

Paper (extended abstract) by Andreas Ytterstad and Gunnar Steinholt

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Subpanel 2: Employment

Title: A Green Shift for Oil and Gas workers?

The «Green shift» was declared the «term of the year» in Norway, after being used 1638 times in news stories in 2015. Behind the buzz, it is possible to distinguish three versions of the Green shift. The first one, basically voiced by the Government and the political parties, came to the fore after the plummet of the oil prize, and a very substantial increase in unemployment in the oil sector, in the latter half of 2015. The second one can be traced to the man who first coined the phrase, the former financial journalist, now editor of the Energy and Climate site of the Norwegian Climate Foundation, Anders Bjartnes. His main argument, spelt out in his book (Bjartnes 2015) is that Norway needs to diversify away from oil, for economic reasons above all. The third and union based version has coalesced around the Bridge to the Future Alliance, which has published three books (Ytterstad, 2013, 2015, Ryggvik 2013) and held three national Conferences behind the slogan “Put the brakes on Norwegian Oil: 100 000 Climate jobs Now!”.

Although the alliance between faith organizations, the environmental movement and trade unions has established contact with unions in the private sector over time, it has not been supported officially by the two most important unions of oil and gas workers, The Industry and Energy Union and Fellesforbundet <https://www.fellesforbundet.no/information-for-foreign-employees/information-in-english/>. Even if preliminary verbal support can be found for the key demand of 100 000 new climate jobs within these two unions, the authors of this paper recognize the predicament of Norwegian Oil and gas workers. Having to choose between keeping a job, and supporting a campaign for climate jobs that has not much to offer beyond the power of a good climate argument, is no real choice. Although May Day demonstrations in Norway have put 100 000 climate jobs on their banners, and although the beginning of 2016 saw the first demonstration for 100 000 climate jobs, the present Governments version of the Green shift is mostly rhetorical. They argue very explicitly for a Green shift *alongside* the licencing of new drilling permits in the Barents sea, and that shift is only followed by meagre market stimulus measures, not the kind of massive, industrial and publicly led investments in climate jobs demanded by the Bridge to the Future alliance.

In this paper, which is an example of action-research, or interventionist research, we nonetheless propose to conduct interviews with trade union leaders AND shop steward representatives of the Industry and Energy Union and Fellesforbundet. Membership polls and some literature (Tvinnerheim and Austgulen 2014) already exist on the perceptions of the climate issue amongst oil and gas workers, but we believe a strategic selection of about 20 interviews would give us further insight into the strategic thinking in these two unions. We are interested in their views on the Green shift, whether they think it is just “hot air”, or if they see any substantial shift behind the rhetoric. We will also inquire about their views of agency, of how they see the role of Government and the big players, like Statoil in the case of Oil and gas and Statnett in the case of renewable energy. Most pertinently, we want to use these interviews to provide more grounded answers to the question we both have, as part of the Bridge to the Future Alliance: Given the combination of increasing unemployment and the buzz around the Green shift, what would it take for them to support, join and fight for a just transition in Norway by way of demanding at least 100 000 new climate jobs?

Discussing the answers to such empirical questions, we will raise theoretical issues on the role of trade unions in Norway. Generally, a history of tripartite agreements between employers, the state and employees, has been the bedrock of the Nordic model (Borgnäs, Eskelinen, Perkiö and Warlenius 2014). Some unions in the private sector, most notably Fellesforbundet and Industri and Energy, have been crucial in the development of

moderate wage policies for more than 20 years in Norway. The general idea has been that although unions should be able to provide a wage increase, it is important for the private sector to remain competitive. Moderate, central wage demands are in order. The social partnership underpinning the welfare state has, however, been under pressure for many years across Europe (Wahl 2011). And although the economic crisis and neoliberal policies has been less severe in Norway than elsewhere, unregulated capitalism is increasingly being seen as a threat, also for workers in oil and gas (Forfang Rostad 2015). We argue that such developments may weaken the democratic corporativism some authors has seen at the heart of Norwegian trade unionism in general, but also environmental politics in Norway (Mjøset 2010, Dryzek 2005).

Following the important recent work by Paul Hampton (2015) we also see that climate solidarities may diverge between trade unions, from “accommodationist” to more “transformative” versions. Arguable, a public sector like Fagforbundet has a history more akin to social movement unionism, less inclined to rely solely on tripartite relations with the state and employers. Significantly, this also has meant a long standing concern with environmental issues, and now climate change. At the TUC conferences, Fagforbundet, together with the Norwegian Servicement Union, has often represented the progressive environmental side, against the unions organizing workers in oil and gas (notably in the discussion of whether the Lofoten Archipelago should be opened up for oil drilling).

An important point by Hampton will inform the conclusion of our paper. “Solidarity in the progressive sense of the term cannot be assumed: it is a path consciously chosen and has to be constituted through struggle.» (2015: 35). We suppose that the combined effect of crisis, for the Norwegian economy and the oil sector, with the growth of climate alliances, means that climate solidarities will be fluid. The goal of our full paper will be to assess this fluidity.