



Union bossesâ?? fossil activism makes an enemy of the global working class

## Description

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### Union

Sharon Graham is the general secretary of Unite, the trade union. However, with [rogue comments this week](#) in defence of British fossil fuel interests, she appears to be making an enemy of the global working class. Sheâ??s joined by GMB chief Gary Smith, whoâ??s been briefing the *Times* about [net-zero â??madnessâ??](#)

As the UK [awaits the coronation](#) of Macclesfield MP Andy Burnham â?? and, perhaps more importantly, his cabinet-in-waiting â?? Ed Milibandâ??s name crops up repeatedly. This is hardly surprising, since Miliband has served different roles on Labourâ??s front benches, including as leader, for much of two decades.

Milibandâ??s core commitment is to [net-zero carbon emissions](#) as soon as is workable. However, the British press has already begun a fear-mongering campaign over this urgent, life-or-death principle. This was, perhaps, very predictable. But what we donâ??t need is union leaders â?? supposedly friends of, and voice for, the working classes â?? teaming up with Britainâ??s Murdoch-dominated, right-wing media establishment.

Graham has previously followed in [Tony Blairâ??s footsteps](#) in calling for an end to net-zero targets. But this rehash could not come at a worse time for British workers, who currently slog away through 35- or 40-degree heat in what will likely be one of Britainâ??s [worst-ever heatwaves â?? yet](#) (Most workers lack the work-from-home support that the *Canary* kindly offers its staff!)

[This weekâ??s sweltering heat is financed by our banks](#)

## Fear-mongering and Miliband-wagoning

The *Times* quoted anonymous cabinet ministers saying that Ed Miliband as chancellor [which he is floated as an option for](#) would risk a [market revolt](#). The *Times* quoted them (whoever they are):

Miliband is insufficiently pro-business. Andy's big test is market confidence.

Miliband is perceived to be on the left of the Labour Party for whatever that's worth and he [campaigns hard](#) for Andy Burnham's recent victory. He is perceived to be a [close ally of the PM to-be](#) and both men appear to have more vision and left-wing credentials than anyone else in the vacuous Starmer lot. (The *Canary* has [documented, in good detail](#) Burnham [abandoning progressive principles](#) in recent weeks.)

The *Independent's* John Rentoul joined to say that Burnham's government will be [over before it has started](#) if it chooses Miliband as chancellor. He suggested ambitious ghoul Wes Streeting as his preferred option. This is clearly more pro-corporate fear-mongering disguised as market realism.

Importantly, however, Miliband has remained [more or less](#) committed to transitioning Britain away from fossil fuel dependence as Energy Secretary. He just celebrated a [cumulative Â£100bn investment in green energy](#) despite much of it being in the private sector and thus outside of democratic control.

This is where Miliband has drawn the [criticism of Unite's general secretary](#) Sharon Graham, said that Miliband would be a [noose around the neck](#) of job creation if he became chancellor in a government led by Andy Burnham. [She explicitly targeted](#) his commitment to net zero and opposition to North Sea oil, mimicking the scare-mongering of Nigel Farage, Kemi Badenoch and their oil-monied ilk.

[Graham framed her case](#) in purportedly pro-worker, yet ultimately divisive terms:

Jobs in Britain are important. We need someone in that role [chancellor] who understands that, and at the moment that isn't Ed Miliband. It's been floated that Ed Miliband would be chancellor that would be a noose around the neck of what we need to do on jobs.

If you've got somebody in there close to the decision-making where they're not pro-worker in their gut, then that's a problem for a party that's supposed to be the party of workers. A lot of the left has now become a middle-class project. It now needs to work for the working class.

[Campaigners urge action on fossil fuel giants profiting from war](#)

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## Why union bosses are so badly wrong

This should be alarming for anybody with the faintest understanding of the chaos threatened and already wrought across the globe by climate change. It's even more startling to read amidst this heatwave.

Let me first offer some words in Graham's defence. She was elected to Unite leadership on a platform, like any union leader, to defend the jobs of the workers she represents. Likewise for Gary Smith. These workers are unfortunately, and often not by their intentional choosing, include those in the oil and gas sector. But both their reactions are knee-jerk, factually wrong, and wildly-to-the-point-of-immorally misguided.

For one thing, experts contradict the union boss's inflammatory stance on jobs. [Data wonks tell the Guardian](#) that "£100bn new investments show that the UK's net-zero economy is [booming](#)". Findings from the Confederation of British Industry support this too. *In actual fact*, the green industry has [grown faster than the rest of the economy](#) and [generated higher-paying jobs](#) suggesting the precise opposite of Graham's inflammatory take.

For another thing, if Graham wants to safeguard jobs, which, one way or another, will ultimately fade into history and not a day too soon, she should call for green jobs, the re-skilling of workers in polluting industries, state-funded education, job transition initiatives, investments that help workers, and so on. Planting our collective feet in the (s)oil as the planet burns is not the right answer.

[Climate campaigner calls out Reform's Richard Tice over fossil fuel interests](#)

## Union bosses find themselves in awful company

Even more grossly, if Graham and Smith want to consider herself a friend of workers, she should consider the bad company she's keeping in this pro-fossil fuel venture:

- Nigel Farage, who [claims to be a friend of workers](#) and recently welcomed union members and institutional affiliations. Plus his allies like Zia Yusuf and [Richard Tice](#) who regularly mock calls for climate action and [lobby extensively](#) for more North Sea oil and gas.
- Kemi Badenoch, who recently ran a [relentless North Sea oil campaign](#) in Aberdeen. Not to mention her predecessor, [Rishi Sunak](#) who promised a [every last drop](#) of oil from the North Sea, whilst prosecuting hundreds of activists [myself included](#) for taking direct climate action.
- Donald Trump, who promises to [drill baby, drill](#) and bring back coal whilst American [workers die in the heat](#) lose homes [en masse to wildfires](#) and struggle to [survive in competition](#) with AI data-centres for [drinkable water](#) and enough energy for air-conditioning.

It goes without saying, that all three are deeply embedded with and bought by Big Oil (see: [Reform Tories](#) [Trump](#) ). All fear-monger about net-zero [woke madness](#) and promise to double-down on

fossil fuels. None are friends of the working class, by any measure. Not exactly smart company for union bosses.

## Stop dividing up working people

To make matters worse, Graham has eaten up and uncritically spewed back out the right-wing rhetoric that the left is somehow "hijacked" by the middle class. Like it or not, the middle class are workers too. Historically they have maintained a solid presence on the left of politics, for better or worse.

As with all working people, the middle class have just as much interest in a liveable planet as anyone else. If anything, it's even more in the interests of those with lower incomes or living standards - less able to skip work, afford air-con or fans, travel by climatized car, etc. - to minimise climate destruction.

But as we've [seen in Hackney](#), Gorton and Denton, and other places through the Green Party surge, viable - indeed necessary - inter-class coalitions *can* and *must* be built. The right-wing-stoked division between the traditional working class (which typically [downplays its ethnic diversity](#)) and the "lefty" middle class does nothing to advance the interests of *all* working people. It only aids the [extremely wealthy asset class](#).

Graham's former RMT counterpart [Mick Lynch recently schooled](#) *The Telegraph's* Camila Tominey on this basic socialist principle, of workers being workers, regardless of accent or cultural taste. So it should hardly come as a shock to any half-intelligent leftist that, as workers, us middlers have class interests too. It's an almighty stain on Sharon Graham's intelligence, not to mention integrity, not to recognise this.

[Unions respond: "Reform are no friends of working people"](#)

## Climate change is the ultimate workers' issue

So, Graham is factually wrong in her scare-mongering, misguided for not pushing to evolve her sector rather than see it disappear, and finds herself in awful company, using reactionary rhetoric. But it gets worse.

It's possible that dozens, even hundreds, could die this week in Britain as a consequence of this heatwave. Many will be heat-struck pensioners. In May's comparatively shorter, cooler heatwave, 13 Brits died from cold-water shock or drowning. In India, where heatwaves frequently hit 48 degrees, some [3,400 die for each day of excess heat](#). An estimated [30,000 died in a five-day Indian heatwave](#) in May. These are real, horrific consequences of continued greenhouse gas emissions happening globally, *right now*.

Any so-called friend of the global working class who refuses to acknowledge these deaths is in fact an enemy. Even in the crudest moral terms, no British worker's salary is worth the death of another

working-class Brit â?? let alone 3,400 Indian workers. Anyone suggesting otherwise is deeply suspect, vile even.

Climate change is fundamentally an aspect of the much deeper class war. The fractional, wealthy elite is overwhelmingly responsible for inflicting climate change on us all. Those with private jets and yachts, daily flyers and [fossil financiers](#) thrusting energy-hungry [AI into every aspect of our economies](#) â?. They arenâ??t the ones who pay the price for the damage they inflict. Not unless we [make them pay](#) that is.

This issue gets to the crux of fake socialism, which is to say socialism without principled internationalism. If Graham considers herself a socialist then sheâ??s certainly not an internationalist. Jobs in the imperial core are given greater weight than *life itself* â?? both in the core and periphery. That cannot fly.

British workers need jobs, yes. But they need valuable, sustainable, green jobs â?? and quick. Graham and Smith would do well to realise that sharpish.

[Global banks finance fossil fuel with \\$8.7tn since the Paris Agreement](#)

*Featured image via the Canary / Cameron Baillie*

By [Cameron Baillie](#)

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