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# Ecological Collective Action at Work as a Powerful Catalyst to Prevent the Violation of Labour Rights

Selen Uncular \*

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**Abstract.** Intertwined with other collective labour rights, workers' collective action has the utmost importance for genuine transformative solutions when labour rights are constantly violated and legal regulations do not function properly. Since collective action at work serves as a protective shield for labour rights, its relationship with ecological sustainability deserves more research and awareness in labour law. Adopting a holistic, supranational and critical approach, this article aims to analyse the role of ecological collective action in enhancing the protection and enforcement of labour rights. In the era of climate emergency accompanied by multiple crises, ecological collective action at work is the irreplaceable component of social justice, democracy, dignity, planetary wellbeing and decent work. All workers, regardless of their employment status, must have the right to take collective action to demand climate jobs, nature-friendly production, efficient energy use, sustainable mobility plans, ecological training and skills, occupational health and safety and other fair working conditions. With the support of trade unions, state, NGOs and court decisions, ecological collective action at work has the capacity to be a powerful catalyst against the violation of labour rights by reuniting labour and nature.

**Keywords:** *Collective action, Climate, Labour law, Strike, Decent work.*

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## 1. Introduction

Entwined with the concepts of freedom of association, conflict, solidarity and social justice, collective action at work has the utmost importance for profound impacts when labour rights are constantly violated, worker participation is minimised or blocked and regulations do not function properly. Due to their economic and personal dependence on employer, employment contracts allow little scope for workers to influence working conditions individually as well. Providing “an effective check to the extreme imbalances of power between labour and capital”<sup>1</sup>, collective action is the most effective force of workers for defending their rights, needs and demands in a hierarchical relationship with lack of democracy and equality.

Although it is essential for strong communities and social progress, there are increasing violations and impediments regarding the fair exercise and protection of collective action at work all around the world. It is urgent than ever to defend and connect it with ecology in the era of climate crisis to ensure decent work for all workers. As such, this article firstly focuses on workers’ collective action and its interactions with main principles, recent developments and other collective labour rights. Then it analyses ecological dimensions of collective action at work by evaluating the fundamental concepts such as collective interest and solidarity in the light of the protection of nature besides examining the relationship between right to collective action (and strike) and ecology under conflicts with public authorities and employer. Finally, it aims to offer comprehensive and innovative solutions by presenting the best practices related to ecological collective action at work in Australia, United Kingdom, Germany and USA.

## 2. Collective Action at Work as an Irreplaceable Component in the Employment Relationship

Being a fundamental collective labour right and a human right, collective action at work has significant implications for employers, workers, states and society at large. Even though strike is the most common and useful means of labour struggle, workers’ collective action also contains go-slow, work-to-rule, boycott, occupation, picketing, blacking and other types of

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<sup>1</sup> J. Vogt, R. Subasinghe, *Turning Up the Heat: The Right to Strike and the Climate Crisis*, in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2025, vol. 45, n. 2, 444.

protest. In this respect, strike, in general terms, can be regarded as the deliberate stoppage of work on the decision of workers or a trade union with the purpose of putting pressure for the enhancement or conservation of social, economic and working conditions. It can take several forms like solidarity/sympathy strike, political strike, general strike, wildcat strike, sit-down strike and warning strike<sup>2</sup>. With a broad and dynamic scope, collective action at work has a unique place and power in the employment relationship.

While collective action centres on collective interests by going beyond individual ones, it relies on both conflictual and cooperative elements. It encompasses various kinds of joint conduct which reflect conflict and have a process based on deliberation, negotiation and resolution. Within this scope, the changing context affects forms of collective action significantly. Due to the new realities like gig economy, increasing incentives to self-employment, climate crisis and artificial intelligence, the need for innovative forms of action is urgent. Also, the judicialisation of labour relations has grown during the last decade at both national and supranational levels. As a result of government strategies against social rights, repression of strikes and protests along with increasing invisibility of conflicts, trade unions and organs of worker representation use the judicialisation of conflict to reinforce labour rights. They support “judicial activism as a mode of conflict that permits them to channel their protest in often effective ways that ultimately generate new types of regulation”<sup>3</sup>. On the other hand, worst case scenarios and unacceptable scandals like collective worker suicides (as in France Telecom (now Orange) and Foxconn Technology Group (in China)) can also happen when conflict cannot be channelled in a positive direction due to its suppression and ignorance.

Built on conflict of interests, collective action has undeniable impacts on providing a voice for workers, changing the power relations and empowering dignity. As Lopez, Chacartegui and Canton point out, “conflict is a dynamic process which, born in divergence, continues with the emergence of discontent and can then be resolved by different means”, whereas its expression and visibility are healthy for societies to

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see T. Novitz, *International and European Protection of the Right to Strike*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003, 6-7.

<sup>3</sup> J. Lopez Lopez, *Modes of Collective Action: Judicialisation as a Form of Protest*, in J. Lopez Lopez (ed.), *Collective Bargaining and Collective Action- Labour Agency and Governance in the 21st Century?*, Hart Publishing, Oxford, 2019, 42.

create transformative solutions and solidarities<sup>4</sup>. Although conflict is generally seen as destructive and disruptive in all areas of life, workers' collective action in fact plays a fundamental role in externalising divergences and discontent in an effective and equitable manner. Yet, most approaches to labour law accept conflict as a drawback instead of a catalyst for progressive changes regarding labour rights and the future of work. "Due to a predominant culture which views bargaining and arbitration as the principal basis of industrial relations, current debates generally fail to incorporate the right to strike in their construction of the essence of labour law"<sup>5</sup>. Collective action at work does not only have integrative and transformative functions (which ensure a certain level of control of social conflict between workers and employers) and change power relations by reshaping regulations, it also invites politics into labour law. It is necessary to analyse collective action as a crucial element of equilibrium for both the stability of legal systems and democracy itself. As Cornell and Dukes highlight, organised labour has a vital role in building and fighting for democracy inside and outside of the workplace<sup>6</sup>. Otherwise, the undervaluation or denial of non-consensual means of transformation (including strikes and protests) reflects an exclusively economic perspective rather than a holistic approach besides forcing workers to find tragic and violent ways for expressing collective conflict. The more societies refuse to face conflict, the more they encourage the invisibility of divergences and solutions which partially damages the transformative capacity of conflict.

Within this context, conflict is mostly invisible in media as well as international and national instruments of regulation. While the (dependent) media has the tendency to limit information about strikes and protests in general, its coverage is heavily focused on their economic impact. As for international legal instruments, the right to strike is directly stated solely under European Social Charter (ESC) and Revised ESC (Art. 6), International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Art 8/1(d)) and Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Protocol of

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<sup>4</sup> J. Lopez, C. Chacartegui, C. G. Canton, *From Conflict to Regulation: The Transformative Function of Labour Law*, in G. Davidov, B. Langille (eds.), *The Idea of Labour Law*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011, 345.

<sup>5</sup> J. Lopez, C. Chacartegui, C. G. Canton, *From Conflict to Regulation*, cit., 345.

<sup>6</sup> For detailed information with several examples, see A. B. Cornell, R. Dukes, *Strikes and the Struggle for Democracy*, in *Comparative Labor Law & Policy Journal*, 2025, vol. 45, n. 2, 288-312.

San Salvador) (Art. 8/1(b)). At the national level, regulation and visibility of collective action at work differs from one country to another depending on their traditions and social policies. On the other hand, there are many countries which impose serious restrictions, penalties and bans on the right to strike such as Egypt, Russia, Bangladesh, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia, whereas political strikes are illegal in the most EU and other countries. Since corporate culture promotes arbitration and mediation systems to solve divergences with a static approach and fear towards conflict, the invisibility of workers' collective action and denial of conflict are evident in codes of conduct of the majority of companies.

Despite these realities, conflicts do and will continue to exist in many circumstances especially under capitalist socio-economic order based on contradictions and struggles. Since conflictual activism plays a huge role in changing social relations of power, expressing discontent and criticism holds the ability to reshape labour rights and working conditions. The more collective action at work embraces political protest, the broader outcomes can be defended related to labour law and social policies. There are plenty of cases confirming these facts as seen in France about the contract for first employment in 2006, in Spain against the reduction of rights for the unemployed in 2002 and in China about a wage increase against Honda and Toyota in 2010<sup>7</sup>. Hence, conflict has a significant potential for changing societies, creating a dynamic interaction between different social actors and proliferating active political participation. Labour law should embrace conflict and collective action by being open to new forms of activism and creation of solidarities.

In this respect, as a universal value and principle, solidarity can be considered as a collective and dynamic concept based on mutual support with empathy and responsibility. Despite lacking a single definition and clear characteristics, it is generally linked to justice<sup>8</sup>, equality and non-discrimination<sup>9</sup> together with new approaches including sustainability<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For more information, see J. Lopez, C. Chacartegui, C. G. Canton, *From Conflict to Regulation*, cit., 359-360.

<sup>8</sup> See R. Zimmer, *Solidarity as a Central Aim of Collective Labour Law?*, in J. Lopez Lopez (ed.), *Inscribing Solidarity- Debates in Labor Law and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022, 46.

<sup>9</sup> J. Lopez Lopez, *Inscribing Solidarity in Labor Law- Promise and Limitations*, in J. Lopez Lopez (ed.), *Inscribing Solidarity- Debates in Labor Law and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022, 2-3.

<sup>10</sup> T. Novitz, *Sustainability as Solidarity Unbound- Labour Rights and Collective Voice in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the European Union*, in J. Lopez Lopez (ed.),

and social contract<sup>11</sup>. Solidarity can be described as inclusive, when there is a common concern with heterogeneous interests and people (as in international solidarity), or exclusive, when it occurs for the benefit of a particular group with homogeneous interests at the expense of others. As Novitz offers, solidarity should be “unbound” related to geography and temporality based on an inclusive approach covering empathy instead of only shared identity<sup>12</sup>. Solidarity has the capacity to help the most vulnerable people obtain rights and agency too. In addition, the state should have positive and negative obligations regarding the solidarity as an instrument of public policy. In terms of its positive role, state should promote solidarity by supporting and ensuring it through autonomous actors (like trade unions) and processes (such as collective action, social dialogue and collective bargaining) and by introducing its own measures and policies. As for its negative duty, state should avoid all regulations or actions that would damage the principle of solidarity.

Due to the individualisation of labour regulation and weakening of unions and worker representation structures, challenges may occur in the practice or defence of solidarity. Nevertheless, collective labour rights have “permitted social actors to achieve some spaces of social progress, countervailing the most untamed forms of capitalism” and “constructed a foundation for solidarity in various forms to reinforce the collective interests of workers”<sup>13</sup>. Within this scope, worker solidarity during the collective bargaining process and through collective action at work is crucial against destructive competition, growing individualism and injustices. Contributing to the proper functioning of regulatory institutions, collective action manifests workers’ individual and collective agency by being deeply connected to both freedom of association and solidarity. As Bogg and Freedland argue, collective action and strong exercise of the freedom of association are important tools to respond the rise of authoritarianism, populism and the violation of social rights<sup>14</sup>.

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*Inscribing Solidarity- Debates in Labor Law and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022, 24-25.

<sup>11</sup> K. D. Ewing, *Solidarity, COVID-19 and a New Social Contract*, in J. Lopez Lopez (ed.), *Inscribing Solidarity- Debates in Labor Law and Beyond*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2022, 82-85.

<sup>12</sup> T. Novitz, *Sustainability as Solidarity Unbound*, cit., 24.

<sup>13</sup> J. Lopez Lopez, *Inscribing Solidarity in Labor Law*, cit., 8.

<sup>14</sup> A. Bogg, M. Freedland, *Labour Law in the Age of Populism: Towards Sustainable Democratic Engagement*, in J. Lopez Lopez (ed.), *Collective Bargaining and Collective Action- Labour Agency and Governance in the 21st Century?*, Hart Publishing, Oxford, 2019, 23.

Within this context, it is essential to emphasise that collective action at work is an integral element of the freedom of association. As the Committee on Freedom of Association (CFA) of the International Labour Organisation (ILO) frequently underlines, being a fundamental right of workers and their organisations for defending their social and economic interests, the right to strike is an inextricable part of the activities, rules and constitutions of trade unions for achieving their objectives. It also helps unions to strengthen their organisational capacities and membership. Without collective action at work, the right to organise and freedom of association would mean solidarity without any power and impact because workers or unions would not have any pressure against employers in case of breaches and they would not be able to compensate their lack of bargaining power in the employment relationship. Similarly, collective action at work cannot be separated from the right to collective bargaining. Without workers' collective action, collective bargaining would merely become 'collective begging' since workers and unions cannot bargain with no power, equality and pressure. Hence, collective action at work is at the heart of labour struggle and its substantial recognition and protection is indispensable for the existence and functioning of an effective freedom of association and right to collective bargaining. Since collective labour rights are indivisible and interconnected, when one of them is violated, others suffer and cannot serve their purposes.

Furthermore, workers' collective action contains the freedom of expression and freedom from forced labour as a collective labour right against employer domination and abuse. It is also capable of ensuring democracy at work, worker dignity and participation, fair production besides decent work and working conditions. By channelling and reducing conflict and transforming societies in ways that lead to equality, justice and solidarity, workers' collective action has a vital place in labour law. Therefore, all workers must have the right to collective action in order to defend their interests without being solely restricted to industrial disputes and collective labour agreements. In addition, legal procedures for declaring collective action at work must not lead to a prohibition in practice. According to Hyman, the simple assumption that the causes of a specific strike or collective action must be either economic or non-economic creates a false dichotomy since most strikes include multiple issues rather than a single cause<sup>15</sup>. Also, economic and other interests are often interrelated. Several forms of conflict and their regulation reflect

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<sup>15</sup> R. Hyman, *Strikes*, Fontana-Collins, Glasgow, 1984, 74.

both economic concerns and political dynamics. Within this scope, collective rights should be considered as a puzzle that without collective action as the centerpiece, only domination, injustice and cruelty left behind.

Yet, the right to collective action and the right to strike are increasingly the most violated and ignored human rights in this continuing period of multiple crises across the world. As ITUC Global Rights Index 2025 confirms, the right to strike was violated in 87% of the countries without any change from the previous year<sup>16</sup>. While workers were denied the freedom of association and right to organise in 3 out of every 4 countries, “the right to collective bargaining was restricted in 80% of the countries (up from 79% in 2024)”<sup>17</sup>. In this regard, many employers insist on ignoring the right to strike under national and international regulations as seen in the major crisis broke out at the International Labour Conference in 2012<sup>18</sup>. Since ILO instruments and principles have been transforming into hard law under international law day by day, Employers Group started a total rejection not solely of the existence of the right to strike, but also of the entire ILO supervisory system. Upon the constant violations and limitations contrary to the CFA decisions and interpretation rules of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties, Workers Group and 36 governments requested the urgent referral of the dispute on the interpretation of the ILO Convention No.87 to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for decision. In November 2023, the Governing Body of ILO decided to request an Advisory Opinion on whether ILO Convention No.87 protects the right to strike.

At the time of the writing of this article, the opinion of ICJ was being expected upon the completion of the public hearings on this case in October 2025. In their written and oral statements, most governments (including Spain, Australia, Vanuatu, Brazil, Somalia, Uruguay, Germany and Norway) supported the right to strike as a fundamental shield for equality and democracy. Also, as an island state highly vulnerable to the climate crisis, Vanuatu emphasised that the protection of right to strike is essential to ensure a just transition towards a low-carbon future by connecting it with climate justice. If ICJ confirms that the right to strike is protected under ILO Convention No.87, the right to strike will enjoy the

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<sup>16</sup> For more information, see ITUC, *Global Rights Index 2025*, <https://www.ituc-csi.org/global-rights-index> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>17</sup> ITUC, *Global Rights Index 2025*, cit.

<sup>18</sup> For a deep analysis regarding this crisis and afterwards, see J. Vogt et al., *The Right to Strike in International Law*, Bloomsbury Publishing, Oxford, 2020.

protection of international law with stronger union activism and supervision of national regulations. Since it is crucial to create and implement a robust protection and enforcement for collective action at work, teleological interpretation is required in accordance with its status of customary international law. In any case, ICJ's opinion will deeply influence national and international labour law and shape the future of labour struggle along with our planet.

In this regard, companies and governments tend to repress and ignore the capacity of workers to organise and take collective action tenaciously. Although international instruments are very important means for the efficient recognition and protection of the right to collective action, they are usually restricted by national laws with limited or no direct applicability, unjust regulations and toothless sanctions. Also, domestic and international courts can have an essential role in the subordination of the right to collective action to economic interests that “there is no point creating rights if [a court] is not prepared to defend them, and if it is to allow permitted exceptions to swallow the substance”<sup>19</sup>. When courts avoid judicial activism and prevent the judicialisation as a protest without an independent and equitable perspective towards political pressures and threats, they contribute to the breach of the right to collective action at all levels by providing the source and motivation against its effective protection and enforcement. Thus, among several interdependent and deep-rooted obstacles, “the supremacy of economic interests, along with exceptionalist and sovereignty concerns, create the essential impediments to the right to collective action” around the world<sup>20</sup>. Still, there should always be hope for finding the strength to overcome these obstacles and to insist on a progressive protection and enforcement of labour rights including collective action at work.

### 3. Ecological Aspects of Workers' Collective Action

Even though workers' collective action is vital for the present and future of labour rights, its relationship with ecological sustainability is generally neglected in labour law and other fields. It is hard to find a court decision about the ecological dimensions of collective action at work as well. However, the urgent adaptation of workers' collective action to the new

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<sup>19</sup> A. Bogg, K. D. Ewing, *The Implications of the RMT Case*, in *Industrial Law Journal*, 2014, vol. 43, n. 3, 223.

<sup>20</sup> S. Uncular, *The Right to Collective Action under European Law and Turkish Law: What Kind of Present and Future?*, in *European Labour Law Journal*, 2018, vol. 9, no. 2, 169.

realities, changes and demands is very necessary. As widely accepted, we are facing a significant transformation period based on two crucial dimensions: ecology and technology. While both fundamentally shape the future of the world in every possible way, their direct and indirect impacts on workers and workplaces are at the highest level. The more ecological destruction gets worse, the more workers are affected negatively and their rights are violated all around the world. Since labour has always been inextricably connected to nature, climate crisis deeply affects jobs, occupational health and safety, working conditions and labour rights<sup>21</sup>. Therefore, reuniting labour and nature under employment relationship ensures a robust protection and enforcement of labour rights.

Within this scope, evaluation of the fundamental concepts such as collective interest and solidarity is essential in the light of the protection of nature. Moreover, it is crucial to examine the relationship between right to collective action (and strike) and ecology under conflicts with public authorities and employer. Accordingly, interactions of all types of collective action at work and each collective labour right with planetary wellbeing are indispensable issues to determine against the climate crisis. As Escribano Gutierrez underlines, collective action at work is “not only an instrument for achieving labour improvements, but also a legitimate means for workers to oppose the consequences of capitalism”<sup>22</sup> which covers the exploitation of both ecosystems and workers.

In addition, countries including Spain, France, Bolivia, Turkey, Italy, Ecuador and Zimbabwe have direct regulations about environmental protection in their constitutions<sup>23</sup>. Having a substantial constitutional basis with binding effects on labour regulation is highly important for enhancing ecological organising and collective action at work. As for international legal sources, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Article 12), Resolution 76/300 of the UN General Assembly on the human right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment (2022), Aarhus Convention (Article 6), European Court of Human Rights’ landmark case of Verein KlimaSeniorinnen Schweiz and

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<sup>21</sup> For a detailed and pioneering analysis in various topics and countries, see C. Chacartegui Javega (ed.), *Labour Law and Ecology*, Thomson Reuters Aranzadi, Pamplona, 2022.

<sup>22</sup> J. Escribano Gutierrez, *The Strike as an Instrument for Environment Protection*, in C. Chacartegui Javega (ed.), *Labour Law and Ecology*, Thomson Reuters Aranzadi, Pamplona, 2022, 142-143.

<sup>23</sup> Whereas there are other Latin American countries with constitutional regulations related to ecology such as Chile and Uruguay, constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia cover the rights of nature as well.

Others v. Switzerland (2024), Advisory Opinion OC-32-2025 of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (July 2025) and African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (Article 24) has the capacity to pave the way for the recognition and protection of ecological collective action at work too. Nevertheless, there is no national legislation which directly regulate ecological collective action at work around the world. Many forms of workers' collective action already are not recognised or protected under national laws unfortunately. International instruments generally lack a profound focus on ecological collective action as well. Similarly, it is not easy to encounter with explicit provisions in collective labour agreements or social dialogue documents. So, legal bases are still mostly insufficient for the recognition, protection and/or implementation of ecological collective action at work. Also, low unionisation rates and collective bargaining coverage together with anti-union practices are crucial drawbacks. Against all odds, we keep on witnessing many promising real-life examples which lead to a remarkable nature and labour synergy under workers' collective action.

In terms of the concepts embedded in workers' collective action, it is possible to find and create strong bonds between environmental protection and collective action at work. To begin with, the definition and scope of collective interest come to the fore. As a concept with no concrete definition apart from transcending purely individual interest, it has been often identified with general and indivisible interest of a group of workers. Originating from the employment relationship, collective interest has different dimensions that shape collective action at work. According to Hyman, trade union strategies of collective action root in a triangle formed between class (opposing the system), market (regulating the labour relationship and market) and society (pursuing social dialogue)<sup>24</sup>. Hence, unions choose to act as mobilisers of class struggle, bargaining agents and/or social partners. In this respect, it is crucial to determine whether and how ecology interacts with collective interest of workers when its social, economic and political dimensions are involved. If the concept of collective interest is understood restrictively by focusing on its one aspect and ignoring the climate crisis, workers' collective action will only cover employment contract, wages or working environment. Nonetheless, in most cases, the protection or destruction of nature is directly (and inevitably) connected with the improvement or worsening of

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<sup>24</sup> For more information, see R. Hyman, *Understanding European Trade Unionism: Between Market, Class and Society*, Sage Publications Ltd, London, 2001.

working conditions and the quality of work. As such, ecological aspects of workers' collective interests are of great importance and embracing them under legal regulations and organising practices leads to more effective collective action at work with wider scope, collaboration and impact.

Although there have been traditional dualities between working environment and natural environment, social and environmental conflicts besides economic and ecological interests, ecology cannot be separated from social and economic realities. In fact, most environmental conflicts end up having effects on some labour issue, whereas any unjust environmental policy will generate direct consequences for the wellbeing and safety of workers. Therefore, collective interest under the employment relationship has to be redefined with a broader scope in accordance with ecological sustainability. Workers' collective interests should cover ecological and also political interests since occupational interests and labour rights are generally intertwined with ecological and political changes and impacts. Similar to the policies and human rights, employment relationship has a multidimensional character containing ecological and political sides.

Since workers' collective interests cannot be isolated from the planetary wellbeing, their socio-economic circumstances and working conditions must consist of the protection of nature too. When workers have fair socio-economic circumstances and working conditions under decent work, climate justice and ecological sustainability increases. In linking collective interest with climate action, unions also play a growing part. Having different orientations within the class-market-society triangle, organisational capacities and leadership structures, Hampton stresses that climate discourses represent a strategic choice for trade unions and their collective action<sup>25</sup>. While trade unionists who accept the climate crisis as a market issue tend to share similar concerns with employers by prioritising market-based instruments like emissions trading, trade unionists who embrace social integration by targeting win-wins for social partners follow the state for climate policies and focus on social justice. On the contrary, trade unionists with an explicit class-oriented perspective support radical alternative social relations and structures through alliances with community and other organisations based on more militant strategies regarding transformative solidarity. It is evident that restrictive and narrow definition of workers' interests damages both labour rights and nature as

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<sup>25</sup> See P. Hampton, *Workers and Trade Unions for Climate Solidarity- Tackling Climate Change in a Neoliberal World*, Routledge, Oxon, 2015, 45-46.

well as reducing the power and potential of workers and unions in the employment relationship. So, environmental protection must be recognised as an irreplaceable requirement for ensuring or improving workers' socio-economic circumstances, working conditions and labour policies. The more ecological destruction decreases or ends, the stronger rights and protection workers will achieve.

On the other hand, so many workers around the world cannot exercise strike or other forms of protest by being outside of the scope of labour law. Whilst the right to strike under the standard employment relationship is constantly violated, atypical and new kinds of workers cannot even imagine organising a collective action. Moreover, there are many countries which regulate strike as merely a freedom or based on the decision of a trade union. In this regard, many workers are not permitted to use this fundamental right directly as workers affected from the conflict. In addition, unemployed people, pensioners, trainees and unpaid workers cannot have any access to the right to collective action. When labour and nature reconcile under the right to collective action, such kind of problematic aspects can reduce and all workers will be able to exercise ecological collective action with broader interests.

As regards solidarity, Novitz underlines "connections between solidarity and sustainability, observing that realisation of the latter entails cross-border intra- and inter-generational commitments as well as activity by civil society, including trade unions"<sup>26</sup>. Accordingly, she rejects a bounded or exclusive solidarity by adopting a holistic understanding of sustainability. Each dimension of sustainability is intertwined and co-dependent, as workers' relational attachments to social community, ecology and labour market are. Since policies based on sustainability aim to benefit both present and future generations, sustainability contains collective action across temporal and spatial borders. "Present generations are to be protected through application of agreed precepts of intra-generational redistributive justice, while inter-generational justice for future generations is to be achieved through durable environmental, economic and social policies that preserve the planet and all the sustenance of life that it can provide"<sup>27</sup>. Furthermore, collective action becomes essential in the dynamic structure of sustainability to improve collaboration across national borders and worker voice. Linking solidarity with ecology paves the way for broader cooperation, more effective

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<sup>26</sup> T. Novitz, *Sustainability as Solidarity Unbound*, cit., 24.

<sup>27</sup> T. Novitz, *Sustainability as Solidarity Unbound*, cit., 27.

labour rights and stronger justice. Ecological collective action can also strengthen transnational, inclusive and intergenerational solidarity even at workplaces without union organisation. Thus, climate crisis can be regarded as a driving force for alternative forms of organising which welcomes an ecological foundation in particular.

In this respect, it is essential to analyse the relationship between the right to collective action (and strike) and environmental protection under conflicts with public authorities and employer. Firstly, workers or trade unions can declare strike (or other collective actions) in response to the ecological activities and policies of public authorities. Collective actions aiming to; (a) influence a country's position in a world summit, (b) obtain the ratification of a state for an international agreement, (c) achieve compliance with international goals or regulations and (d) enact/withdraw certain national legislation or policies are some of the examples for this situation. Such kind of ecological collective action can easily be qualified as political since they involve government policies and political objectives<sup>28</sup>. However, political strikes are mostly considered as illegal around the world and especially purely political strikes, which have no occupational interest, are left without any labour law protection. So, it is necessary to determine how an ecological collective action against public authorities can affect occupational interests.

As in other dichotomies stated before, it is usually superficial and unrealistic to qualify a collective action as “purely” political and divide a strike into political and non-political strike. In practice, political and occupational aspects of a strike are often interconnected because a regulation or policy adopted by a government will have immediate impacts on workers or employers. Employment relationships and labour rights have deep interactions with politics. Only workers' collective action aimed at dividing a country, protesting foreign policies of some countries or creating chaos in the society may be regarded as purely political without a direct link to working conditions. Otherwise, collective action at work based on the demands against economic, social and ecological policies of public authorities and legislation deserve to be legal, usual and widespread. As Escribano Gutierrez emphasises, “it is hard to qualify as purely political those strikes that make an environmental demand”<sup>29</sup> since workers' collective action against the ecologically destructive public

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<sup>28</sup> In countries such as Spain, Netherlands, Norway and Italy, ecological strikes against public policies are deemed political and legal (See J. Vogt, R. Subasinghe, *Turning Up the Heat*, cit., 435).

<sup>29</sup> J. Escribano Gutierrez, *The Strike as an Instrument*, cit., 142.

policies and activities cannot be isolated from occupational interests and labour rights.

Work life has many interrelated dimensions which include social, economic, political and ecological interests altogether. Therefore, collective action at work can perfectly have political and occupational elements with ecological objectives. For instance, a strike against legislation which excessively restrict ecological whistleblowing at work or workers' right to disconnect proves this reality in a simple manner. Within this context, categorisation of different strikes or other collective action at work should be made carefully without being an excuse to complicate their exercise and ecological organising. It is important to highlight that ecological collective action at work must be legally recognised and protected for conflicts with public authorities as well. On top of it, when there are provisions about environmental protection under the constitution, international instruments and/or environmental legislation, public authorities and state are obliged to protect nature and prevent environmental pollution without violating them and court decisions. So, their policies and activities must always be in compliance with ecological obligations and should not damage nature and climate.

Secondly, workers or trade unions can declare strike (or other collective actions) against the ecologically harmful activities and policies of employers. Within this scope, these kind of activities and policies of employers can contain production, distribution, procurement, energy use, waste, workplace policies and conditions, business strategies and decisions, and all other ecological matters and consequences. In this regard, workers can demand the minimisation, termination or reduction of ecologically destructive activities and policies at work and/or adoption or enhancement of eco-friendly practices and policies during or outside of collective bargaining. For example, workers can exercise their right to collective action for demanding climate jobs, income protection and green pay, nature-friendly production, waste minimisation, efficient energy use, sustainable mobility plans, ecological training and skills, working time reduction, occupational health and safety and other decent working conditions. On the other hand, imposition of sanctions and/or closure of the company due to ecological damage or non-compliance with ecological regulations may have direct and immediate impacts on workers. In this case, ecological collective action at work will provide effective protection for workers regarding just transition, job security and material and moral compensation. Therefore, workers must be able to exercise as many types of ecological collective action as possible against employer because they

are vital means for the robust protection and enforcement of labour rights as long as being exercised in a peaceful and proportionate manner. Nevertheless, economic freedoms including the freedom of establishment and the freedom to provide services can be used as challenging obstacles against the right to collective action by employers, national and international courts as well as states. When the right to strike is mainly accepted as a restriction of economic freedoms and as an exception, it becomes so narrow and useless with many requirements that employers' interests prevail unjustly. In this regard, economic freedoms and business interests need to be in compliance with human rights which include the rights to collective action and strike. Especially in an era of multiple crises, ecological collective action is required for the future of labour and nature. Also, ecological collective action at work should not be recognised solely in disputes deriving from collective agreement or bargaining since it is the most powerful response against any injustices and violations of labour rights around the world. Although collective action at work has a limited scope in many countries, employers may have constitutional or legal obligations to protect nature and prevent environmental damage as being citizens at the same time. Thus, they cannot infringe their ecological duties deriving from the constitution, international instruments and/or environmental legislation and cannot commit environmental crimes outside of the collective bargaining process either. On the other hand, if collective action at work damages the nature, employers may have the competence to impose restrictions on its exercise for risk prevention and occupational health and safety<sup>30</sup>. Still, such circumstances should not be used as an excuse to restrict the rights to collective action and strike excessively. Employers' interferences with human rights must be minimal and cover the necessary proportionality with the ecological risks to be avoided. If environmental protection requires, the right to collective action may be restricted to the least extent possible in an exceptional and equitable manner.

Moreover, as in other situations, when workers have to sacrifice or minimise their right to collective action, employers should sacrifice or minimise their managerial prerogatives and economic freedoms too, since they are the parties of the same production and employment. If workers face unjust limitations or blanket bans related to their collective action, employers should not be allowed to exercise their managerial prerogatives

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<sup>30</sup> For an example in France, see J. Escribano Gutierrez, *The Strike as an Instrument*, cit., 147.

arbitrarily. Instead of minimising or banning labour rights, employers must ensure decent working conditions in order not to compel workers to take collective action. Employers must not infringe the law, principle of good faith and their obligations. Rather they should prioritise to avoid harming the nature and human rights even if sometimes their economic freedoms and interests are restricted. Otherwise, workers become deprived of their labour rights, whilst employers continue to exploit workers and nature, ignore their responsibilities and create unfair working conditions. Neither employers, nor workers can abuse their rights and act illegally. When the right to collective action is excessively restricted, postponed or banned (even in essential services, because it is mostly possible to make adequate arrangements), it becomes more problematic to establish a fair balance in the employment relationship. The more work life becomes climate-friendly, democratic, decent and equitable, the less there will be violations, domination and exploitation.

#### **4. Solution Offers Supported by Best Practices for Ensuring Ecological Collective Action at Work**

In the time of climate breakdown accompanied by several crises based on the individualisation of labour, growing digitalisation, dominance of multinational enterprises, rise of far-right politics and ongoing wars, conflicts and injustices are becoming more intense and complex. So, connecting ecology with collective action at work is indispensable for democracy, equality, planetary wellbeing and dignity by establishing not only a transnational but also an intergenerational solidarity. Since collective action at work essentially provides the proper functioning of regulation and enforcement, ecological collective action will serve as a protective shield for labour rights.

As the first step of my solution offers on ensuring ecological collective action at work, all workers regardless of their employment status must have the right to take all kinds of collective actions in issues regarding the protection of nature at the workplace and other relevant levels. Within this context, employers must have the obligation to ensure the genuine and effective exercise of workers' collective action without any blanket ban, postponement and unjust restriction too. As other obligations of employers, this obligation has to be recognised explicitly and fairly by being subject to dissuasive sanctions in case of breach under legislation, collective agreements and international instruments. In this respect, employers must not hinder trade unions and workers to take collective action in ecological matters and to involve in ecological organising. It

should be always underlined without any compromise that employers cannot violate human rights, circumvent the law and suppress collective action at work. Without denying ILO core labour standards and instruments and trying to ignore labour rights, employers should also accept the decisions of CFA and other supervisory institutions.

Due to the intertwined character of collective labour rights, freedom of association, collective bargaining and collective agreements are closely related with the protection of nature as well. Whereas trade unions should be considered as ecological actors, collective agreements can and should regulate ecological matters related to the employment relationship. The more collective bargaining is climate-friendly, the better collective agreements ensure the protection and enforcement of labour rights. Also, worker participation and representation are essential for ecological decision-making at work. Besides combining all participation rights of workers with ecology, significant examples like climate representatives, environmental committees and green union representatives pave the way for nature-friendly work organisation. Similar to the right to collective action (and strike), these rights are highly capable of enhancing worker and planetary wellbeing simultaneously with the aim of achieving socio-ecological sustainability<sup>31</sup>.

Although there is not an ILO Convention or CFA decision focusing on the alliance of labour and nature yet, it is possible to interpret them broadly since climate emergency has immediate, serious and direct effects on the world of work like no other. As CFA has already approved strikes and protests related to diverse issues including pensions, trade agreements, tax policy, social protection and labour law reform before, it will likely (and should) protect ecological collective action at work too<sup>32</sup>. Also, ILO has already acknowledged the realities of climate crisis in its Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work, Just Transition Policy Briefs, guidelines and training programmes with increasing research on it.

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<sup>31</sup> Defining these types of rights as workers' environmental rights, Blaise and Ibrahim analyse the literature and legislation in Canada, while Arabadjieva and Tomassetti focus on their classification under EU labour law and environmental law. For more information, see K. Blaise, N. Ibrahim, *Workers' Environmental Rights in Canada*, 2019, [https://cela.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Workers-Environmental-Rights-in-Canada\\_Full-Report.pdf](https://cela.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Workers-Environmental-Rights-in-Canada_Full-Report.pdf) (accessed February 23, 2026); K. Arabadjieva, P. Tomassetti, *Towards Workers' Environmental Rights- An Analysis of EU Labour and Environmental Law*, ETUI Working Paper, 2024, [https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/Towards%20workers%20environmental%20rights-an%20analysis%20of%20EU%20labour%20and%20environmental%20law\\_2024.pdf](https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/Towards%20workers%20environmental%20rights-an%20analysis%20of%20EU%20labour%20and%20environmental%20law_2024.pdf) (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>32</sup> In a similar approach, see J. Vogt, R. Subasinghe, *Turning Up the Heat*, cit., 435.

While other international instruments which recognise the right to strike or collective action should embrace their ecological aspects at work, court decisions, state policies and labour inspection must contribute to the effective protection and enforcement of ecological collective action.

As regards national regulations, exercising all kinds of collective action needs substantial recognition and protection as a fundamental right by being interpreted and implemented broadly in favour of climate justice. It must not be limited solely to disputes arising during the conclusion of a collective agreement in order not to lose its purpose and power. Also, definitions of strike, collective action, lawful and unlawful strikes must be equitable, comprehensive and eco-friendly. Scope of lawful strikes (and collective action) has to be determined fairly without emptying the essence of the right. Similarly, requirements and scope of ecological collective action at work should not prevent its effective exercise. It is evident that without ecological collective action, labour rights and decent working conditions cannot be secured.

In terms of the guarantees of the rights to strike and collective action, it is significant to emphasise that;

- provisions regarding the waiver or restriction of ecological collective action in employment contracts or collective agreements must be invalid,
- an employment contract must not be terminated for participating in the decision to take ecological collective action and/or participating or encouraging others to participate in it,
- the exercise of ecological collective action must not lead to any retaliation or penalty by itself,
- during ecological collective action, employer must not hire or employ other workers, permanently or temporarily, in place of those whose employment contracts are suspended due to the collective action,
- employer must be obliged to pay the wages and supplements of the workers involved in ecological collective action until its start date (on the regular payment day),
- workers taking ecological collective action should be free to publicise it in a peaceful manner and collect funds without any coercion,
- the right to work of those workers who do not prefer to join ecological collective action should be respected, and

- settlement of collective labour disputes (like arbitration and mediation) should not prevent ecological collective action at work and not be regulated in a manner that violates it.

Furthermore, women workers are active and indispensable actors against ecological degradation since resistance against oppression, violation and exploitation is vital for both women and nature. Destruction of nature contributes to the breach of women rights mostly due to the imposed gender roles and gendered responsibilities at the household and community. Climate crisis is not gender neutral. It affects men and women differently because women still have less economic, political and legal influence to cope with the negative impacts of ecological problems. Disparities in economic opportunities and access to productive resources also make women more vulnerable to the climate crisis since they often receive less education, are poorer and are not involved in household, community and political decision-making processes<sup>33</sup>. In addition, women are generally the first victims of climate crisis due to their overwhelming responsibility for household management along with water and food sourcing for their families. Even though the pandemic proved once again that women's leadership is pivotal in turbulent times, women and girls are underrepresented in collective actions and decision-making mechanisms against ecological issues<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, it is crucial to adopt a gender-sensitive mentality and bring inclusive, creative and feminist perspectives for shaping low-carbon strategies<sup>35</sup>. The more participation and leadership of women workers in ecological collective action increase, the more effective protection and enforcement of labour rights will be accomplished. Moreover, transformative changes in production, participation and working conditions will contribute deeply to women rights. Within this scope, women workers should be on the front lines in ecological collective action and gender equality needs to be incorporated in collective action at work too. It is vital to guarantee collective action for women workers at all levels. When collective action at work embraces the

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<sup>33</sup> For more information, see S. Habtezion, *Overview of Linkages Between Gender and Climate Change*, 2016, <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/publications/UNDP%20Linkages%20Gender%20and%20CC%20Policy%20Brief%201-WEB.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>34</sup> For more information, see Y. Aki-Sawyer, *Climate Leadership Needs More Women*, in *Social Europe*, 2022, <https://www.socialeurope.eu/climate-leadership-needs-more-women> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>35</sup> In a similar vein, see S. Fredman, *The World of Work: A Green and Feminist Future?*, in C. Albertyn et al. (eds.), *Feminist Frontiers in Climate Justice*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Glos, 2023, 131-136.

solidarity between labour and nature, women will become winners together with the whole society and our planet.

As for the best practices regarding ecological collective action at work, green bans are a pioneering and historical example with huge impacts. Green bans were initiated in Australia during 1971-1975 by the workers known as builders labourers who were employed to construct skyscrapers, shopping areas and luxury apartments due to the post-war construction boom. Supported by a grand coalition, green bans consisted of three main kinds: “to defend open spaces from various kinds of development, to protect existing housing stock from demolition to make way for freeways or high-rise development, and to preserve older-style buildings from replacement by office-blocks or shopping precincts”<sup>36</sup>. Although they were imposed in many parts of Australia, green bans mostly took place in Sydney and regional centres in New South Wales where the construction boom and the most committed branch of Australian Builders Labourers’ Federation (BLF)<sup>37</sup> were centred. This branch, namely New South Wales Builders Labourers’ Federation (NSWBLF), developed a new concept of unionism based on the principle of social responsibility of labour in May 1970 under the leadership of Jack Munday, Joe Owens and Bob Pringle. Accordingly, “workers had a right to insist their labour not be used in harmful ways”<sup>38</sup> and “they should also use their power at the point of production to do good”<sup>39</sup>. It supported the idea that organised labour should not ignore social and political issues and contest oppression and exploitation both in the workplace and society. In this regard, “these builders labourers presented themselves as protecting the many from the few and the planet from the profiteers”<sup>40</sup>.

In June 1971, the movement started in Sydney when a resident action group from the Hunters Hill sought the NSWBLF’s help in order to save Kelly’s Bush on the harbour foreshore against the construction of luxury houses by A.V. Jennings. This resident action group composed of 13 middle-class women, who called themselves the Battlers for Kelly’s Bush, had already lobbied the mayor, local council and the Premier without any success. Hence, the union asked these women to organise a local meeting

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<sup>36</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement: Workers’ Power and Ecological Radicalism in Australia in the 1970s*, in *Journal for the Study of Radicalism*, 2008, vol. 2, no.1, 65.

<sup>37</sup> In the early 1970s, this federation had around 30,000 members nationwide and covered all unskilled labourers besides certain categories of skilled labourers employed on building sites.

<sup>38</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 65.

<sup>39</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 74.

<sup>40</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 66.

to estimate the level of local support for a ban. More than 600 people attended the meeting and requested the NSWBLF formally to ban the destruction of Kelly's Bush. When the union agreed, Jennings declared to use non-union workers. Nonetheless, "building workers on a Jennings project in North Sydney sent this message to Jennings: 'If you attempt to build on Kelly's Bush, even if there is the loss of one tree, this half-completed building will remain so forever, as a monument to Kelly's Bush'"<sup>41</sup>. Jennings had to abandon its plans and Kelly's Bush still remains as a natural bushland open to public. Even though it was an unlikely alliance between the union and residents of Hunters Hill, which was a wealthy suburb little to do with the workers' movement, militant and proudly working-class NSWBLF could find a common cause with the Battlers for Kelly's Bush.

Upon this first success, many resident action groups rushed to request NSWBLF to impose similar bans. But green bans were never initiated unilaterally by the union, it was always selective in applying them. Community groups, which seek a green ban, must have been strong enough to make a meaningful alliance with the union. "In a few cases, the union refused to support a ban because the affected community was not sufficiently well organised"<sup>42</sup>. Also, all requests for union support had to be ratified in the meetings of union branch which was open to all members.

Among 54 green bans in total (more than 40 in New South Wales), another urban area rescued from the building boom was The Rocks. As the site of the first European settlement on Sydney Harbour in 1788, green ban from November 1971 until 1975 saved this suburb and historic area in the city centre of Sydney from demolition along with its low-income residents like sailors, cleaners and pensioners. It halted the re-development project which would destroy the character of this historic area and ignore its residents. So, the Rocks Resident Action Group mobilised in order to support the ban and prepared a People's Plan for the acceptable renovation in the area. NSWBLF stated clearly that it would not lift the ban until the residents were content with the actions of Sydney Cove Re-development Authority. When the new plans were proposed by the Authority in accordance with the People's Plan, green ban was lifted. In addition, Woolloomooloo, a working-class area home to

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<sup>41</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 66.

<sup>42</sup> K. Iveson, *The Sydney 'Green Bans' Show How We Can Transform Our Cities*, in *Jacobin*, 2021, <https://jacobin.com/2021/07/australia-sydney-urbanism-construction-builders-labourers-federation-nsw-green-labor-militancy> (accessed February 23, 2026).

fishermen and maritime workers, was saved in 1973 thanks to a green ban. As such, “65% of the area was retained by the Housing Commission for low-income earners under a plan that entailed a genuine socio-economic mix of residents living in medium-density buildings with many trees and landscaped surroundings”<sup>43</sup>.

While ancient trees in Royal Botanic Gardens of Sydney were protected against turning into a car park for the Opera House in 1972, Moore Park and Centennial Park were rescued from becoming a “massive, \$76 million sports centre with an 80,000-seat stadium”<sup>44</sup> accompanied by a swimming pool complex during the same year. Similarly, green ban protected the nature reserve of Riley’s Island in the north of Sydney from being sacrificed to 300 luxury home sites in 1973 which would have destroyed most of its bird and fish life. Many graceful old theatres, cinemas, churches and other historical buildings around Australia owe their lives today to the green bans movement. As Burgmann underlines, “by 1975 bans had stalled \$5,000 million in development (at mid-1970s prices), saving New South Wales from much of the cultural and environmental destruction it would otherwise have suffered”<sup>45</sup>.

Being a form of strike sometimes accompanied by boycotts, such a significant and powerful collective action did not have its own name until February 1973. But a new phrase was necessary since the traditional terminology of black ban was not appropriate. Black ban is imposed to improve wages and working conditions, whereas these bans cover both social and ecological elements: they reflected the unions’ commitment to save open spaces or valued buildings and to ensure that every citizen had a voice in the matters that affected their lives. More than 18 months after the movement had started, Jack Munday coined the term ‘green ban’ and this movement led to the integration of the word ‘green’ into politics.

It is important to underline that green bans were deeply entwined with women rights besides gender-based constructions of urban areas. Whereas women were so prominent in the resident action groups whose requests for assistance constituted the basis for most green bans, women union members were very active and leading several campaigns and rallies against ecological destruction. Within this scope, a green ban was imposed on the University of Sydney in 1973. Two philosophy graduate students from the University of Sydney proposed to conduct a course centred on

<sup>43</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 67.

<sup>44</sup> I. Maher, *Moore Park*, in *Green Bans 1971-Now*, <https://www.greenbans.net.au/component/content/article?id=26&Itemid=101> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>45</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 68.

feminist philosophy and political structures of sexual oppression. Yet “a male-dominated professorial board declared the women unfit to teach the course, despite initial approval from both the Philosophy Department and the Faculty of Arts”<sup>46</sup>. After a month-long strike, which resulted from this decision, the NSWBLF was ready to help as several buildings of the university were in urgent need of completion. A green ban was imposed and negotiations between the university and the union began. The ban was officially lifted when those two graduate students had the approval to run the course in the following year. Similarly, the NSWBLF won equal pay for women in the mid-1960s and forced employers to accept additional women workers.

Also, green bans contested against the prerogatives of private ownership in addition to the production under capitalism. The NSWBLF challenged employers’ legal benefits and successfully showed that these prerogatives can be harmful to others and detrimental to nature. In 1972, Munday articulated the principles of NSWBLF:

Yes, we want to build. However, we prefer to build urgently required hospitals, schools, other public utilities, high-quality flats, units and houses, provided they are designed with adequate concern for the environment, than to build ugly unimaginative architecturally-bankrupt blocks of concrete and glass offices... Though we want all our members employed, we will not just become robots directed by developer-builders who value the dollar at the expense of the environment. More and more, we are going to determine which buildings we will build...<sup>47</sup>.

Whilst denying and opposing employers’ longstanding right to employ others to do/build whatever and wherever the profit dictated, the NSWBLF and its thousands of active members and supporters formed an alternative public space where subordinated social groups created and shared counter discourses to redefine their identities, needs and interests. This arena attracted the devoted loyalty of different groups including union activists, progressive academics, housewives, pensioners, intellectuals and writers. With its popular slogan of ‘People Before Profits’, green bans movement provided remarkable evidence regarding the power of social movement unionism to mobilise different social

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<sup>46</sup> I. Maher, *Sydney University Women’s Course*, in *Green Bans 1971-Now*, <https://www.greenbans.net.au/component/content/article?id=28&Itemid=101> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>47</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 65-66.

groups. Moreover, the importance of urban environmental protection was repeatedly underlined because urban environmental campaigns were particularly meaningful to working class who were more vulnerable to ecologically damaging urban planning.

Green bans did not merely highlight the particular interests of working class in ecological matters, but at the same time demonstrated the workers' power to act for their interests and ability to take a leading role. "The greens bans movement reveals the capacity of those with power at the point of production to achieve far-reaching goals through the strategy of withdrawing labour"<sup>48</sup>. Within this context, green bans confirm the huge potential of the collaboration between workers, unions and many other groups against employers, bureaucracy and greed for profit. They show once again that ecological organising and union power are fundamental for the transition towards a climate-friendly future.

Nonetheless, NSWBLF did not consider green bans as a permanent solution for planetary wellbeing. Apart from the significant immediate impacts of bans in rescuing individual buildings, localities or spaces, the union hoped and aimed that the longer-term and more comprehensive effects of the green bans would be "to provoke the state into responding to the assertion of industrial muscle and indications of public support"<sup>49</sup>. Due to the wide extent of the destruction, despite the successful outcomes of green bans, many were destroyed without any law to stop demolition. However, power of these builders labourers and the popularity of the green bans forced governments at both state and federal levels to respond and initiate or improve legislation, regulation and consultation for more socially and ecologically responsible planning and development. In this regard, green bans led to important pieces of environmental legislation in Australia<sup>50</sup>. "The environment was on the political agenda, and public involvement and people power were taken seriously, due to a great extent to the moral and economic force of green bans"<sup>51</sup>. Yet, the same force and impact brought the end of green bans due to the rising tensions within and outside of the labour movement.

Although green bans were conducted for less than five years in Australia, they have a meaningful legacy as one of the most inspirational and visionary practices in labour history. The success of green bans movement

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<sup>48</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 80.

<sup>49</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 82.

<sup>50</sup> For instance; the Heritage Act of 1977 and the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act of 1979.

<sup>51</sup> V. Burgmann, *The Green Bans Movement*, cit., 82.

is essential for political ecology: it provides evidence and offers hope that coalitions between trade unions and community groups can achieve extraordinarily effective results. Also, green bans “showed us that courage, leadership and a will to take a risk can take on powerful interests and unfair laws”<sup>52</sup>. Green bans significantly influenced the local planning structures of New South Wales as well as initiated democratic national and state planning systems in which heritage and ecologically important sites became a part of development processes. Before green bans, petitions, community protests and attempts to speak to officials were constantly being ignored. Even legislatures did not have the power to prevent a demolition. But the green bans movement proved that a militant, democratic and innovative union, which accomplishes big improvements for workers, can influence local, national and international politics in a powerful way. As such, green bans became known across the world rapidly.

When all else fails and both labour and nature are facing exploitation, violation and oppression, green bans can protect the commons of public space and services together with labour rights. Therefore, the revolutionary example of green bans including the skilled leadership, effective strategies, organisational model, principles and alliance building should serve as a guide for radical activism in ecological sustainability. Fighting for labour rights requires the demand for higher standards of working conditions, sustainability and responsibility as well as ecological organising and collective action. As the strongest and largest practice which unites nature and labour, green bans must be a huge inspiration, hope and lesson for today. They are as urgent as in the 1970s against socio-ecological crises and the proof that ecological collective action at work has an enormous power to create change.

In terms of the next best practice, occupation and sit-in of workers in the wind turbine factory of Vestas Wind Systems in 2009 deserve an analysis. In April 2009, Danish firm announced that its wind turbine factory in Newport, Isle of Wight (UK) employing 525 workers and another factory in Southampton (UK) employing 100 workers would close at the end of July due to a lack of demand in northern Europe. The news of closure and job losses came when Vestas, which is the world’s largest manufacturer of wind turbines, “reported a quarterly sales rise of 59% to

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<sup>52</sup> T. Ginty, *Sydney’s Green Bans: The Workers Boycotts That Saved the City*, in *Lives & Times*, 2019, <https://livesandtimesblog.com/2019/05/12/sydneys-green-bans-the-worker-boycotts-that-saved-the-city/> (accessed February 23, 2026).

1,11 billion euros”<sup>53</sup>. Despite its rising profits and being the only large manufacturing company for wind turbines in the UK besides one of the largest employers of skilled labour in Newport, Vestas blamed the British government’s lack of commitment to renewable energy and weak currencies while offering workers a redundancy package of less than £1,000.

Within this scope, 25 workers entered the administration block of the Vestas factory in Newport on 20th July and refused to leave until the government was willing to negotiate their proposal to prevent its closure by nationalising the plant. Also, 11 of them carried out a sit-in protest at the company’s offices. Whereas workers occupying the Vestas factory were threatened with arrest and a court injunction, on 11th July, “50 protesters gathered in St. James’ Square in the town of Newport in support of the threatened workers”<sup>54</sup>. As the opposition to the closure of the factory was increasing, rallies continued in support of the Vestas occupiers too. RMT union pledged full support to these workers and its general secretary (Bob Crow) made a solidarity visit to the occupation.

Since the occupation began, the Vestas workers received wide support and solidarity from the British left including political parties and environmental groups like Greenpeace, Campaign Against Climate Change, Workers’ Climate Action and Climate Camp. As a spokesman for the Alliance for Workers’ Liberty said: the struggle of Vestas workers is crucial on at least three aspects- “it is central to the struggle for jobs, it is central to the struggle for the environment, and it is central to the struggle for rebuilding the labour movement”<sup>55</sup>. In a similar vein, a spokesman for the Campaign Against Climate Change said: “We give the workers our full support. The government should take over the plant and restart production and if there currently is not enough demand for wind turbines, then it should build more wind farms itself”<sup>56</sup>.

During the peaceful collective action, occupation was carried out at one floor of the plant and managers continued working on the rest. Police

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<sup>53</sup> <https://libcom.org/article/wind-turbine-manufacturing-workers-occupy-company-offices> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>54</sup> R. Stevens, *Britain: Vestas Workers Occupy Wind Turbine Plant to Stop Closure*, in *World Socialist Web Site*, 2009, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2009/07/vest-j23.html> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>55</sup> <https://libcom.org/article/vestas-occupiers-sacked> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>56</sup> M. Weaver, S. Morris, *Staff Occupy Isle of Wight Wind Turbine Plant in Protest Against Closure*, in *The Guardian*, 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2009/jul/21/wind-turbine-factory-occupation> (accessed February 23, 2026).

officers attended the protests as well, whilst private security guards cut the factory's communication lines and blocked all deliveries of food and water. On the other hand, "the use of mobile telephones in the Vestas occupation gave the press remarkable access to the occupiers and provided an effective platform for relaying their demands and feelings to the media"<sup>57</sup>. However, at least 5 occupiers were arrested at the plant and 11 workers participating in the occupation were dismissed. While workers complained about the double standards in the approach of UK government towards low-carbon industries and green jobs, they underlined that "it would be a tiny step financially to keep this factory open, but it would be a huge statement about the government's commitment to the green economy. Just as they could not afford to let the banks fail, they can't afford to let this fail. It's about the history of humanity"<sup>58</sup>.

After a bit more than two weeks of factory occupation and protests, Vestas workers were evicted by bailiffs upon the court order implemented by the company management on 7th August. Then they were made redundant on 12th August. Due to the closure on 31st July, more than 600 jobs were lost in Newport and 1,900 workers became redundant in northern Europe. As seen in the campaign poster and leaflet of Vestas workers and supporters, they kept fighting for the reinstatement of all workers, demanded the re-opening of the factory "under worker control, through nationalisation if necessary, buyout by a consortium if not" and supported "a decent energy strategy from both national government and Isle of Wight council"<sup>59</sup>. Also, the leader of Green Party (Caroline Lucas) had put forward a proposal which aimed at turning the factory into a workers' cooperative under the Sustainable Communities Act of 2007. These workers wanted green jobs and just transition besides believing in the need "to shift to sustainable and socially useful production"<sup>60</sup>. They aimed to save jobs, planet and Vestas at the same time, while calling on the government to intervene and save the industry. Though they could not become successful in achieving their demands and goals, Vestas workers gained an important victory in practicing ecological collective action at work and providing such an influential and prominent example for workers around the world.

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<sup>57</sup> <https://libcom.org/article/vestas-occupiers-sacked>

<sup>58</sup> M. Weaver, S. Morris, *Staff Occupy Isle of Wight Wind Turbine Plant*, cit.

<sup>59</sup> <https://savevestas.wordpress.com> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>60</sup> <https://savevestas.wordpress.com>.

As the third experience, occupation and protests of workers at Harland and Wolff in 2019 can be examined. Harland and Wolff is one of the best-known companies of Northern Ireland which was founded in 1861 and built the Titanic between 1909 and 1911. When its Norwegian parent company restructured and decided to sell Harland and Wolff, 130 ship builders, steel workers, riveters and welders occupied the shipyard on 30 July 2019 and started to protest outside the yard's gates in a call for the company to be re-nationalised. Workers locked themselves inside the gates and insisted on not leaving until there was a resolution for the 158-year-old yard to remain open. In addition, trade unions representing workers on the site (GMB and Unite) and workers demanded from British Prime Minister to create new jobs in renewable energy there. Since workers at Harland and Wolff had built parts for wind turbines before, they argued that "renewable energy jobs would serve not only as a sustainable solution, but also a practical one because of their skill set"<sup>61</sup>. They saw a huge potential in wind turbines and tidal energy, so they aimed at creating thousands of jobs as part of a green new deal and supported the need for a just transition to renewable energy.

Yet, Harland and Wolff went into administration on 6th August with the potential loss of at least 120 jobs, after its parent company had failed to find a buyer. Workers received support from local community and many countries, whereas a rally was held at the shipyard on 23rd August by union leaders from across the country. The strength of support attracted multiple serious bids from potential buyers who wanted to purchase the shipyard. In the meantime, the unions negotiated for the preservation of workers' contracts and terms of employment until the yard re-opened. Workers insisted that "it would be criminal, in the face of the climate emergency, to waste skills and productive capacity which could, at minimum cost and through government procurement, be put to use immediately to reduce at least the UK's carbon emissions"<sup>62</sup>. Furthermore, workers at the shipyard developed an alternative plan, drawing on both a detailed audit of the yard's production capacity and their own experiences

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<sup>61</sup> L. K. Gurley, *Workers Seize the Shipyard That Built the Titanic, Plan to Make Renewable Energy There*, in *Vice*, 2019, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/8xwanz/workers-seize-the-shipyard-that-built-the-titanic-to-make-renewable-energy> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>62</sup> H. Wainwright, *The Harland and Wolff Workers Want to Make Renewable Energy. A Labour Government Would Help Them*, in *Independent*, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/harland-and-wolff-belfast-occupation-nationalisation-labour-john-mcdonnell-a9071536.html> (accessed February 23, 2026).

and skills, to produce equipment and create new jobs for the renewable sector.

Two months later Harland and Wolff was bought by an energy firm (InfraStrata) and 79 workers maintained to be employed. After 2020, this firm was rebranded as Harland and Wolff Group Holdings and continued to own Harland and Wolff as a subsidiary. In January 2025, acquisition of Harland and Wolff's some facilities by another firm called Navantia UK was completed. Eventually Harland and Wolff was saved from closure many times, but there were still job losses and most importantly workers' occupation and protests for five weeks in defence of climate jobs and renewable energy could not achieve such a meaningful and visionary goal. They definitely showed far more commitment to the shipyard than the government by demanding public ownership and state-led reconstruction, just transition and green jobs. Despite the different outcome than they desired, workers of Harland and Wolff and unions successfully practiced a fundamental example of ecological collective action at work and proved that another way is possible.

Moreover, workers from different sectors and countries started to join and contribute to the Global Climate Strikes since 2019. According to ITUC, unions in many countries took part in the climate strikes by mobilising their members<sup>63</sup>. In this regard, trade unions such as CFDT in France<sup>64</sup>, CCOO and UGT in Spain, DİSK in Turkey, CGIL in Italy and TUC in the UK called for every member to participate in the climate strikes. A broad range of unions and other labour organisations in the USA participated in these strikes too. As a remarkable example, arts and culture workers, employed at the institutions including Tate Modern, Southbank Centre, National Theatre and Tate Britain, joined thousands of protesters in central London in the Global Climate Strikes on 20 September 2019. These workers left work and walked out of their workplaces to join a group of outsourced maintenance workers and members of the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) which had organised the protest. Then they marched together to join other protesters in the Global Climate Strike.

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<sup>63</sup> ITUC, *Students Strike Now for the Jobs of Tomorrow*, 2019, <https://www.ituc-csi.org/Fridays4Future-Worldwide-15March> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>64</sup> As another union from France, CGT called a strike in 2014, which lasted 3 months, in order to reverse the emissions of the Sénerval company (operating in waste valorisation) due to their harmful effects on the people in Strasbourg (See J. Escribano Gutierrez, *The Strike as an Instrument*, cit., 151).

According to a press release, workers were protesting the cultural organisations which produce huge amounts of carbon dioxide through heating, lighting, plastic use and flights<sup>65</sup>. The strike also aimed at putting pressure on the institutions to drop their oil sponsorships from the biggest fossil fuel polluters on the planet. While workers from the National Theatre drafted a petition which called on the management to acknowledge a climate emergency and join them in the strike, press release of the PCS underlined that “art and culture workers have a vital role to play in the radical changes needed to avert climate disaster” because the workers of art and cultural organisations “are in a unique position to engage citizens in the urgency, values and opportunities of a transition away from fossil fuels”<sup>66</sup>.

Following major protests led by Extinction Rebellion in London in 2019, several cultural institutions in the UK, such as Tate, the Old Vic and the Royal Court, had already declared a climate emergency. Those workers protesting on 20th September also “called on all cultural institutions to escalate their efforts to tackle climate change by committing to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, refusing fossil fuel sponsorship, running green forums, and promoting the role of Green Reps in the workplace”<sup>67</sup>. On the other hand, Culture Declares Emergency (a group of arts organisations in the UK) called on all participants to attend the general strike on 27 September 2019 as well, whilst an alliance of more than 30 creative agencies called Create and Strike was another participant in the Global Climate Strike took place in London.

In terms of tech workers, climate strikes and open letters to companies like Amazon, Google and Microsoft constitute valuable examples about the protection of labour and nature. Accordingly, more than 8,000 workers of Amazon requested the adoption of “climate plan shareholder resolution” and the release of “a company-wide climate plan” from its CEO and board of directors in an open letter of April 2019 that demonstrates the principles of;

- “public goals and timelines consistent with science and the IPCC report”,
- “a complete transition away from fossil fuels”,

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<sup>65</sup> See <https://www.frieze.com/article/arts-workers-join-thousands-protesters-climate-strike> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>66</sup> N. Polonsky, *Hundreds of Art Workers Join Global Climate Strike in London*, in *Hyperallergic*, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/518846/global-climate-strike-london/> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>67</sup> N. Polonsky, *Hundreds of Art Workers*, cit.

- “prioritisation of climate impact when making business decisions”,
- “reduction of harm to the most vulnerable communities first”,
- “advocacy for local, federal, and international policies that reduce overall carbon emissions”, and
- “fair treatment of all employees during climate disruptions and extreme weather events”<sup>68</sup>.

Since “customer obsession requires climate obsession”<sup>69</sup>, Amazon workers demanded concrete action, plans and strategies against the climate crisis by signing a letter with their names open to public. Similarly, more than 2,000 Google workers called on their employer in an open letter of November 2019 “to commit to and release a company-wide climate plan” which incorporates;

- “zero emissions by 2030”,
- “zero contracts to enable or accelerate the extraction of fossil fuels”,
- “zero funding for climate-denying or -delaying think tanks, lobbyists and politicians”, and
- “zero collaboration with entities enabling the incarceration, surveillance, displacement, or oppression of refugees or frontline communities”<sup>70</sup>.

In addition to these open letters, more than 1,700 Amazon workers and more than 1,000 Google workers participated in the Global Climate Strike on 20 September 2019 together with hundreds of workers from Tech Workers Coalition including Ecosia, Atlassian and Microsoft. As “a coalition of workers in and around the tech industry, labour organisers and community organisers”, Tech Workers Coalition is a worker-led, democratically structured and all-volunteer organisation working “in solidarity with existing movements towards social justice, workers’ rights and economic inclusion”<sup>71</sup>. Similar to the demands of Amazon, Google and Microsoft workers in their climate strike announcements about 20th

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<sup>68</sup> Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, *Open Letter to Jeff Bezos and the Amazon Board of Directors*, 2019, <https://amazonemployees4climatejustice.medium.com/public-letter-to-jeff-bezos-and-the-amazon-board-of-directors-82a8405f5e38> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>69</sup> Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, *Open Letter*, cit.

<sup>70</sup> Google Workers for Action on Climate, *Open Letter on Climate Action at Google*, 2019, <https://medium.com/@googworkersac/ruth-porat-497bbb841b52> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>71</sup> <https://techworkerscoalition.org> (accessed February 23, 2026).

September<sup>72</sup>, Tech Workers Coalition also demanded from their employers to “act with boldness and urgency, and commit to: zero carbon emissions by 2030, zero contracts with fossil fuel companies, zero funding of climate denial lobbying or other efforts and zero harm to climate refugees and frontline communities”<sup>73</sup>. It was aware of tech industry’s hidden carbon footprint, collaboration with Big Oil, “dirty role in climate change” and “repression of climate refugees and frontline communities” so that it undertook the responsibility to be a part of the solution and to hold their employers accountable<sup>74</sup>. Under the initiatives called “Google workers for action on climate”, “Microsoft workers for climate justice” and “Amazon employees for climate justice”, these workers committed to their demands and principles for many years.

In May 2023, thousands of Amazon workers walked off the job again with demands about a flexible remote work policy and renewed commitments to decrease carbon emissions to zero<sup>75</sup>. As workers emphasised with the slogan of ‘Enough is enough’, Amazon was quitting its own Climate Pledge which aimed to be net carbon-zero by 2040 and was a win for its workers after their participation in the Global Climate Strike in 2019. Since Amazon was getting worse related to its climate commitments, its workers organised a walk out one more time to push the company to move in the right direction. Within this scope, Global Climate Strikes are one of the most powerful examples related to ecological collective action at work since workers get together with people of all ages (and especially with new generations) and collaborate in unity for the future of labour and nature<sup>76</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> Google Workers for Action on Climate, *Google Workers are Striking for Climate on Sept 20*, 2019, <https://medium.com/@googworkersac/google-workers-are-striking-for-climate-sept-20-7eba2100b621> (accessed February 23, 2026); Amazon Employees for Climate Justice, *Amazon Employees are Joining the Global Climate Walkout*, 9/20, 2019, <https://amazonemployees4climatejustice.medium.com/amazon-employees-are-joining-the-global-climate-walkout-9-20-9bfa4cbb1ce3> (accessed February 23, 2026); <https://github.com/MSWorkers/for.ClimateAction> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>73</sup> <https://techworkerscoalition.org/climate-strike/> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>74</sup> <https://techworkerscoalition.org/climate-strike/>.

<sup>75</sup> See C. O’Donovan, *Amazon Workers Walkout Amid Layoffs Citing Concerns for Climate*, in *The Washington Post*, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/technology/2023/05/31/amazon-walkout-climate-strike/> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>76</sup> For a toolkit for workers to support young people in the climate strikes, see Labor Network for Sustainability, *A Climate Strike Toolkit for Workers*, 2019, <https://www.labor4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/ClimateStrike.pdf> (accessed February 23, 2026).

Being the first union-authorized climate strike in the USA, Minneapolis cleaning workers is another crucial example with successful consequences. On 27 February 2020, over 4,000 unionised cleaning workers employed at high-rise towers in Minneapolis walked off their jobs and led a tremendous march demanding that their employers take action on climate crisis. Alongside these workers and janitors who were mostly immigrants and people of colour, there were environmental organisations (like Sierra Club, MN 350, Environment Minnesota and Minnesota Environmental Justice Table) and high school students. As members of Service Employees International Union (SEIU) Local 26, workers were employed by over a dozen different subcontractors including U.S. Bank, Wells Fargo, United Health Group and Ameriprise. Since the strikers were a colourful coalition from all over the world with different religions and races, SEIU Local 26 provided simultaneous interpretation in Somali, Vietnamese, Spanish, Nepalese and Amharic. The purpose of this 24-hour climate strike was pushing for demands such as the creation of a Community Green Bargaining Table, adoption of a Green Cleaning Training Program with more eco-friendly cleaning products and closure of the HERC incinerator which was a powerful source of greenhouse gases and pollution harming nearby communities.

A week after the climate strike, Minneapolis cleaning workers won a new contract which covers “funding for a green cleaning initiative to reduce waste and water and energy consumption, while transitioning away from toxic chemicals, with the goal of significantly lowering carbon emissions from buildings”<sup>77</sup>, wage increase, reduced cost of health insurance and incorporation of sexual harassment policies. Although SEIU Local 26 has had a concern with ecological issues since 2009 and climate has been a popular topic among its members, it took hard work to build a coalition with joint green demands for four months. Also, focusing on bargaining for the common good might not be useful, unless the union was eager to make sacrifices and ultimately strike. As an innovative method for bringing trade unions and allies together which “goes beyond the limits to traditional collective bargaining and jointly shape bargaining campaigns that advance the mutual interests of workers and communities alike”<sup>78</sup>,

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<sup>77</sup> I. Altamirano et al., *Lessons From the First Union Climate Strike in the U.S.*, in *Labornotes*, 2020, <https://labornotes.org/2020/04/lessons-first-union-climate-strike-us> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>78</sup> J. Brecher, *First U.S. Union-Authorized Climate Strike?*, in *Labor Network for Sustainability*, <https://www.labor4sustainability.org/strike/first-u-s-union-authorized-climate-strike/> (accessed February 23, 2026).

bargaining for common good was surpassed by Minneapolis cleaning workers based on “striking for common good”<sup>79</sup> which implies ecological sustainability against the carbon emissions of corporate office towers. Visionary mentality of workers, successful results, efforts and collaborations of the union, and organising an ecological collective action in the USA are outstanding elements of this best practice. As a pioneering movement in Minneapolis, it will influence many workers and unions in Minnesota, USA and around the world by serving as a compass.

Last but not least, public transport workers’ strike in Germany is an inspiring example that connects labour with nature. German trade union Verdi, which represents around 90,000 public transport workers from more than 130 municipal companies, called an almost nationwide public transport strike for the second time in February 2024. Accordingly, the strike took place from 26th February to 2nd March, whereas the main strike day was planned for 1st March (Friday) coinciding with the day of climate protests organised by the Fridays For Future. Under the banner ‘We Drive Together’, Verdi joined forces with the climate movement for better working conditions (including shorter working time without wage loss, longer rest periods between shifts and more holiday with higher holiday pay), high additional investment in the underfunded public transport sector in Germany by 2030 and “socially just transport sector transition”<sup>80</sup>. According to the Association of German Transport Companies (VDV), 110,000 new workers have to be hired across Germany by 2030 to achieve climate targets in the transport sector<sup>81</sup>.

As regards the motivation behind this unusual alliance between local transport workers and climate activists, which also covers the students who have been leading massive school strikes, it is sharing common goals based on the cooperation of labour and nature. Whilst prioritising public transport with reliable services and decent jobs over private cars remains a significant part of decarbonising the transport sector, climate-friendly working conditions for public transport sector workers are vital for their health and safety, participation and rest. In addition, Fridays For Future’s collaboration with Verdi is crucial “for mutually reinforcing acceptance of common goals and exerting pressure on public sector employers for

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<sup>79</sup> J. Brecher, *First U.S. Union-Authorized Climate Strike*, cit.

<sup>80</sup> F. Quecke, *Climate Protesters in Germany Join Forces with Public Transport Workers to Push for Change*, in *Clean Energy Wire*, 2024, <https://www.cleanenergywire.org/news/climate-protesters-germany-join-forces-public-transport-workers-push-change> (accessed February 23, 2026).

<sup>81</sup> See F. Quecke, *Climate Protesters in Germany*, cit.

higher wages”<sup>82</sup>. Whereas both parties started to trust and understand each other, mutual support and effort provided stronger voice, new sense of purpose, creative strategies along with wider experience and networks. Although this alliance has been developing since 2019, acting together could not be postponed any longer. In March 2025, Verdi called for a warning strike again due to the inadequate financial offer of Berlin’s public transport company (BVG) and ongoing inflation. Nevertheless, this remarkable ecological collective action is still a big victory as it links labour struggle with climate.

### 5. In Lieu of Conclusion

Workers’ collective action has always been and continues to be a powerful and irreplaceable tool for societal transformations and social justice. As its necessary reflection in the era of socio-ecological crises, ecological collective action at work is the key to ensure decent working conditions and extensive labour rights. Instead of being ignored as an “old way” practice, it must be regulated under legislation and collective agreements fairly and its exercise must become easier. Since ecological collective action at work is crucial for the future of workers and our planet, it should not be regarded automatically and eagerly as illegal, abusive or exception. Of course, it has limits and workers should not abuse their right to collective action. But employers should not deny this human right either and should face dissuasive sanctions, restrictions and more responsibility with their economic activities otherwise.

As an ecological actor, strong and independent unions are indispensable for the effective exercise of the ecological collective action at work. Thus, there must be an increase in trade union density and collective bargaining coverage similar to the fair functioning of unions such as active participation of members, union democracy, abundance of resources and innovativeness, and high quality of decision-making and procedural mechanisms. Ecological organising is an important opportunity for trade unions to introduce a fresh, powerful and inclusive purpose to renew themselves in methods of activity and solidarity, whilst for workers to embrace a pro-union mentality. Also, raising awareness of ecological collective action at work and its best practices should be prioritised together with actively taking part in all political processes regarding its legalisation, enforcement and protection in cooperation with unions and

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<sup>82</sup> F. Quecke, *Climate Protesters in Germany*, cit.

organisations including ETUC and ITUC. Since women are affected disproportionately by socio-ecological crises, ecological collective action has to adopt gender equality with more participation and leadership of women workers as well. Being a unique element of nature-friendly worker organising, ecological collective action at work has the capacity to be a robust antidote to the violations of labour rights. Accompanied by ecological labour legislation, fair court decisions and labour inspection as well as a mentality far away from greed for profit and human-centrism, ecological collective action at work can achieve a magnificent success for reuniting labour and nature in a changing world.



**ADAPT** is a non-profit organisation founded in 2000 by Prof. Marco Biagi with the aim of promoting studies and research in the field of labour law and industrial relations from an international and comparative perspective. Our purpose is to encourage and implement a new approach to academic research, by establishing ongoing relationships with other universities and advanced studies institutes, and promoting academic and scientific exchange programmes with enterprises, institutions, foundations and associations. In collaboration with the Centre for International and Comparative Studies on Law, Economics, Environment and Work, (DEAL) the Marco Biagi Department of Economics, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, ADAPT set up the International School of Higher Education in Labour and Industrial Relations, a centre of excellence which is accredited at an international level for research, study and postgraduate programmes in the area of industrial and labour relations. Further information at [www.adapt.it](http://www.adapt.it).

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