

Trade union strategies on climate change mitigation: Between *opposition*, *hedging* and *support*

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Abstract

This article aims to provide a better understanding of trade unions' climate change strategies. Using a qualitative methodology based on an analysis of interviews and documents, the article sets out the three ideal-typical strategies of unions towards climate change mitigation policies: *opposition*, *hedging* and *support*. Our analysis finds that current trade union strategies on climate change are primarily rooted in sectoral interests mediated by union identities and conceptions of union democracy. At a theoretical level, the article contributes to broader debates on interest representation and collective bargaining behaviour by trade unions, in particular to the much-discussed tendency of organized groups to pursue private gains at the expense of common goods.

Keywords

Climate policy, concession bargaining, decarbonization, European Union, social dialogue, trade union strategy

Introduction

When US President Donald Trump made his case for abandoning the Paris climate agreement, he cited concerns over jobs and economic growth. In response, the European Union (EU) highlighted the opportunities that a low-carbon transition offers for modernizing European industry and the economy (European Council, 2017) in line with the green jobs agenda. As the 2018 special report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

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(IPCC) demonstrates, a rapid and far-reaching transition to a low-carbon economy is required to maintain the objective of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change to limit global warming to 1.5°C. According to the IPCC, global net human-caused emissions of carbon dioxide (CO₂) need to fall by about 45 percent from 2010 levels by 2030, reaching ‘net zero’ around 2050. This large-scale transition will inevitably reshape the economy, create and destroy jobs, and impact working conditions and skills.

Most trade unions in the EU generally acknowledge the need to mitigate climate change and endorse the goal of decarbonizing the economy (Hampton, 2015; Rätzl and Uzzell, 2013). Despite this principled stand in favour of decarbonization, respective trade union strategies are characterized by internal tensions and dilemmas arising from concerns over job losses in the traditionally unionized manufacturing and fossil-based power generation industries (Rätzl and Uzzell, 2011; Tomassetti, 2020). While some economic sectors are set to grow through decarbonization, others will face decline. Trade unions representing workers from the manufacturing industry in particular emphasize the possible downsides of enforcing stricter carbon emission targets for workers (Felli, 2014). As regulations to cut CO₂ emissions become more stringent, the jobs-versus-environment dilemma is likely to deepen further.

This contribution discusses how European trade unions are coming to terms with policies focused on reducing emissions in the manufacturing and power generation sectors – two sectors particularly targeted by climate change mitigation policies and already existing European regulations (Galgóczi, 2020). We develop a typology of union strategies which is inspired by recent debates on company strategies towards climate change policies (Meckling, 2015; Skjærseth and Eikeland, 2013). These debates shed light on the diversity of corporate strategies when dealing with decarbonization as well as the multitude of factors shaping these strategies (e.g. companies’ capacity for innovation, general business strategy, carbon intensity and exposure to international competition) (Skjærseth and Eikeland, 2013). Building on such research, we also expect diversity in union strategies, which are broadly understood as the formulation of policy objectives accompanied by the mobilization of resources to achieve them. While sector and employment-related concerns can be expected to shape trade unions’ strategies on decarbonization, other factors – for instance, related to unions’ historical trajectories or to their internal decision-making mechanisms – could also play a role. As climate change mitigation is a relatively new topic on which unions are just about to build up expertise, their climate strategies are not necessarily based on an exhaustive analysis of circumstances and evaluation of all the available options, but are likely to be influenced by short-term perceptions and established modes of organizational priority setting.

To construct our typology, we analysed pre-selected trade union strategies on decarbonization policies in our two selected sectors along three dimensions: unions’ positions regarding the scientific consensus on the anthropogenic nature of climate change, strategies towards climate change mitigation policies and attitudes concerning employment transitions. The resulting typology sees three ideal-typical trade union strategies: *opposition*, *hedging* and *support*. Strategies *opposing* climate change mitigation see unions openly rejecting the adoption of emission-reducing policies in the industries they represent. *Hedging* strategies are adopted by those unions that do not deny the need to mitigate climate change but seek to minimize regulation, advocate incremental approaches and

construct a dichotomy between the competing priorities of employment and environmental protection. *Support* strategies are adopted by unions supporting mitigation policies and with a proactive approach to decarbonization.

The possible factors underlying these choices of climate strategies are then discussed using three strands of literature: unions' collective bargaining strategies on employment issues, the conceptual framework of union identities and debates on union democracy. As decarbonization policies risk having an adverse effect on employment in a number of sectors, the literature on trade unions' bargaining approaches towards employment issues can be expected to provide valuable insights into their policy preferences. The conceptual framework of union identities (Hyman, 2001) sets out the historical trajectories of European trade unions, providing a deeper understanding of the multidimensional character of unions' interactions with workers, employers and society. Finally, the long-standing debates on union democracy may shed light on the challenges involved in unions' formulation of climate change strategies.

The empirical evidence illustrating the diversity of unions' climate strategies stems from (1) in-depth interviews with union representatives at different levels (i.e. international, European, national, company) carried out between 2017 and 2020; (2) archived documents (administrative documents, internal memoranda and correspondence with affiliates) from the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC); and (3) documentary analyses of a wide range of secondary data, particularly newspaper articles and union reports. Not limiting the data collection to particular EU Member States enabled us to identify a wide range of union strategies and to obtain different examples of trade union climate strategies, implemented through lobbying political decision-makers, social dialogue and/or collective bargaining. The main challenge here was to identify examples that go beyond rhetoric and general political statements, that is, ones reflecting an actual engagement with specific climate policies, for instance, the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), emission standards for cars and vans, or carbon taxation.

This article first discusses the impact of decarbonization policies on employment and union response patterns to previous employment losses. Then, a typology of union strategies towards decarbonization is put forward based on the empirical data analysed. Finally, possible factors influencing the choice of union climate strategies are discussed.

Climate change and the jobs-versus-environment dilemma

To achieve the objectives of the Paris Agreement, rapid and far-reaching changes to energy generation and consumption, land use, transport, infrastructure and industrial production are required. Moreover, CO₂ emissions from industry need to be about 65–90 percent lower in 2050 relative to 2010, while renewables need to supply 70–85 percent of electricity in 2050 (IPCC, 2018). In 2014, the EU and its Member States committed to a binding target of cutting greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 40 percent by 2030 compared to 1990. Industrial facilities and power plants covered by the EU ETS will have to cut emissions by 43 percent by 2030 (compared to 2005).

While various economic sectors, such as regenerative energy generation and ecological construction, stand to gain from decarbonization, others – such as energy-intensive

industries or fossil fuel extraction and processing – are expected to lose out (Chateau et al., 2018; OECD, 2012). For example, an estimated 160,000 direct jobs are set to be lost in the European coal sector by 2030, a sector employing nearly half a million people in direct and indirect activities (Alves Dias et al., 2018). Although some energy-intensive industries will not be completely displaced, tighter environmental regulations may require changes in production, possibly affecting employment or leading to an offshoring of emission-intensive activities (e.g. blast-furnace steel production could be relocated to countries with laxer emission constraints; a phenomenon known as ‘carbon leakage’). Consequently, unions from the manufacturing and power generation sectors are emphasizing the possible downsides for workers of enforcing stricter carbon emission targets.

The positive and negative impacts of decarbonization will be spread unevenly between countries, regions and sectors (ILO and ILS, 2011). While research on this topic is still scarce, the overall number of newly created jobs in sectors such as regenerative energies and ecological construction is expected to outweigh the job losses in carbon-intensive sectors such as petroleum and coal production (European Commission, 2019; OECD, 2012). This challenges unions, as many of the jobs with large carbon footprints are in well-unionized sectors covered by comparatively advantageous collective agreements. Unionized workers are indeed frequently employed in older and larger workplaces (Scheuer, 2011; Schnabel, 2013) in traditional ‘brown’ carbon-intensive industries. By contrast, many of the newly created green workplaces are not (yet) well unionized. Similarly, jobs in ‘green construction’ and waste disposal are often characterized by poor working conditions with comparatively low wages and patchy to low interest representation (Holtgrewe et al., 2015). In addition, employment in highly polluting industries is often regionally concentrated in Central and Eastern EU member states (OECD, 2012). Times of dwindling unionization rates and eroding collective bargaining coverage (Müller et al., 2019) may lead sectoral and national trade unions to defend existing unionized, carbon-intensive jobs.

The literature on collective bargaining in situations in which job losses are likely to occur provides insights into how trade unions can be expected to deal with the emerging jobs-versus-environment dilemma. Ongoing since the 1980s, the debate on concession bargaining has demonstrated that unions have in many instances adopted bargaining strategies aimed at safeguarding employment and improving company competitiveness, even if these strategies contradict general principles upheld by unions such as the defence of working conditions and broader solidarity among workers (Cappelli, 1985; Doerflinger and Pulignano, 2018). Literature dealing with the consequences of the US recession in the 1980s indicates that unions accepted to reduce or freeze wages, cut back benefits, implement two-tier wage plans for new hires and increase overall flexibility to strengthen company competitiveness in exchange for job guarantees, no-layoff policies or earning protection (Cappelli, 1985; Kochan et al., 1986). Unions were thus willing to make concessions related to labour costs in return for job security. Instances of concession bargaining were also evident in the debate on temporary agency work in the 2000s and 2010s, when various unions agreed to the use of agency workers to preserve the jobs (and working conditions) of core workforces (Holst et al., 2010), *inter alia* in the context of the recent economic and financial crisis (Doerflinger and Pulignano, 2018). Thus, the flexibility, and in some countries cost advantages, made possible by agency workers was

traded off against safeguarding the employment of core workers (who are more likely to be union members), to the detriment of agency workers (who are less likely to be unionized). In sum, trade unions have a record of agreeing to far-reaching concessions when (core) employment is threatened.

However, there is an essential difference between the aforementioned debates and the jobs-versus-environment dilemma. While the former solely involves management–labour relations, the latter affects society as a whole. The jobs-versus-environment dilemma is thus arguably more complex than the concession bargaining debate, as a third party (i.e. society) – a party not represented at the bargaining table – is greatly affected by the outcome of concessions. At least to a certain extent, companies and unions are likely to have a common interest in reducing emissions, which could, for example, stem from real concerns about climate change, the will to develop low-carbon activities and products, or reputational issues. At the same time, companies may want to continue their business activities undisturbed, without too much supra-national and national regulation, while unions will want to preserve jobs. Companies and unions may thus pursue common interests not easily reconcilable with the objective of reducing emissions in the interest of society as a whole.

Data and methods

To identify and analyse trade union strategies on climate change mitigation, we collected a mix of primary (interview) and secondary (textual) data between 2017 and 2020 in an exploratory way. We focused on the manufacturing and power generation sectors, mainly because of their exposure to climate mitigation policies, without restricting the research to any particular EU countries. Furthermore, this choice was motivated by the fact that EU policies and standards directly related to the challenges of decarbonization are implemented in both sectors (e.g. EU ETS, Clean Energy Package, EU car emission standards; Delreux and Happaerts, 2016); hence, there has been external pressure on the actors involved to deal with climate change.

We carried out 28 interviews with trade union representatives, employer representatives and policy makers. Interviewees were selected because they possessed relevant knowledge on debates over unions' climate strategies. Respondents are either trade union officials who directly elaborate union climate strategies or employer representatives and public policy makers who interact with unions over climate policies. To identify interviewees, we used referral sampling (Patton, 2002). Interviews were conducted in French, English, German and Luxembourgish and subsequently transcribed. The interviews were carried out with international trade union officials (ITUC), European-level union officials (European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU), IndustriAll Europe), national-level union officials (German IG Metall, Polish NSZZ Solidarność, Luxembourg's Onafhängege Gewerkschaftsbond Lëtzebuerg and Lëtzebuerger Chrëschtliche Gewerkschaftsbond), company-level union representatives (ArcelorMittal's European Works Council), employer representatives (World Steel Association, ArcelorMittal) and representatives of the European institutions and member states (DG Environment, EU Council working party Environment). In parallel, we analysed a large range of related secondary data – particularly archived ITUC documents,

newspaper articles, trade union publications and industry reports (in English, French, German and Dutch) – with two purposes in mind: first, to validate the information provided to us in the interviews; second, to identify interesting cases/strategies at European and national level (which were in turn also a topic in the interviews). These secondary data were also used to complement the primary data and triangulate the information gathered through interviews.

We chose cases illustrating particular trade union strategies based on the principles of purposeful sampling; ‘the logic and power of purposeful sampling lie in selecting information-rich cases [. . .] which yields insights and in-depth understanding rather than empirical generalizations’ (Patton, 2002: 230). Specifically, we selected cases of union engagement with climate policies that have an impact on the workers represented by the unions. At the same time, we discarded cases involving vague declarations of intent or policy statements not leading to concrete action. Following the logic of purposeful sampling, it was not our aim to establish an exhaustive list or a statistically representative set of cases of union engagement with climate change; we rather sought to identify a varied range of cases rich in information and representative of the breadth of the subject. The primary and secondary data collected were systematized and analysed in a two-step process. We started by examining each case separately based on three interrelated dimensions for which we defined the extremes of the continuum, though many of the cases were actually situated somewhere in between:

1. The trade union position regarding the scientific consensus on the anthropogenic nature of climate change (denial/acceptance);
2. The union strategy regarding climate change mitigation policies at sectoral and/or workplace level (support/opposition);
3. The general nature of union strategies towards the employment implications of the low-carbon transition (proactive/reactive, that is, planning ahead/in response to policies being implemented or about to be implemented).

We compared the cases investigated, identifying similarities and differences. In accordance with Rich (1992: 785), this step enabled strategies to be ‘ordered and compared’ and ‘clustered into categorical types’. Based on the emerging classification, we identified different ‘ideal types, each of which represents a unique combination of organizational attributes believed to determine the relevant outcome(s)’ (Doty and Glick, 1994: 232). Overall, this analysis resulted in the identification of three ideal-typical strategies of unions in the European manufacturing and power generation sectors towards emission reduction policies: *opposition*, *hedging* and *support*.

A typology of trade union strategies towards climate change

Opposition

A first type of strategy consists of outright *opposition* to emission reduction policies, whereby a union denies the scientific consensus on climate change and opposes

decarbonization policies at sectoral and/or workplace level. Consequently, union involvement in planning transition-related employment implications is low to non-existent. To the best of our knowledge, the only example of such outright *opposition* is Polish coal miners' unions. These have consistently opposed EU climate policies and play a prominent role in advocating a continued strong reliance of Poland on coal-based power generation (responsible for 85 percent of the country's electricity). Coal miners are influential within the Polish union movement due to the very high (close to 90 percent) union density in that sector (Gardawski et al., 2012), whereas overall union density in Poland had fallen to 13 percent in 2017 and collective bargaining coverage is very low (Czarzasty, 2019). In addition, wages in the Polish mining sector are substantially higher compared to other sectors with similar workforce characteristics (Szpor, 2019).

In the run-up to the Katowice climate conference in 2018, the three main Polish trade unions, NSZZ Solidarność (with close ties to the national conservative Law and Justice party PiS), OPZZ All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions and FZZ Trade Unions Forum, held a conference calling for an analysis of the cost and job impact of climate policies and demanding that each country 'should be able to produce energy from the fuels owned on its territory in order to ensure cheaper heat and electricity for its economy' (NSZZ Solidarność et al., 2018). The ITUC, to which the Polish unions are affiliated, declined an invitation to participate in this conference, stating in an e-mail: 'We don't believe this conference really contributes to reaching the political objectives that have been identified by our organisations and their members for the international climate change negotiations'.¹ As ETUC and ITUC affiliates, Polish unions have opposed the positions favouring ambitious climate policies put forward by these international union organizations. Ahead of the UNFCCC conference of 2013, the Polish unions suggested that the ITUC should adopt a statement declaring that 'scientists have not reached agreement on that matter [global warming]' and highlighting the 'social costs' of 'thoughtlessly sustaining the decarbonization policy'.²

At least in the case of NSZZ Solidarność, the *opposition* to decarbonization policies goes hand in hand with a denial of human-induced climate change. Questioned on climate change, a national-level representative of NSZZ Solidarność in charge of environmental issues who works closely with mine workers on climate policies did not want to support the scientific consensus on the anthropogenic nature of climate change, calling it 'an extreme view' (NSZZ Solidarność, Interview, January 2020). Concerning the general need for climate change mitigation, this official he stressed:

I feel that in numerous cases the international trade union movement, and to some extent the European one, have not only become the hostages of the climate ideas, but are switching sides with organisations and movements that are acting against the workers' interests. [. . .] Throughout the history of humankind, we were not able to influence the temperature, however, what humans are excellent at is adaptation. [. . .] We are all focused on the idea that we have to stop climate change. But this is like trying to reverse the current of a river with a stick. (NSZZ Solidarność, Interview, January 2020)

During the COP24 meeting in Katowice in 2018, the NSZZ Solidarność branch for mining and energy workers and the NSZZ Solidarność regional branch of Silesia, Poland's

largest coal-mining region, issued a statement together with a conservative US think-tank, the Heartland Institute, known for its denial of climate change, denouncing ‘alarmist climate policy’, asserting that ‘there is no scientific consensus on the main causes and consequences of climate change’ and opposing the ‘elimination of coal from the world’s energy portfolio’ (Heartland Institute, 2018). This emphasizes Polish coal-mining unions’ outright *opposition* to decarbonization policies, reflecting a mix of job preservation concerns and arguments about national energy sovereignty.

Hedging

A second strategy is *hedging*, meaning that trade unions accept the scientific consensus on climate change and in principle support the need for decarbonization policies, but seek to minimize regulation, advocate incremental approaches and are reluctant to engage proactively with the transition-related employment implications. Such *hedging* strategies resemble the attitudes of businesses that do not directly oppose environmental regulations but attempt to shape regulations to minimize their cost exposure (Meckling, 2015). An example of *hedging* is the position of the steelworkers’ unions affiliated to the European trade union federation IndustriAll Europe over the latest reform of the EU ETS, adopted in February 2018 (Wettestad and Jevnaker, 2019). The EU ETS is a carbon cap-and-trade scheme that sets binding emission reduction targets for industrial facilities and power plants. Iron and steel production is highly relevant to the debate over reducing emissions because the sector accounts for approximately 5 percent of global CO₂ emissions. In the debate over the reform of the EU ETS, IndustriAll Europe and its largest affiliate IG Metall denounced as overly ambitious the climate policy goals of the EU ETS reform and demanded a greater allocation of free emission allowances. While upholding in principle the need for decarbonization, an IndustriAll Europe official responsible for coordinating the steel sector underlined the primary goal of buying time when explaining the organization’s position towards the EU ETS reform:

We relied heavily on delegates in companies who knew these issues better than us. They told us, listen, the bosses are not wrong about everything. When it comes to reducing CO₂ emissions, the European Commission is going a bit too far. We are not able to follow, and if we are forced to follow, it will be the end of steelmaking in Europe. [...] High levels of investment are needed to achieve the emission targets, so we have to give ourselves time. The bosses were a little tougher than us on that, with us saying that reduction goals had to be achieved at some point, but we need time to do so. (IndustriAll Europe, Interview, June 2018)

IndustriAll Europe’s position on the EU ETS reform was thus aimed at limiting the impact of decarbonization policies in several crucial dimensions: the relationship between free and auctioned allowances, the determination of the performance benchmarks and the recycling of blast-furnace gases. This led to close cooperation between IndustriAll Europe and the European steel employers’ association, Eurofer, with common positions developed on core issues and the participation of many steelworkers’ unions in a demonstration organized by Eurofer in Brussels in February 2016. However, the more class-oriented IndustriAll Europe affiliates, mainly from Southern European countries, did not participate in this demonstration.

Navigating between *opposition to* and *support for* decarbonization policies, *hedging* strategies aimed at shaping regulations without directly opposing them seem to be the most frequent ones among European trade unions in the manufacturing sector. For example, unions representing car workers also adopted *hedging* strategies when dealing with new EU-wide CO₂ emission standards for cars and vans. Without questioning the general need to reduce emissions in the transport sector, major unions such as Unite (UK) and IG Metall (Germany) primarily upheld employment concerns, arguing for incremental approaches. Together with the car industry, trade unions consistently advocated lower CO₂ reduction targets than those ultimately adopted by the EU in January 2019 (IndustriAll Europe, 2017). In addition, when in June 2019, the French Parliament discussed the phasing out of combustion engines in cars, Force Ouvrière (FO), the main union at the French car manufacturer PSA Groupe, expressed *hedging* attitudes, pointing to possible job losses when asking for more time for the industry to adapt.

Support

A third strategy shows outright *support* for decarbonization policies, entailing a proactive (instead of reactive) approach to transition. One example of such an approach is the ‘*Just Energy Transition Statement*’ signed in 2017 by the participants of the European social dialogue in the energy sector: on the employers’ side, Eurelectric, and on the unions’ side, EPSU and IndustriAll Europe. Such joint statements, though non-binding, are a frequent outcome of the European sectoral social dialogue and aim to influence EU policies (Upchurch et al., 2009). The statement defines a ‘Just Energy Transition’ as a ‘combination of plans, policies and investments that enable the sector to decarbonize cost-effectively while ensuring that potential negative impacts on business, employment and living conditions are anticipated and mitigated’ (Eurelectric et al., 2017). The statement provides recommendations in terms of company policies, mostly focusing on skills development, re-skilling and job creation, while calling for additional public financing under the EU’s Multiannual Financial Framework. The negotiation of the declaration was facilitated by the specific configuration of socio-economic interests in the sector of electricity production, where the more localized nature of electricity markets (implying lower competition) and the possibilities for switching to renewable energies or passing on the costs to customers reduces the potential employment impact of decarbonization (Eikeland and Skjærseth, 2019; Meckling, 2011). An EPSU official responsible for the energy sector highlighted the declaration’s usefulness, while noting that it needs to be further spelled out:

What is interesting about the text is that it recognizes the Just Transition. The text gives a definition of what we, as sectoral social partners, mean by Just Transition. It also puts forward some ideas on how to implement it. The emphasis is on vocational training, which is at the heart of the Just Transition and one of the easiest issues to discuss with employers [. . .] The declaration remains an expression of political will. But it’s good to have the text. In one of the sectors most affected by the energy transition, employers and trade unions agree on the need to socially support the transition, finance it in the long term and plan it. All of these things are in the statement. (EPSU, Interview, December 2017)

While the joint statement calls for public investment in the Just Transition, it does not address the employers' responsibility in financing the transition and does not define concrete activities or measures. Furthermore, as it is not legally binding, there is a possibility that the agreement will not generate any results in practice. Nonetheless, it represents an example of a commitment by unions to support the decarbonization of economic activities and of proactive engagement with all its employment implications.

Another example of a *support* strategy is the signing of the '*Social and Ecological Pact*' by a number of French unions (Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail (CFDT), Union Nationale des Syndicats Autonomes, Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens) together with social and environmental NGOs in March 2019. The head of the main French trade union confederation CFDT took a leading role in promoting the pact together with the former French Environment Minister Nicolas Hulot. This pact, much commented on in the context of the Yellow Vest protests in France, advocates the introduction of carbon taxation, an end to the construction of combustion engine cars 'in a time horizon compatible with the Paris Agreement' and social support to mitigate the consequences of the ecological transition on employment.

Discussion and conclusion

The jobs-versus-environment dilemma challenges trade unions, as decarbonization policies will lead to job losses in a number of sectors. No matter how they respond, trade unions may be faced with criticism. If unions advocate ambitious climate change mitigation policies, workers may turn away because of potential job losses. Companies may blame unions, as emission reduction policies could lead to decreased profits. Conversely, if unions focus on safeguarding employment – possibly to the detriment of the environment – this may spark criticism by society at large.

The need for trade unions to take into consideration the interests of not just their members has been a long-standing issue of debate in industrial relations literature. Bok and Dunlop (1970: 86) coined the term 'responsible unionism' to designate a unionism 'responding to the interests of the members [. . .] dealing fairly with individuals and minorities within its ranks, and exhibiting a due regard for legitimate interests of those beyond its walls'. However, reconciling these potentially diverging interests in the case of decarbonization is not straightforward and may lead to policies not equally addressing the concerns of workers, employers and society alike. The diversity of union strategies (see ideal-typical strategies in Figure 1) and the extent to which they take into account environmental considerations lead to the question about the factors shaping union strategies responding to decarbonization policies. In the following sections, we analyse the role of sectoral interests, union identities and conceptions of union democracy.

Sectoral interests

Decarbonization confronts trade unions with a dilemma. Should they support minimal environmental regulation to safeguard employment or actively support emission reduction policies at the risk of job losses? Since the sectors investigated are carbon-intensive, a high number of jobs of current union members may be at risk if production is decarbonized.

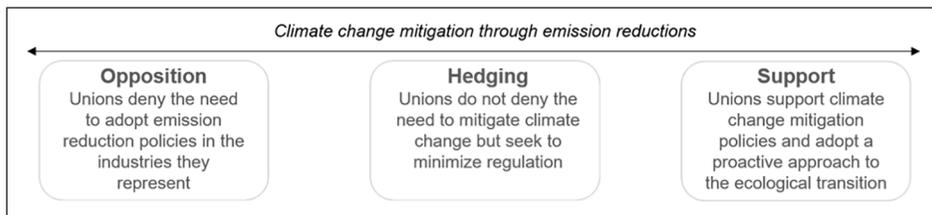


Figure 1. Ideal-typical trade union climate strategies.

Such sectoral interests are a key factor in union positions on decarbonization. As unions are membership organizations, one of their core goals is to represent their members' interests, that is, maintaining jobs and decent working conditions (for a full discussion of union interests, see Hyman, 1997). This core interest is reflected in the prevalence of *hedging* strategies: decarbonization is accepted but regulation – also related to jobs cuts – is sought to be minimized. At the same time, incremental approaches are preferred to borrow time and tackle the social aspects of decarbonization.

Earlier debates dealing with similar dilemmas underline the importance of such (membership) logics. Literature on concession bargaining in the 1980s and 1990s stresses the willingness of unions to offer wide-reaching concessions on wages and working conditions to safeguard employment by improving companies' competitiveness (Arthur and Dworkin, 1991). For example, Abbouchi's (1987) study, involving interviews with 120 US unionists, emphasizes their willingness to engage in concessions to safeguard employment in situations of possible job cuts. A survey among union members of the United Steelworkers in the US indicates that members accepted this strategy, being willing to agree to concessions when gaining economic security in return (Dworkin et al., 1988). Although unions' acceptance of concessions may reflect their members' expectations, this could generate a negative image of unions. Specifically, Levine (1990) highlights that unions' loss of power vis-à-vis management in situations of concession bargaining may give union officials a negative image and reputation. Despite the at best mixed results of concession bargaining for US unions, the primarily European debate on union responses to temporary agency work from the 2000s onwards shows similar patterns. In situations in which the jobs and/or working conditions of core employees – often union members – were threatened, plant-level union representatives often accepted relatively large numbers of agency workers to preserve the status of core workers (Holst et al., 2010; Pulignano and Doerflinger, 2013). Again, this illustrates unions' willingness to accept wide-reaching concessions to safeguard employment and in particular, the jobs of union members – even if such locally negotiated concessions contradict general or sectoral union policies (Bergström and Styhre, 2010) or principles like protecting all workers alike.

The way in which unions previously dealt with similar dilemmas contributes to understanding how they are now dealing with decarbonization, despite the fact that the current debate does not only involve capital and labour but also society as a whole. While few unions have adopted outright *support* or *opposition* strategies, most see themselves between the two extremes. Adopting *hedging* strategies can be regarded as

unions' attempts to simultaneously balance employment-related and environmental targets. Nonetheless, it is likely that job concerns will prevail over environmental concerns; although climate change is not denied, employment enjoys the higher priority. Fully reconciling both sets of targets may be challenging, and trade-offs between jobs and decarbonization policies, particularly in sectors exposed to international competition (where 'carbon leakage' is possible), are likely to exist. This is because of high union membership levels in the sectors investigated and the need to represent members' interests in times of general membership decline in many EU countries. As in the aforementioned debates, in which members' jobs were safeguarded to the detriment of new hires or agency workers, this time jobs could be protected at the expense of the environment. Unions may pursue (*hedging*) strategies addressing certain environmental concerns – also vis-à-vis society at large – but they will probably primarily attempt to safeguard their members' jobs. This also explains why unions often only react to but do not actively engage in the planning and steering of decarbonization. However, depending on the issues under discussion, sectoral interests and negotiation dynamics, union strategies – even within the same European federation – may vary, as demonstrated by the empirical example of IndustriAll Europe (i.e. *hedging* strategy in the steel sector and *support* strategy in the energy sector). This underlines that *opposition*, *hedging* and *support* are best conceived as a continuum of strategies that are not necessarily enacted in a pure form in reality, but that condense, like all ideal types, development tendencies at work in the social world (Weber, 1968).

Overall, the data show that unions are tackling decarbonization in different ways. Following Hyman (2001), we argue that union strategies are mediated by union identities, situated in a triangle between market, society and class. The diversity of strategies should thus not only be explained based on sectoral interests but also be linked to union identities as explained below.

Union identities

Hyman (2001) identified three ideal-typical models of trade unionism, distinguishing between unions as market bargainers, mobilizers of class opposition and partners in social integration. Although the concept of environment is not explicitly part of this theoretical framework, the model of union identities provides insights into the shaping of unions' climate strategies.

The model of market-oriented or business unionism in which unions consider themselves primarily as labour market actors focused on their members' interests, regardless of the interests of other groups of workers and broader socio-political projects, could be conducive to *hedging* and *opposition* strategies. In particular, market-oriented unions can be expected to enter into coalitions with employers over perceived shared interests to preserve business interests and employment. This is demonstrated by IndustriAll Europe's involvement in the revision of the EU ETS or the position of the French FO, a union traditionally focused on collective bargaining and distant from politics (Yon, 2009), on the phasing out of combustion engines. As class-oriented unions have a strategic preference for independent action due to the inherent antagonism between labour and capital, they can be expected to challenge the joint lobbying with employers that often

goes hand in hand with *hedging*. In the case of steel unions' reaction to the EU ETS, the class-oriented unions, mainly from Southern Europe, affiliated to IndustriAll Europe refused to join in a public demonstration organized by the employers, without, however, questioning the overall position adopted by IndustriAll Europe. The climate strategies of primarily society-oriented unions can be expected to integrate broader societal concerns. The commitment to the Just Energy Transition of the EPSU, a public sector federation with a history of engaging with social movements in broader campaigns (Fischbach-Pyttel, 2017), gives testimony to this, as does that of the French CFDT, a union confederation with a history of advocating the notion of 'general interest' and the 'creation of new solidarities' (Defaud, 2009).

The theoretical framework of union identities is thus heuristic in explaining trade unions' manoeuvring between *opposition*, *hedging* and *support*, and the degree to which they are willing to balance members' interests and broader societal concerns. Specifically, the widespread *hedging* strategies can be situated between the poles of market and society, possibly influenced by class when it comes to unions' willingness to collaborate with employers. However, it must be noted that Hyman's (2001) discussion of union identities is strongly rooted in the ideological divisions of the 20th century between social democracy, communism and social Catholicism. The erosion of these ideological currents and the traditional political movements has led to realignments in the relationships between unions and political parties. New and challenging linkages between unions and political forces have thus developed, such as the alignment of NSZZ Solidarność with nationalist conservative forces in Poland, and its potential influence upon the former's climate strategy, which mixes job concerns and a concern for national energy sovereignty. A further factor shaping unions' climate strategies is union democracy, as discussed in the final section.

Union democracy

Different understandings of union democracy can be expected to affect the formulation and enactment of trade union climate strategies. The quality of procedural, deliberative and participatory mechanisms is relevant, as unions have to continuously arbitrate between different interests and bargaining objectives. In their seminal contribution on collective bargaining, Walton and McKersie (1965) highlighted the role of intra-organizational bargaining in the definition of members' interests and bargaining objectives. Unions need to balance the defence of sectional and short-term interests with general and long-term interests (Flanders, 1970). This may also involve choosing between the interests of different member groups. For instance, when adopting its position on the EU ETS, IG Metall needed to weigh up the interests of the steelmaking segments of its membership against those of its members working in renewables. The greater organizational weight of steelworkers within the union helped tip the scales in favour of the steel industry.

The development of coherent positions on climate change is rendered more difficult by potential tensions between different levels of bargaining and union organization, as local, sectoral and national union positions may differ (Bergström and Styhre, 2010). With the decentralization of collective bargaining (Marginson, 2015) and the emergence of segmented spheres of debate between national and lower-level structures in many

unions (Thomas, 2017), sector- and company-level union officials may increasingly be found acting autonomously and pursuing their own interests.

The global and encompassing nature of climate change not only raises the issue of the definition of unions' internal objectives and the organizational power of different member groups but also questions the traditional definitions of the boundaries of union action. Thus, climate change relates to the capacity of unions to reflect upon their purpose and to connect with wider objectives such as environmental sustainability. Especially on such a complex topic as climate change, future-oriented union action requires reconciling members' interests and societal concerns, aggregating different perspectives, building coalitions with other actors, and ensuring the gender and ethnic diversity of union leaderships (Flanders, 1970; Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman, 2013; Levi et al., 2009). The loss of membership and ensuing loss of membership dues (Vandaele, 2019), the crisis of social democracy in many EU countries and the emergence of social movements that do not recognize trade unions further challenge unions' capacity to realize its objectives.

With the acceleration of the climate crisis, trade unions will be increasingly confronted with the employment impacts of decarbonization, and beyond that, with the repercussions of climate change on the livelihoods of workers. Our analysis suggests that current trade union strategies on climate change are primarily rooted in sectoral interests mediated by union identities and conceptions of union democracy. In general, unions seem to be struggling to develop policies coherent with the positions in support of decarbonization that they (have to) adopt to signal environmental commitment to society at large. Our document analyses indicate that concrete trade union climate strategies going beyond rhetoric and embedded in social dialogue and collective bargaining are relatively scarce. The gap between principled positions and concrete climate strategies highlights the tenacity of the dilemmas generated by decarbonization.

The challenges of enacting an inclusive transition to a low-carbon economy also raise the question of the appropriateness of the approaches and frameworks deployed by industrial relations scholars. Climate change can be seen as an incentive to renew the debate on union identities by bringing in the ecological dimension and expanding the factors taken into account when discussing the capacity for strategic action and renewal by trade unions (Lévesque and Murray, 2010). This expansion has the potential to renew long-standing discussions on the articulation of members' interests and societal concerns by trade unions, and the wider debates on the role of interest groups in democratic societies.

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Notes

1. E-mail by the president of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) to NSZZ Solidarność, OPZZ All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions and FZZ Trade Unions Forum, July 2018.

2. Draft version of a statement proposed by NSZZ Solidarność, OPZZ All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions and FZZ Trade Unions Forum to the ITUC on the occasion of the 19th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP 19) held in November 2013 in Warsaw, Poland.

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