demands are reasonable and achievable, Labour policy makers should take note.

OUR POWER

OFFSHORE WORKERS' DEMANDS FOR A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION

I. OUR TRANSITION

Solutions for the immediate barriers workers face to moving into renewable industries.

DEMAND 1

WORKERS AT THE CENTRE OF TRANSITION PLANNING

DEMAND 2

CLEAR, ACCESSIBLE PATHWAYS OUT OF HIGH CARBON JOBS

DEMAND 3

A TRAINING REGIME BUILT TO KEEP WORKERS SAFE INSTEAD OF FOR PROFIT

DEMAND 4

INVEST IN DOMESTIC MANUFACTURING AND ASSEMBLY FOR RENEWABLES

These demands, created by offshore workers, provide a pathway to a more sustainable and fair energy industry. They are a plan for an energy industry that meets the needs of the workforce, the public and the environment.

II.

OUR RIGHTS

Solutions to ensure work in renewables is secure, well-paid and safe.

DEMAND 5

COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WITH STRONG RANK AND FILE UNIONS ACROSS THE WHOLE OFFSHORE INDUSTRY

DEMAND 6

ESTABLISH UNIVERSAL RIGHTS AND A WAGE FLOOR ACROSS THE UKCS

DEMAND 7

EFFECTIVE AND TRUSTED WHISTLEBLOWING PROCEDURES

III.

OUR ENERGY

Solutions for a new energy system, where benefits are shared fairly and there is greater public control.

DEMAND 8

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

DEMAND 9

REORGANISE THE TAX SYSTEM FOR PUBLIC GOOD

DEMAND 10

NO COMMUNITY LEFT BEHIND

Our Power' - get on board!

We want the Labour government to look seriously at Our Power! The Tories ignored it, but for them big business will always come before workers and communities. We are at a critical point for energy supply in the UK and this Labour Government has a chance to re-write history! State owned energy companies are major players in the renewables sector in the UK. Around 50% of wind generated power is already produced by state owned companies from Europe and beyond, the rest by private investment. GB Energy is a start, but it needs to be bold! To make a difference GB Energy will need to be protected and supported, which will only happen if it is a genuine benefit to the economy, to workers, and to communities around the UK.

Our Power has the support of communities, the Trade Unions and climate campaigners alike, that's a big chunk of UK society.

To drive the aims of Our Power, the authors from "Platform" are setting up a Workers Advisory Board. The group could work with Labour and possibly, GB Energy, just give us a shout Mr Milliband. The first board meeting will take place on **Monday 7th October at 2pm** and will be an online event via Zoom. RMT will be involved, you can get involved, or come along as an observer by contacting the Platform Organiser, Ruby Earle. You can email Ruby at: ruby@platformlondon.org Alternatively, you can contact RMT at: oilc@rmt.org.uk



Our Power might not provide all the answers, but it could form the foundations of a plan that could make GB Energy – our power!

Feedback and opinion

Get Labour to apply the rules for UK workers!

The Offshore Branch has regularly highlighted the pitfalls of employment for workers transferring into the wind industry. One example is the Neart Na Gaoithe (NnG) windfarm off the coast of Fife. I worked there during the construction phase in 2023, but left after one trip as it took me 12-weeks to get fully paid! Things are not getting any better.

A friend of mine has been back at NnG this year. He joined the Siem Barracuda, a multi-role vessel owned by Norwegian company Siem Offshore, but registered in Limassol. The work is within the 12-mile limit, meaning under post-Brexit rules and the ending of the Offshore Wind Workers Concession, the vessel should be manned by UK domicile seafarers, techs, riggers, etc. Alternatively, it can be crewed by those with Frontier Work Permits (FWP), but when my friend joined it was manned by a mixture of Latvian, Lithuanian, Polish and Norwegian workers in all departments, and most don't have a FWP. Four or five UK seafarers joined, 3rd Engineer, 2nd Mate,

ABs, Crane Op, and have been signed on as trainees! Apparently, there is a loophole in the legislation making the certification of workers without a FWP legal? It seems the Border Force are happy with this, saying that the crew don't need Frontier Work Permits, as; 'they're only there for a few trips'; WTF!

The UK Border Force, who have been guilty of handing out Frontier Work Permits like confetti and undermining domicile workers, are in this case not enforcing the law they are dutybound to uphold. It is almost impossible post-Brexit for UK workers to get work in Europe, in shipping or offshore, but it appears the UK Border Force are not enforcing their own rules on this side. The rules should be reciprocated both ways.

This has been reported to both the RMT National Secretary and the ITF, and is being raised with the Energy Minister. This disgraceful situation needs sorting out now.

Disillusioned.

ENERGY OUTRAGE! One member feels energy pricing needs sorting!

Dear Editor, can we look at the big picture, this nonsense could affect us as energy workers!

On 13 August 2024, with a big fanfare in the press and especially on the BBC, it was announced that a multi-billion pound subsea 'superhighway' cable would be installed between Scotland and England. SSEN Transmission will do the work, to move renewable energy 'around the grid on days when the wind doesn't blow or demand is high.' This will be one of four subsea cables that transfer renewable wind power south, accounting for roughly 75% of that produced in Scotland.

This is not an anti-English rant, the UK has a history of transporting and importing energy; a gas pipeline was built between Norway and Scotland in the mid-2000s (I worked on the last couple of months of this), and when demand is high in the south of England, nuclear power is imported from France. The problem with this 'superhighway plan,' that seems to be carrying enough energy for most, if not all, of the UK population, is it will be subsidised by UK taxpayers! That means you and me will be paying for this and at the same time we are facing a rise in the energy

price cap, as well as the government scrapping the £300 winter fuel allowance for pensioners!

To help pay for this infrastructure, we are also facing a large rise in energy standing charges. My current standing charges, without using a single therm of energy, is £231 a year, and I'm facing a rise to over £318 a year when my new contract kicks in! The standing charges in Scotland have always been traditionally higher because of the so-called, 'remoteness of the infrastructure!' This is a bit of an irony in an energy rich country, don't you think? Fuel poverty in Scotland is sitting at anything between 20% and 31% of the population depending on what figures you look at, and the rest of the UK is not far behind. With the price cap and standing charge increases and ending of the winter fuel allowance, fuel poverty will only rise again this year. What can be done about this in an energy-rich country?

For a start, the energy companies who have made vast profits in the last couple of years should fund the infrastructure improvements out their profits before paying dividends to shareholders. They are producing

renewable energy on the back of taxpayer subsidies, while consumers are suffering unsustainable price rises, this can't be right. The other problem is that energy prices are linked to wholesale gas prices, and Governments just shrug their shoulders and say there's nothing they can do about it. Well, here is a novel idea - just decouple the electricity price from the wholesale gas price at a national level. Probably a one-page Act of Parliament and, 'hey presto' an instant solution! If one country does this, others will follow, and the whole energy pricing system can be overhauled.

The new Labour Government at Westminster is looking at a 'could do better' report for its first couple of months. If the new Energy Secretary, Ed Milliband, was prepared to overhaul the energy system for the benefit of consumers and not shareholders, some confidence could be restored. Just saying.

NOTE: What happens with the oil and gas, and renewables sectors in the coming year will impact all of us! Get involved and make your voice heard through RMT.

Shout Out!

We received a lot of common themes in our feedback around political change and the election result which are captured with these lines;

Labour must dump the windfall tax... it will bury us!

Where is the offshore skills passport, we are getting ripped off on training...

Why are agencies allowed to do the crewing for wind jobs, this is not transition, it is exploitation!

Is RMT lobbying this government about new licences? We will need oil for years to come, or do we import it like we did with coal for 40-years!

CAN NEW OFFSHORE PROJECTS BE COMPELLED TO PROVIDE SINGLE OCCUPANCY ACCOMMODATION?

Why do different companies have different standards for the same task? I've done a working at height course seven times now for seven different companies!

Why are we not looking at geothermal energy? This could give us drill crews a future!

WHY DON'T WE SEE MICK LYNCH ON THE TELLY SHOUTING ABOUT OFFSHORE? HE DOES A NO BAD JOB FOR THE RAIL MEMBERS, AND THEY'VE GOT A FUTURE... WE DON'T!

We need to overhaul the tax system for energy or we won't have an industry!

Certified or 'scam-ified'!!

I know the Offshore Branch has banged on about certification scams over the years, especially recently with GWO. Apparently GWO certs are essential to transition into offshore wind, yet it's almost the same as OPITO certs! But is oil and gas any better?

In 2018, on top of your OGUUK medical, the 'Fit to Train' certificate was brought in to assess fitness before in-water training. Originally, it was something you only did once unless your health changed, but now we need to do a phone assessment before doing a FOET or BOSIET. This 10-minute assessment costs around £100!

The Emergency Response Team (ERT) medical has appeared in the last couple of years as well, looking at the fitness of those with ERT duties. I've seen price quotes for this course of between £150 and £350. For us freelance workers who pay for our own courses, (a lot of us nowadays)

this is another expense some won't be able to afford.

One of the biggest scams though must be 'Working at Height!' I think there are 8 units, but unit 2 about sums this up. It costs nearly £400 to answer a few questions, then climb a fixed ladder clipping on a harness as you go up and down. A course that could be done in an hour or two and at a fraction of the price. I've been wearing a harness for 40 years, from the waist only 'back-breaker' to the full body harnesses we have today; why do I need someone to show me how to wear it every two years and... pay almost £400 for the pleasure?

So, courses and medicals in the oil and gas industry, especially those introduced in the last few years; are they a worthwhile exercise, or a scam? It would be interesting to see what our readership thinks.

Scammed.

Forty Years *and counting!*

Congratulations to Offshore Energy Branch member Scott Agnew who recently marked Forty Years as a union member!



Robbie and Scott.

Scott 'of the Antarctic' and every other continent around the world (he has travelled to and worked around every single one!) received his Forty Year badge and medal from Offshore Energy Branch Secretary, Robbie Wyness, at the Branch meeting in July.

Scott signed up to the National Union of Seamen (NUS) at just 17, joining the ranks of the merchant navy and heading to sea. Since then, the NUS has become today's RMT after merging with the rail union, and OILC. During his time as a member Scott has had a real mixed bag of roles across the maritime and offshore energy sectors. From Antarctic exploration vessels, to drill ships off Canada, Brazil and Africa, supply

vessels and anchor handlers around Asia and Australia, to lift barges and semi-submersibles around Europe, Scott has done more than most.

His commitment to the union during those 40-years has never wavered (well maybe once or twice!!). He has been the Chair and Secretary of the Aberdeen Shipping Branch, the Chair of the Offshore Energy Branch, been a delegate at STUC Conferences, at RMT AGM's and Chaired a BGM. Today he is still active in the Offshore Energy Branch.

We extend our thanks to Scott for his continuing support and commitment, and congratulate him on marking 40-YEARS we hope he's got a few more in him yet!

No floats on helicopter a worry!

In February 2024 a Norwegian Search and Rescue Sikorsky S92 crashed into the sea off Norway killing one of the onboard team. The Norwegian Safety Investigation Authority (NSIA) has recently released a preliminary report into the event and have indicated the autopilot system of the aircraft was a factor.

The aircraft was on a training exercise when the accident happened. The NSIA report talks about the weather conditions and the actions of the crew, which was to use the autopilot system to put the aircraft into a hover

above an emergency locator beacon. For reasons not yet identified, the autopilot system did not operate as it should have, and the aircraft crashed into the sea.

The report also tells us that the impact of the crash pushed out all the windows on the port side of the aircraft. The cabin filled rapidly with water and quickly sank. Worryingly, it did so without the emergency floats deploying.

The investigation continues and we will report further as more information is released.

Gangways in the wind!

We read with interest that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) had issued a warning about safety standards for Motion Compensated Gangways (MCGs) being used to access offshore wind turbines. Apparently, there's been several incidents across the UK sector some of which were serious injuries.

For the 'old guard' of the OILC Branch this news took us back to the late 1980's when our offshore activists alerted operators before two gangway failures occurred. The second of these was on the Shell Tern platform. It's a long story, but after Piper Alpha tragedy the Tern gangway event fuelled the offshore industrial unrest and the fight for improved safety standards.

In the end up, we almost wrote the script for the regulators around safe operations of MCGs.

The HSE has said that MCGs carry risks of entrapment or shearing, falls from height and other risks! No #### Sherlock! Because of the number of incidents, the HSE has offered up guidance on how to mitigate the risks. The HSE has also advised vessel operators that the auto-retraction function of any MCG should include audible and visible warnings to allow users of the gangway to get to safety. Who would have thought!!!

We know the HSE is a bit thin on the ground for conducting any meaningful inspection of the wind sector, so we

are prepared to offer them support in this area if needed. Or perhaps the HSE should consider Elected Safety Representatives for the sector, we can train them in the absence of HSE inspectors.

FFS! JOIN RMT



Scan this QR Code to join RMT or visit www.rmt.org.uk/join

Fighting For Standards!

Find us online at:



/RMTOffshoreNews

email: oilc@rmt.org.uk