

Chapter 6: Discussion and Conclusions

Abstract

This last chapter sees me critically discuss the UK conservative political legacy regarding both green jobs and the Green Jobs Taskforce (GJT), and (un)intended consequences arising for stakeholders involved. I then examine new conservative British approaches, UK press and media views, and Sunak's own green future, including his actions in his late summer 2023 reshuffle. I add commentary on UK Labour's green plan and ask where are we now with UK green jobs, and where are we going? I partly answer this question with a critical discussion of Rishi Sunak's key net zero speech of 20 September 2023. I close this study and book with some study limitations, policy and practitioner implications and future research ideas.

Keywords UK • Conservatives • Politics • Legacy • Stakeholders • Media • Sunak • Labour

The UK conservative legacy

Part of the new tradition emerging over the last few decades regarding the green concern historically within the British conservative political party (hereafter UK conservatives) is one of policy change, budget cuts and missed opportunities. Their new and changed policies after Brexit threaten UK environmental protections, as one leading water provision study argues that the British government's 25-year environmental plan produced a 'zombification' of UK environment policy. Additionally, no serious governance system enforcing previous European nature policies exists, former EU Habitats and Birds Directives are 'most at risk' (Manchester Friends of the Earth, 2018, pp.1-3), and some see the UK conservatives as 'polluting your air' because they 'tried to avoid tackling killer air pollution that is so toxic it is illegal' (Morning Star, 2017, p.1). Further, the conservative UK government seem set to adopt some already-decided outcomes, as Minister Michael Gove suggested that wind farms or nuclear power stations 'are the only clean energy sources that the UK government will consider' (Rayner and Swinford, 2017, p.2), which the new PM Rishi Sunak supported, in backing "more nuclear or offshore wind" (Riley-Smith and Maidment, 2023, p.1). Moreover, the UK conservative party's financial legacy is one where the years under former Chancellor George Osborne (2010-2016) saw the 'largest budget cuts of any UK government' fall on the environment department, which were 'equal to 57% in real terms over the course of two Parliaments'. Then, the financial settlement supposedly left 'other areas such as wildlife conservation, air quality and water pollution, forced to manage cuts of up to 80% over the two Parliaments, and to more than 5,000 redundancies' too (Howard, 2015, pp.1-2).

More recently, the UK conservatives have moved from Boris Johnson's Ten Point Green Jobs Plan and GJT to Liz Truss's pro-fracking interventions, and now onto Rishi Sunak's so-called 'ambition'¹ to invest up to £20 billion of UK public taxpayer's money² into untested and unproven carbon capture utilization and storage (CCUS). However, Sunak seems unable to

¹ This is an ambition, because 'this £20 billion figure does not appear in Chancellor Jeremy Hunt's Spring 2023 Budget formal costings, or to be spent before the next UK general election in 2024/5, meaning it may either be dropped if the conservatives lose this election or be funded through levies if they win' (Electrical Review, 2023, p.1).

² Roughly £3.5 billion per year between 2030 and 2040 (Gatten and Gutteridge, 2023, p.1).

organize urgent upgrades to the electricity grid, as Britain moves away from gas for heating and towards using electric vehicles (Gatten, 2023a p.4). Apparently 'green' policy initiatives are missed opportunities to invest more public money into home insulation, solar energy and on-shore wind, and the latest in a long line of UK conservative environmental 'policy mistakes' or 'policy disasters' (cf. Dunleavy, 1995) which can be traced back to PM Theresa May's budget cuts to key green government departments, and later PM David Cameron's "get rid of the green crap" era (Murray, 2021, p.4). Additionally, the UK conservatives' £3 billion clean air strategy 'did not include a car scrappage scheme, or address pollution from construction, farming and gas boilers, and passed [action on them] to local authorities' (BBC News, 2017, p.5), i.e., a devolution of such powers to local government authorities some of which are run by opposition UK Labour politicians. Such political devolution by the UK conservatives on green policy is advocated by Chris Skidmore's 2023 Net Zero Review, which forms an arguable political checkmate, because local UK Labour politicians now also have to manage this new green circumstance too.

UK conservative leaders and politicians may point to some green policy gains, namely: banning new diesel and petrol vehicles from 2040, a £255 million fund to help councils tackle emissions (BBC News, 2017, p.1), the UK offshore wind sector success story (which is amongst the very largest globally), their original Ten Point Green Plan under Boris Johnson, the GJT, a £3 billion clear air strategy and Rishi Sunak's most recent CCUS investment ambition. Additionally, their focus on green policy has produced a large and significant pro-green Conservative Environment Network (CEN group within the UK Parliament). Here, within Sunak's Cabinet, he may need the support of such CEN MPs to get his other policies through the House of Commons, as former PM Boris Johnson's resignation and subsequent letter critical of Sunak's green policies has promoted a split in the UK conservative party. This development saw a new National Conservatism (NatCon UK) conference in May 2023 at Westminster addressed by Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg (see Frost, 2023a, p.19; Somerville, 2023, p.5), and also a different new group emerge called Conservative Democratic Organisation (CDO) (Elgot, 2023, p.2), who wish to reinstall what they call "the" party democracy, i.e. grass-roots based UK conservative party members. This internal party split may not be good for the British green jobs agenda, as for the UK conservatives 'there is no obvious ideological homogeneity on show' (Daily Telegraph, 2023a, p.15), and for many others it means more a fractured political debate, infighting, and navel-gazing on environmental policy instead of the government being laser-focused on enacting it (BBC Newsnight, 2023a). Thus, this development conveys the fate of all the different politicians involved, including prior UK conservative leaders such as Boris Johnson and Liz Truss.

(Un)intended consequences arising

A tragedy for British workers emerging from the UK conservative legacy above lies in employee voices not being seen or heard much in formulating the original British green jobs plan by Boris Johnson, i.e., a lack of opportunities for such UK citizens, plus the constricted role for, and marginalization of, worker's groups within the British GJT itself. Such labour exclusions even extend to the UK and Irish HR profession, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), not formally being on the GJT itself either! Ergo, Boris Johnson's green jobs plan and his GJT have the unintended consequence of looking like yet another employee voice 'failure' in UK HRM studies (cf. Wilkinson, Knoll, Mowbray and

Dundon, 2021). Indeed, if British workers are not trusted to build and drive forward a new green(er) UK economy, then who will? For all its fanfare, the GJT fails to answer this key question and is thus a missed opportunity to gain progress in British workforce greening. The GJT report also suffers from significant implementation and delivery issues, and a lack of serious, sustained levels of new long-term UK government funding to support new British green job creation. Thus, the findings in this research monograph, therefore, raise important questions on which stakeholders will now 'buy into' the GJT, and if not so many do so, whether it is instead seen as a stereotypical, classic political ruse, i.e. who will champion, enact and fully deliver the GJT recommendations after the GJT's original organizer, former UK PM Boris Johnson left the political scene?

As such, the Boris Johnson and Rishi Sunak governments have not seemingly got 'green jobs done', because of the limitations of British state interventionism, which was and is itself facilitated and advanced by a conservative anti-state ideology and the arguably chaotic personality and leadership of both Johnson and Sunak too. Ergo, failures in the UK green jobs plan and the GJT arise, and with more successful counterparts being enacted elsewhere in the USA and EU, the British GJT seems like a key, missed political opportunity to generate new UK-based green employment with deleterious consequences for UK worker voice(s). Instead, the failure of the GJT now opens the door to more hawkish, extreme British right-wing conservative climate-sceptic voices and their UK media/press supporters (detailed earlier) to potentially fill the political vacuum emerging. Such voices perhaps include Steve Baker's Net Zero Watch (NZW) group, the Global Warming Policy Foundation (GWPF) and Conservative Way Forward (CWF) (cf. Pickard-Whitehead, 2023, p.7), as all three groups seek to engage in anti-green rhetoric and political spin to support a classic conservative, highly political and ideological 'business-as-usual' no change type scenario, which stimulates UK-based fossil fuel industry players and only enacts decent, green jobs at the margins. In doing so, all three political groups seemingly do little to drastically alter the status quo of British industry and move it away from historic stagnation and decline, and into a brighter, greener future. Any such class antagonisms arising from the pro-green/anti-climate tensions seen above may 'erupt in a disruptive way' (cf. Goodwin, 2014, pp.170-171), which Steve Baker MP argues, as he states that due to their high costs and business and public affordability issues, the UK governments green job proposals 'could provoke a political crisis greater than those around the Poll Tax' of the late 1980s and even spark riots in Britain (Baker in Bet, 2021, p.6). But Baker's NZW group seems like a climate sceptic one, and as a potentially future UK conservative party leader, he might arguably be seen to be encouraging more authoritarian-style governance.

However, a clear majority of Britons also voted for a net-zero environment policy in the last 2019 UK general election, British uptake of electric vehicles (EVs) is at an all-time high, most UK citizens 'say they want the environment prioritized in the economic recovery' and climate change has topped the list of national UK concerns for a third time (ipsos.com, 2020, p.1). Further, a majority (54%) of Britons think jobs and investment in renewables are 'just as important' as securing low-cost power, and 11% want to prioritize the industrial/job benefits of the sector' (Bennett, 2022, p.1). Indeed, an Office for National Statistics survey finds climate change and the environment ranked third in 2023 after the cost of living and the health service (Toynbee, 2023, p.2), and some commentators add that onshore wind is: 'a) massively popular with Tory voters, b) a Great British invention, c) cheap d) and low

carbon' (Bell, 2022, p.1). Yet recent polls in the summer of 2023 also show 51% of Britons 'would like to do more to help' the climate but 'cannot afford to' (Gibbons, 2023, p.6). Hence UK politics and public opinion matter, especially regarding the role of the British state, as the USA, EU and China have all seen much state intervention in green policy and are all leading the way on green job growth, while less interventionist and more cautious regimes like the UK government are struggling to keep up (Leake, 2023, p.18). Here, the left-leaning British Institute for Public Policy and Research (IPPR) think-tank argues that the UK needs to spend £25 billion until 2032 on green manufacturing industries to achieve a comparable funding level to US and EU green industry investments (at £137 billion and £134 billion each respectively), as not investing in them means importing such green goods (Leake, 2023, p.18).

New conservative British approaches

As a postscript herein, it seems pertinent to say something about the new UK PM Rishi Sunak's own green credentials and policy programme, and new Labour policies under leader Sir Kier Starmer too. But this is a very rough sketch below at the time of writing (late Summer 2023), as we all need to know a whole lot more about them to comment more and to do so both fairly and wisely. For now, my initial thinking is that the new Rishi Sunak-led British conservative government appear to inspire little confidence either of a green policy re-fresh or a new start regarding the UK green jobs policy or of his leadership and regime helping to generate many more new, decent British-based green jobs. Why? This is because he: went ahead with opening a new coal mine in Whitehaven, Cumbria, UK; facilitated 100-odd new oil and gas drilling licences in the North Sea; earmarked up to £20 billion into carbon capture use and storage (CCUS) technology; rarely mentioned the climate crisis as Chancellor, and rarely mentions it much now as PM; has not stopped development of the Sizewell C nuclear power station; has opened up permits for more short-haul internal flights; took a plane, and not a train, to travel 80 miles from London to Southampton; and had to be embarrassed into attending the United Nations COP conference (Renwick, 2022; 2023). Moreover, Sunak is reported to have said that he could abandon green policies that cost British consumers – as he “doesn't unnecessarily [want to] give people more hassle and more costs in their lives [because] that's not what I'm interested in and prepared to do” (in Crerar, 2023, p.2), he cancelled his government's pledge to enact a law banning UK coal power generation from October 2024 (Oliver, 2023a, p.14), his senior aides say that Sunak's approach to net zero by 2050 is that “he's not opposed to it – he's just not interested” in it (Smyth, 2023a, p.1), and he approved the controversial Rosebank oil and gas field in September 2023. Further, an internal government audit found green measures being 'allowed to run off course' under Sunak's tenure, including reducing packaging, plastic bottle returns, recycling initiatives, tree planting and woodland creation (Savage, 2023, p.1).

Here, it is not that Sunak is deviating from official UK conservative party policy (i.e., achieving net zero by 2050), as he often talks about doing so. Rather, it is more that he is implementing it differently, because he seems decidedly non-green or neutral in his character and his changing, personal behaviors, and perhaps does not know what to say or do regarding the ecological concern. This impression was further enhanced in mid-2023 when Sunak had little reply to the stinging riposte by the British climate watchdog (CCC) that his government's progress on net zero is “worryingly slow, and markedly less” than in

2022 (in Thomas-Peter, 2023, p.1), the resignation of longstanding UK climate Tsar Minister Zac Goldsmith, whose excoriating criticism is that Sunak is “simply uninterested and practices apathy” regarding the environment (in Scott, 2023a, p.1), and comments by resigning government minister Nadine Dorries MP that “you simply don’t care about the environment” (in Sky News, 2023a, p.5), which for Zac Goldsmith imply that Britain had now “stepped off the world stage” (in Tominey, 2023a, p.21). Additionally, other UK conservative politicians like former COP 26 President Alok Sharma MP argue that Britain needs £327 billion of investment to reach net zero by 2050 but has only committed £22.5 billion, and Chris Skidmore adds that “to follow a ‘not zero’ path would lead not only to further environmental crisis but a future economic crisis too” (in Helm and Harvey, 2023, p.15).

Indeed, Sunak appears ‘defensive and petulant when criticized’ on television (Shipman, 2023, p.7), and he seems much more comfortable talking about business and finance policy issues, which is predictable considering his background as a hedge fund manager and his Stanford MBA education, and his climate apathy may be influenced by or come from Donald Trump’s climate skepticism/denial (detailed in Chapter 1) seeping into UK politics via his fellow politicians in the conservative NZW group and other UKIP politicians too (Logan, 2017, p.1). Certainly, Sunak’s announcement of billions for CCUS was made when British Parliamentarians were in recess (not attending), so no debate on it was possible (BBC Newsnight, 2023b), in late summer 2023, Sunak said that he is ‘on the motorist’s side’ (Malnick, 2023a, p.1) and that his use of a private jet to make internal UK flights “is the most efficient use of my time” (Grant, 2023, p.15). But such actions appear risky for Sunak, as some see that his government seems to be politicizing and vilifying net zero (Atkins, 2023, p.1), and others state that Sunak is not acting in the national interest (Murray, 2023a; 2023b). Indeed, his latest oil and gas plus pro-CCUS drive appears tied together, which is problematic, because concerns arise that CCUS ‘is viewed by oil giants as a “free lunch” to excuse further drilling rather than decarbonizing’ (Wheeler, Boothman and Spencer, 2023, p.2). Such outcomes are perhaps expected, as *The Guardian* newspaper links Sunak’s family firm to oil giant BP³ (Walker, 2023a, p.1).

Sunak is now engaging in politicking and electioneering ahead of the next UK general election in 2024, as he characterizes his political opponents in Labour as ‘Just Stop Oil’ protestors (Smyth, 2023b, p.10), perhaps blocking progress, supporting strikes, being dreamers and utopians, obsessed with un-realistic climate targets and having fixed ideas, while he alternatively portrays his own UK conservative party as motorist-friendly, flexible, making climate progress, being pro-trade, realistic, reducing costs and therefore reliable and trustworthy. So, Sunak is trying to put clear dividing lines between himself and UK Labour politicians, working to shore up his position with his supporters (about being pro-motorist and pro-oil and gas), looking to gain new votes in Scottish oil constituencies, and wanting to win more votes overall through his concern on reducing British voter energy bills, and relating his green policy to ‘pragmatism’ – which might resonate with UK public notions of ‘common sense’ policy-making (see *The Daily Telegraph*, 2023a, p.15).

³ While Sunak’s former Energy Minister Theresa Villiers MP also had shares in Shell (Sky News, 2023b, p.1).

However, costs also arise for Sunak in pursuing green policy as an electoral ‘wedge issue’ and arguable culture war (Mahmood, 2023a, pp.1-2), as the British think-tank Onward estimates any rollback on green targets could cost Sunak’s conservatives up to 1.3 million votes at the next election, or a quarter of their current voters, and put off ‘millions of wavering supporters’ too (Payne, 2023, p.19). Additionally, a 2023 Opinium poll revealed most UK conservative (Tory) voters planning to switch to Labour feel Sunak ‘has not done enough on climate change’ (Vaughan, 2023a, p.8), and UK Tory chiefs worry about losing up to around 1.7 million rural votes from households who cannot afford to replace their oil heating systems (Somerville, 2023, p.4). Here, are Sunak’s conservatives using such similar ‘votes won versus votes lost’ figures as a smokescreen to push through their own more ‘realistic’ and pro-fossil fuel policies? I say this as the most recent climate discussion in the serious UK broadsheet conservative-supporting political press and media circles has now seemingly descended to new a low point, which has six parts detailed below.

UK press and media views

Firstly, a steady drip-feed of arguably negative noise and news from UK conservative politicians exists (The Daily Telegraph, 2023b), such as: Minister Suella Braverman MP in *The Daily Telegraph* labelling British Labour leader Starmer as being “in bed” with pro-climate group donors such as Just Stop Oil because he gained £1.5 million from one of their backers (see Gutteridge, 2023, p.4), yet Starmer also said such groups should “just stop”, and accused them of “arrogance” in their pro-climate stunts (Penna, 2023a, p.4). Here, Sunak’s former UK Energy Secretary Shapps added that Labour has “an ideological vendetta against British energy independence [which] risks hundreds of thousands of jobs” after industry sources claimed that Labour announced it would stop all new drilling licences in the North Sea if it wins the next election (in Oliver, 2023b, p.4), which Starmer then rejected, as it may mean fewer jobs and votes in areas he needs to win (Daley, 2023a, p.20). Starmer is also characterized as being ‘a cheerleader for a tiny, tiresome pressure group’ (The Daily Telegraph, 2023c, p.15), and an apparent ‘revolt’ is happening from London Labour MPs over the expanded Ultra-Low Emission Zone (ULEZ) scheme, despite Starmer saying it was a “difficult decision that had to be made” (Diver, Gibbons and Leather, 2023, p.6). Here, conservative Shapps states that Labour’s energy policy “represents a clear and present danger to national security”, that Labour has ‘anarchist allies’, an ‘insane plan’ (Shapps, 2023a, p.5) and a ‘green underbelly’ (in The Sunday Times, 2023, p.24). Some conservative media commentators add that Labour has ‘reformist rhetoric’, whereas ‘there’s nothing there’, and that Labour’s Rachael Reeves Green Prosperity Plan ‘was effectively shelved. Quite an embarrassment’ (Nelson, 2023a, p.14). Further, others state that Labour’s net zero plans need ‘3,000 onshore turbines’ to work too (Riley-Smith, 2023, p.1).

Secondly, offshore British wind farm development executives describe former Energy Secretary Shapps ‘as a “remote” figure who is reluctant to engage with company bosses’ (Chan and Oliver, 2023, p.27), and someone: not always keen to listen to threats to such large wind projects like increasing costs, obscure planning rules and reduced subsidies, while the latest round of auctions for British renewable energy licenses has ‘hit the rocks’, meaning ‘slowly, but surely, the government is watering down its environmental agenda’ (Warner, 2023a, p.21). Instead, UK ‘ministers remain bullish about the wind industry’s

prospects, with Shapps dismissing new offshore wind competition from the US' because "we are decades ahead" (in Oliver and Chan, 2023, p.31).

Thirdly, right-of-centre British commentators, politicians and media outlets are characterizing (and stereotyping?) green enthusiasts as a 'snobby climate-change-deranged middle-class' and a 'Tesla army' (Long, 2023, p.23), 'metropolitan elite green zealots' (McCartney, 2023, p.19), the 'laptop elites of Davos' (Orlowski, 2023, p.18), and groups where 'environmental extremists' practice 'eco-fascism' and a minority of immoderates' exists (Tominey, 2023a, p.21). They add that net zero is 'terrible for the economy', and 'there is a 'backlash' against it (Marlow, 2023a, p.34; 2023b, p.20), as a 'no growth green group' emerges (Riley-Smith and Martin, 2023, p.1). They describe 'unpopular green net zero policies' (Frost, 2023b, p.5) and 'net-zero dogma' (Moore, 2023, p.18). UK Minister Michael Gove asks not to treat "the cause of the environment as a religious crusade" (in Malnick, 2023b, p.1), and greens are seen to engage in 'apocalyptic alarmism' (The Times, 2023b, p.23). Sir Jacob Rees-Mogg MP comments about 'unpopular, expensive green policies' (in Penna, 2023b, p.6), the net zero agenda is 'filled with greenwash solutions that achieve nothing' (MacKinlay, 2023, p.6), 'middle-class zealots and extremist environmentalists' exist (Tominey, 2023b, p.19), who practice 'climate hysteria' (Daley, 2023b, p.20), and that 'we will soon face energy outages, electric cars that can't be charged and heat pumps that don't work' (Heath, 2023a, p.16). Moreover, other evidence is that lobbyists for gas boilers are attempting to delay UK government-led household heat pump installations, and instead promote hydrogen to extend the life of the gas industry regardless of hydrogen's unsuitability (i.e., hydrogen may be expensive, inefficient, leaky, dangerous and high-carbon) (Harvey and Cooke, 2023, p.2).

Fourthly, the developments above sit alongside countless anti-net zero editorials and other pieces in the leading UK conservative political newspaper, *The Daily Telegraph*, including UK Labour being 'wedded to disastrous ideas on environmentalism' (2023d, p.19) using a cloud of extravagant rhetoric' (2023e, p.15), and there being 'an opportunity here for the government to create a new dividing line in British politics and be on the side of the ordinary voter by prioritizing cheap energy and reliable supplies' (2023f, p.19). They comment on 'the net-zero poll tax' of green levies on citizens, being a question of whether 'our politicians are intent on making people poorer in the name of net zero?' (2023g, p.17), criticize 'all these pointlessly punitive measures' (2023h, p.17), and request to 'change the ludicrous net zero timetable' (2023i, p.15). They add criticism of 'anti-car zealots' (2023j, p.19), 'arrogant, unthinking greenery' (2023k, p.17), that 'Rishi Sunak is finally standing up to the green Blob' (2023l, p.17), and 'how the political Left captured the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) (Heffer, 2023, p.1). Additionally:

"Making net-zero legally binding by 2050 must count among PM Theresa May's very worst acts⁴ ... where is the cost-benefit analysis of net zero?... the conservatives should consider offering a referendum on net zero" (The Daily Telegraph, 2023m, p.17).

⁴ Some argue that it was introduced via secondary legislation with brief debate and 'no Parliamentary vote' (Grant, 2023, p.15).

To counter, former ministers like Alok Sharma MP urge the UK government to keep the political consensus on achieving net zero, and British business leaders, scientists and politicians warn that diluting climate policies would be very unpopular with voters, undermine global efforts towards net zero and hurt Britain's green credentials too (Savage, Helm and McKie, 2023, p.1).

Fifthly, other net zero criticisms include ones that it 'risks blackouts' (Gatten, 2023b, p.8), contains 'irrational environmental schemes and eco-authoritarianism' (Johnston, 2023, p.14), and that 'Scotland is now the testing ground for net-zero madness, and green policies that prioritize ideology over living standards' (Harris, 2023, p.23). Electric vehicles (EVs) are now seen to cause a 'pothole crisis', due to EVs weighing more and causing more wear applied to roads through asphalt cracking and expanding (Simpson and Clark, 2023, p.1), and a generation of children are being fed a never-ending "dark green" gloom narrative' (Nelson, 2023b, p.16).

Sixthly, some arguably more climate curios/sceptic commentators like former Spectator editor Fraser Nelson argue that 'the planet's future is brighter than many think', and 'good news' exists, such as fusion research in Oxfordshire, cleaner air 'than in any time in living memory', and climate-related deaths falling 'by about 90% throughout the past century', alongside apparently encouraging statistical developments (Nelson, 2023c, p.18). Others use statistics on more global deaths arising from cold weather to argue that 'warming has meant fewer people dying' (Ridley, 2023, p.16), and Nelson adds that 'adaptation and tech give us the tools to handle extreme weather, [meaning] we have no reason to fear the summer' (Nelson, 2023b, p.16). Such comments ignore the fact that heatwaves are a dangerous climate phenomenon for many people suffering from them – which tend to be black women in much poorer countries (Renwick, Clark and Crichton, 2024). Most recently, news channels such as GB News in August 2023 seem to have moved the UK down to a new and even lower level of the climate debate, in showing a video of two presenters laughing at their guest Alex de Koning describing the process of how the human body dies through 'wet bulb' like heatstroke, as him making 'ridiculous comments', and then asking him to 'grow up' (The London Economic, 2023).

Sunak's future

Whatever the truth and accuracy are about the trends and taste in the UK climate debate above, Rishi Sunak's new stance on the climate may not produce (m)any new green jobs, as he seems to be repeating the same policy mistakes or disasters (cf. Dunleavy, 1995) on green policy that former conservative UK leaders Cameron, May and Johnson all made, because there is plenty of time until the next election for the British media to unpick Sunak's new pro-fossil fuels, pro-motorist and pro-private jet approach. Further, Sunak's former energy deputy Shapps stressed his new department title of energy first (Nelson, 2023c, p.18; Shapps, 2023b, p.27), which Shapps's replacement Claire Coutinho has continued, and means its' other title of net zero is perhaps a secondary priority. In doing so, Sunak may be on a political road to nowhere here, as UK voters do not like broken promises (Payne, 2023, p.19), which arguably include ones Sunak and his Cabinet have already made on achieving net zero by 2050. Further, Sunak arguably gives the impression of being a mini-Donald Trump in treating Britain like his own personal fiefdom, as he uses words in his

media interviews like: “I think/my interests/I am not prepared/my private flights” (above), which seem self-centred, and perhaps non-green. Indeed, further evidence of UK government policy lying in the hands of single politicians is noted elsewhere, as Minister Gove decided to press ahead with a new UK coal mine and to deny leading retailer Marks & Spencer the ability to develop their asbestos-riddled flagship London Oxford Street store, which their Chief Executive described as a ‘capricious and chilling’ decision, riding ‘roughshod over the facts and experts’ (Machin, 2023, p.23). Gove additionally announced that the British government ‘will scrap EU-era pollution laws which prevent homes being built’ (Oxley, 2023, p.2). Thus, is some UK power-making now so concentrated that it seemingly lies in the hands of single conservative politicians like Rishi Sunak and Michael Gove?

A question arising then is whether, because of Sunak’s approach to green policy probably is likely to lose him some votes, he is the least astute recent British political leader, or if Sunak is the smartest one in the room. Perhaps Sunak knows something big about UK climate change policy that other external commentators and observers do not, but he is simply not telling us, that his new low-cost type of greening may work. For example, is the ‘cost’ of running down the UK oil and gas sector in terms of lost government tax revenues and jobs too huge for Sunak to contemplate? Or is it that:

“The Tories facing obliteration at the next general election on current trends could yet turn the tables if they dump “net zero” and draw up some workable, realistic and popular alternatives” (Johnston, 2023, p.14).

In turn, is it as David Frost states, time for Sunak to:

“Delay the net zero 2050 target. Abolish the deadlines on boilers and EVs. Get fracking and build low-carbon modern gas power stations and zero-carbon nuclear. Stop wasting money on green levies, and if we must use renewables make them stand on their own two feet” (Frost, 2023c, p.19).

If so, the legacy that such green policy changes is one that a new UK leader like Sir Keir Starmer might potentially have to deal with, and what then happens next to British green job creation becomes a consequence of such changes. Do we get more dither and delay on achieving net zero by 2050 from Sunak (Marr, 2023, p.1), as we did under the successive conservative administrations of Cameron, May and Johnson? Here, stories are emerging that Sunak could either stick to his existing green commitments, or that he might delay or dilute them (Parker and Fisher, 2023, p.15), car makers now ‘fume’ at his government’s green ‘dithering’ (as they want stability and investment) (Mustoe, 2023, p.18), and the next general election might delay decisions on the UK nuclear energy programme too (Oliver, 2023c, p.33). Here, Labour’s Starmer has already expressed his frustration with Sunak not seemingly cooperating with the EU over a response to Joe Biden’s green plan (Boscia, 2023, p.2) (although Sunak is also reported to be talking to the EU about rules regarding electric car parts sourcing) (BBC News, 2023, pp.1-3), and long delays in responses to consultations on net zero policies have become a feature of recent [Sunak-led] government policy-making’ (Riley-Smith, Gutteridge and Gibbons, 2023, p.4). Right now (summer 2023), the UK faces serious competition to attract new green innovation, ‘as more ambition is needed’,

Britain has to be 'more holistic' to gain 'the next wave of projects', and 'reward certain investments in return for equity' (Kapadia, 2023, p.18). As Sunak's Treasury under Chancellor Jeremy Hunt 'has pretty much ruled out attempting to replicate Biden's IRA, and his strategy has instead 'been to try and tap into America's green largesse' (Warner, 2023b, p.26), Sunak's Tories may need to change and become a 'pro-consumer party – anti-inflation, and pro-driver' to win (Stanley, 2023, p.16). As such, Sunak's political judgement regarding his approach to green policies including new, de-cent green jobs may need sharpening if he wishes to win the next British general election.

Sunak's late summer 2023 reshuffle

In early September 2023, Rishi Sunak's reshuffle saw him place his close friend in politics Claire Coutinho MP as Energy Secretary, which perhaps heralded a subtle change of policy from the government 'away from green causes', and their 'huge costs for ordinary families' (Martin, Penna and Riley-Smith, 2023, p.5). Coutinho is a CEN member, has previously championed environmental issues like growing wild rural spaces and protecting the green belt, and agrees with Sunak to protect UK households from huge financial costs. She is not opposed to net zero, has pledged to only shop for second-hand clothes and use more public transport, and held a green surgery with voters. She said: "I will work with the PM to safeguard our energy security, reduce bills for families, and build cleaner, cheaper homegrown energy" (in Martin et al., 2023, p.5). Here, Sunak is 'choosing his last few pre-election battles, gathering and promoting his closest allies and getting ready for his final push' (Nelson, 2023c, p.14), which includes a 'face down' with British UK government climate advisers to halt airport expansion, and instead expand them, while hoping rapid development of green aviation fuels can 'decarbonize the sector' (Malnick, 2023c, p.1).

Labour's green plan

In terms of alternative British green job plans, Labour's new policy response over the summer of 2023 led by Shadow Energy Secretary Ed Miliband seems worth highlighting, not least because Labour may be one of the few parties to either win the next UK general election outright, or become a major player or coalition partner in it from 2024-25 (cf. Nelson, 2023d, p.14), meaning Labour may partly dictate future British green jobs policy. Here, Labour states that they will look to provide '100,000 jobs in offshore and onshore wind; commit to make Britain a clean energy superpower by 2030; set up GB energy, a publicly owned company; create a National Wealth Fund to secure good jobs; and insulate 19 million UK homes over a decade' (Miliband, 2022, p.5). Moreover, Labour previously committed to spending £28 billion every year on green investment (Murray, 2022, p.1), which is higher than the conservative's original £9-12 billion per year⁵ (Renwick, 2022; 2023). But Labour then lowered this figure down to £15.38 billion per year until 2030⁶, and

⁵ These figures differ, as one was an original UK conservative estimate under the Boris Johnson government (£9 billion) and another shortly after his exit (£12 billion). The latter, higher figure was one former Energy Minister Shapps quoted as part of their £100 billion green energy spending from mid-2023 until 2030 (on BBC Newsnight, 2023b).

⁶ As Shadow Chancellor Rachael Reeves said £28 billion per year was a figure Labour could not now commit to, because of economic uncertainty (Maidment, 2023, p.8).

promised “good, union jobs” from their Green Energy Plan, which would involve ‘wind farm subsidies, home insulation, electric vehicle battery factories and a new generation of nuclear power stations’ (Oliver and Lawford, 2023, p.16). Labour ‘tax and spend plans’ were also reduced to only being enacted in the second half of any first Labour Parliament term (i.e., ‘fiscal orthodoxy’ is applied), because Labour argues Britain’s public debt is already so high they do not want to raise taxes to go green. Whichever exact financial investment figure emerges, Labour is ‘committed to creating a million good, new jobs from it’ (Lawson, 2023, p.24). Here, Labour’s Thangam Debbonaire said: “Sunak is taking us backwards, Labour will honour 100 new oil and gas licences, but we want four times more onshore wind too. The Tories say either growth or green, but we need both, and we need a rapid transition” (on BBC Newsnight, 2023b), and Labour leader Starmer’s approach is simple: he wants to “getting Britain thinking big again” (Starmer, 2023, p.5).

Personally, Labour leader Starmer – just like conservative leader Sunak – at first sight also seems on board with publicly adopting green jobs policies, backs onshore UK wind power and supports worker ‘just transition’ initiatives. Indeed, reports are that Starmer ‘will scrap the ban on new onshore wind farms, tear up planning laws, and enact a strategic plan for skills to double onshore wind output by 2030 to create British power for British jobs’ (Gutteridge, Martin and Oliver, 2023, pp.1,5), and Labour has pledged £3 billion to decarbonize UK steelmaking and make large investments in renewables too (Jolly, 2023, p.53). Further, industry bosses at Centrica (who own British Gas) and the GMB trade union argue that ‘the UK’s net zero economy could be worth £1 trillion by 2030’ and ‘create tens of thousands of new, well-paid, skilled jobs right across the UK’ if a ‘10-year skills revolution’ is enacted. Yet this is a huge challenge for any possible incoming Labour government to deliver, as the UK workforce is ageing, it has few apprentices and not enough vocational training. Further, any British government needs to proportionally match US and EU commitments to fund this green transition or risk being left behind, with a clear strategy and plans to develop renewables, hydrogen, mini-nuclear reactors and CCUS (O’Shea, 2023, p.21). Nonetheless, others see that Starmer’s Labour have such a plan, with their “fairer, greener future” slogan, and ‘even bigger green investment per capita than Joe Biden’s’ green plan, ‘meaning sticking to its green guns is Labour’s path to victory’ (Toynbee, 2023, pp.1-2). Here, Shadow Chancellor Rachael Reeves states that:

“The push for net zero by 2050 should not make people poorer, but we need to stick to the targets because businesses need certainty, and businesses and local people know what is best for them; this government is piecemeal; we need eight battery factories to cement our position as a serious car manufacturer; it is about planning and skills” (in Malnick, 2023c, p.6).

But again – and just like Sunak – Starmer’s public comments also ‘endorse longer sentences for people [climate protestors] who glue themselves to roads’ (Monbiot, 2022, p.3), and he was quoted as saying he “hates tree-huggers” (in Wheeler and Dahan, 2023, p.1), a quote which was later revealed as ‘a Tory lie, according to his [Starmer’s] team’ (Toynbee, 2023, p.2). Starmer most recently emerged as being anti-Ulez expansion in July 2023, as it seemed to have cost his party votes in the Uxbridge by-election, and one unknown senior Labour figure states: ‘People like the idea of green policies until they stop them doing something, or cost them money’ (Savage, Helm and King, 2023, p.6).

Labour's green jobs policy needs more development and clarity, as they have big questions to answer on it, just as Sunak's conservatives do. Indeed, the UK arguably now has an emerging political consensus where Labour and the Conservatives tend to agree 'on almost everything', and where 'stopping climate change comes distant second to fiscal prudence', meaning that 'sweeping change' is not expected, but 'squabbling over a few billion pounds worth of annual state spending – mere crumbs off a £1.2 trillion cake – will be' (The Economist, 2023a, p.26).

Where are we now, and where are we going?

From the points above, a clear dividing line now seems in place in British politics and green policy. Labour under Starmer appear to engage in a state-led, top-down plan to create green jobs and power the grid, while the conservatives under Sunak seem to prefer state intervention that supports 'transition' fossil fuels and some renewables, and to rely on private sector funding, equity, markets and technological innovation to gain energy security and generating green jobs as a by-product. But a big risk for Sunak is what happens next if the financing and markets fail. With such competing green visions now known, the UK election battle lines on them will begin. Nonetheless, problems arise for all British politicians in winning over voters regarding tackling climate change, alongside job opportunities emerging for them, as on the downside:

"If going green costs money that not everyone has, then ultimately there are two plausible political responses. The first is utterly unconscionable since it means reneging on net zero. The second is to find the money for a genuinely fair transition, and fast. Unsurprisingly, most politicians are keener to talk about shiny new green jobs or cheap solar energy than about where they'll raise the money to fund new scrappage schemes and grants" (Hinsliff, 2023, p.2).

On the upside for the UK conservatives, electoral boundary changes mean 585 of 650 Westminster seats are changing, with England gaining 10 seats in the south-east and south-west, and 'electoral gravity' moving to mainly conservative voting suburbs and towns, which may benefit the conservatives by 5-10 seats come the election (The Guardian, 2023a, p.2). Such gains may appear small now, but these fine margins may prove important for Sunak's conservatives later. However, a small frustration for them is that some of their traditional supporters at the right-wing publication The Economist seem less friendly, because it says "Britain has been poorly governed for 13 years", they argue that "the conservatives are passing on a rotten inheritance" to Labour, and that 'the next period of chaotic conservative government is only a few years away' remains a political possibility (Beckett, 2023, p.3).

Here, because Britain is currently the 6th largest economy globally (GOV.UK, 2023) what happens in it regarding green jobs matters, because if the UK (and other larger economies) do not lead the green jobs industrial revolution (which I imply herein that Britain is now not doing), then who will? And what does such UK leadership mean for developing economies looking to go green and protect the ecology too? Ergo, it seems vitally important for the UK to improve, so that it can build better eco-employment to benefit future generations to

come. The task at hand for Rishi Sunak to now achieve a breakthrough in green policies (above) seems immense. As one commentator states:

“This is not about individual politicians, nor is it even about the parties. Everything seems frozen by uncertainty, ignorance, and fear. The understanding is not there, the ideas are not there, and the ability of the state to devise and execute plans and policies is certainly not there. The challenges we face are truly enormous, yet our politics has never seemed smaller” (Timothy, 2023, p.14).

Further, Sunak may need to detoxify the British national debate on green tech, as in the case of supposed UK ‘national revulsion’ against heat pumps, ‘better, cleaner, hotter’ ones are on the way using helium, ionocaloric technology and natural rubber, meaning British consumers may be tempted to buy more than the 40,000 heat pumps they purchased so far in 2023 and join the US, Poland, Norway, Sweden, Finland, France and Italy in installing more (Evans-Pritchard, 2023a, p.21). Indeed, others see heat pumps working efficiently in very low temperatures in Finland and Canada, and state UK ones working less efficiently are ‘because they are fitted poorly’ (Alsop, 2023a, p.1).

Sunak’s speech of 20th September 2023

Rishi Sunak’s most recent (September 2023) speech on changes to UK government policy regarding net zero by 2050 seems like a watershed moment in UK politics and green jobs if the reaction to it is anything to go by. Rather than repeat or paraphrase Sunak’s own words again, readers are guided to gain full details of his speech which appear at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-on-net-zero-20-september-2023#:~:text=We%20will%20never%20impose%20these,in%20the%20same%20way%20again>

Here, reaction to Sunak’s speech falls into two main areas: fact-checks and problems emerging, which I now detail.

Fact-checks on Sunak’s speech raised issues of some seeing Sunak sounding ‘like an asset stripper. Absolutely unprepared to invest for the future’ (Oldridge, 2023a, p.1), practicing ‘deceit’ (Oldridge, 2023b, p.1) and ‘wishful thinking’ (Nevett, 2023, p.1) plus sparking an ‘industry backlash’ (Brown, 2023, p.1). Here ‘business anger grows’, as Ford Motor Company said the private sector requires “ambition, commitment and consistency” from the UK government, but Sunak’s speech undermined all three (McKay and O’Leary, 2023, p.1), and ‘banks hate’ his U-turn as ‘uncertainty and risk are expensive’ (Dunn, 2023, p.1). Here, as businesses require certainty and policy makers need consistency, Sunak’s policy change seems like a problematic issue for them both. Others view him as: practicing ‘bad economics dictated by cynical politics’ (The Guardian, 2023b, p.1), someone who is not fooling the UK media (Vince, 2023, p.1) and ‘turning the environment into a US-style political wedge issue... purely to score points. It is reprehensible’ (Goldsmith, 2023, p.1). Indeed, Sunak seems to be ignoring the fate of the last Australian government which backtracked on the climate and lost an election (Murray, 2023c, p.1). Here, the creeping climate-skepticism outlined in *The Daily Telegraph* editorials and pieces (above) now seems partly realized under Sunak’s regime, and he has divided his own party on achieving net zero too (BBC Newsnight, 2023c).

Sunak's speech may cause him new problems: as one moderate Tory said 'delaying the UK's ability to lead the energy transition will mean less investment, slower growth, fewer jobs and ultimately higher bills' (Skidmore, 2023a, p.1), another Tory is asking why he wants to 'shatter' the UK's 'broad, non-partisan consensus' on climate issues (Clarke, 2023, p.1), and public opinion polls saying it makes the UK government look 'untrustworthy, reckless and back-wards' (ECIU, 2023a, p.1). Moreover, Tory MPs are very surprised about his announcements on pushing back petrol/diesel car bans, as they seem 'anti-business' and break a promise he made in private to them (Coates, 2023a, p.1), that they 'will not help economically or electorally' (Sharma, 2023, p.1), provide 'only a cost, not a benefit' (Skidmore, 2023a, p.1), and other Tory MPs are considering submitting no confidence letters in Sunak too (Politics UK, 2023a, p.1). Some commentators see his plan as 'a fundamental threat to lots of new private investment, as £6 billion is going into EV charging' (Hebditch, 2023, p.1), and that it will cost Britain '£4.2 billion and 30,000 jobs' (Walker, 2023b, p.1). Tech sector reaction is that Sunak now 'turns heads towards countries with more stable regulatory environments' (Vaughan, 2023, p.1), that it offers him 'little electoral advantage (because it's not popular)' (Walker, 2023c, p.1), as he has made a 'huge strategic mistake' (Skidmore, 2023b, p.1), with '40% of people less likely to vote Tory now' (Politics UK, 2023b, p.1), and that despite stating he remains committed to net zero by 2050, the risk for Sunak is that his 'nuance is lost or that voters simply don't buy it' (Balls, 2023, p.1).

Other problems include whether Sunak's speech is his 'secret weapon or a gift to Labour?' (Aurora, 2023, p.1), a form of 'cheap politicking' (Nowak, 2023, p.1), and 53% of 2019 Tory voters thought more spending on renewable energy would bring down living costs (ECIU, 2023b, p.1). Further, the heat pump industry says Sunak is 'damaging investor, installer and consumer confidence', and that he has not provided evidence for some of his claims (Ralston, 2023a, p.1), while voters want more green investment and 'not less' (Vinter and Stacey, 2023, p.1), and Sunak's climate about-turn 'could risk the UK's legally binding emissions targets' (Peston, 2023, p.1). The centre-green Tory CEN group argue for a 'more positive narrative' than Sunak's speech (CEN, 2023, p.1), over 400 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) including Nestle, Aviva and EON published an open letter 'to lay their deep concerns about any weakening of net zero policies' (E3G, 2023, p.1), and the Financial Times labelled Sunak's speech as an 'unwise retreat on climate policies' (FT, 2023, p.1). Key reactions 'from industry, academia, NGOs and many politicians' include words like 'pathetic, betrayal, stupid, chaotic and incoherent' (Polman, 2023, p.1), and his speech 'may scarcely cut through to voters at all' because UK voters support green policies and net zero, they do not blame such policies for rising living costs, they see policy U-turns 'as a bad look' and are 'rolling their eyes' against politics (Frayne, 2023, pp.1-3).

Some opinion polls suggest that 'two-thirds of the UK public do not trust the Tories on the environment' (Slawson and Gecsoyler, 2023, p.1), Sunak has risked Tory seats as a 'climate majority' exists in the Blue Wall and key marginals (Stone, 2023, p.1), and that 'only 22% of Britons trust Sunak on the climate' (Horton, 2023, p.1). Sunak is now seen as the problem because he has 'become the status quo' (Walker, 2023d, p.1), his net favourability score has dropped to a new low of -45 (YouGov, 2023, p.1), and that 'it looks like the people love net zero after all' (Ralston, 2023b, p.1). Indeed, while Sunak made his speech when most of his environmentalist colleagues were out of the country, UK regulator Ofgem chief Brearley says his 'economic case for pushing back net zero targets is "analytically very weak"' (in

Kenyon, 2023, p.5), while other international opinion is that Sunak's plan 'is bad news for his country and his planet' (Karl, 2023, p.1). Other commentators argue that Sunak's changes 'will leave renters colder and poorer with sky-high bills' (ECIU, 2023c, p.1; Middleton and Ahmed, 2023, p.1). The largest UK conservative party donor in 2019 John Caudwell said he is "beyond shocked" at the "madness" of Sunak's reversal (in *The Times*, 2023b, p.1), individual senior UK conservative MPs rail against Sunak as pursuing 'the worst kind of culture war' (Harvey, 2023, p.1), and more conservative UK newspapers talk of Sunak's 'green gamble over net zero', e.g. *The Times* (2023c, p.1), while Sunak has been warned he is 'likely to face legal challenges' over his changes (Harvey, Horton, Niranjana and Allegretti, 2023, p.1). Yet although other conservative UK newspapers such as *The Sun*, *The Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* all support Sunak over his net zero changes, they are also seen as 'preparing the Tories' downfall' over it, because they also backed the short-lived Liz Truss regime which spooked the bond markets and crashed the Pound Sterling (Elledge, 2023, p.1-3). Nonetheless, other UK conservative reporters argue that Sunak is adopting 'a bright green agenda focusing on tech and green progress' and 'joining a European trend towards more pragmatic green policies' (Nelson, 2023e, p.1).

Of course, Sunak operates in a wider context which includes several aspects, namely: him managing external and internal pressures; negating his traditional supporters; and bypassing opposition to his plans, which I now illustrate.

Here, Al Gore sees Sunak as under pressure from external sources, as someone "captured" by fossil fuel companies (Gore in Mahmood, 2023b, p.1), yet he also gained praise from Donald Trump who said his net zero changes were "smart" (Gore in Sky News, 2023, p.2). Sunak is under pressure internally in his party, by right-wing MPs wanting a 'debate' on decarbonization costs (Conservative Home, 2023, p.1) to avoid 'bankrupting Britons' (Braverman in Baker, 2023, p.1), and for him to reduce green spending and provide more personal income and inheritance tax cuts too (ECIU, 2023d, p.1). Sunak himself wants to 'do something he believes will go down well with Tory voters' (Coates, 2023b, p.1) and 'grab the agenda' (Mason, 2023, p.1). To manage such internal pressures, Sunak appointed the chief economist of Shell to run the UK climate watchdog CCC (Oldridge, 2023c, p.1), and new Energy Secretary Claire Coutinho⁷ said that 'it is wrong to expect people to "change their lives" or "punish" people' to reach net zero (in Ferguson, 2023, p.2). Additionally, Sunak granted the first wave of 21 North Sea carbon storage licenses (Murray, 2023d, p.1) and has overseen his transport department 'weaken their already weak climate commitments' (Anderson, 2023, p.1), while offering up a lot of straw men to criticize, which 'simply were not' UK government policy (e.g. banning flying, taxing meat, and placing trash into seven different bins) (Clarke, 2023, p.1).

Sunak seems to reject traditional UK conservative supporters, as his green changes saw one commentator argue that "business generally has pretty much lost it with this government" (Coates, 2023b, p.1), and multinationals are instead calling for a 'tripling of renewable power capacity by 2030' (Keating, 2023, p.1). UK public opinion seems mixed on Sunak's new approach to net zero, as 54% of Britons prefer tax cuts to be focused on renewables

⁷ Who herself is linked to a policy group funded by ExxonMobil which targeted climate activists (Lott-Lavigna, 2023, p.1).

(ECIU, 2023d, p.1), 46% said the government should stick to its (prior, original) plans (ECIU, 2023e, p.1), and that UK businesses and voters appear keen on electric vehicles (EVs), as Britain has the second highest rate of EV sales for major economies (ECIU, 2023f, p.1). Here, Sunak's announcement was 'about allowing fossil fuel companies to continue fleecing us' (Oldridge, 2023d, p.1), and he uses 'the tactics of doubt, delay and distraction devised by none other than... Big Oil' (Shukman, 2023, p.1).

Sunak's emphasis on cost-control regarding net zero seems to ignore the jobs, legal and moral case for advancing the green concern and seems similar to his bypassing social issues like UK National Health Service (NHS) outcomes, where the waiting list hit 7.68 million and from 2018-2022 1.5 million people died waiting for hospital treatment (Sikka, 2023a, p.1). Sunak's net zero changes also seem contradictory, as he is reducing UK climate commitments while 'leading the way' in fighting climate change (Griffiths, 2023, p.1), he has disbanded a task force to speed up home insulation and boiler upgrades (which only formed in March 2023) (Wells, 2023, p.2), is lambasted for building 'no new industries' (Sikka, 2023b, p.1) and 'has handed Tata Steel a £500 million green subsidy to fire 3,000 steelworkers' (Sikka, 2023c, p.1).

Ergo, is Sunak very right-wing and more focused on financial management within green policy and less so on social conscience issues? This question arises because instead of Sunak leading on climate, it seems that his former UK Net Zero Review chief Chris Skidmore MP does, as Skidmore launched an international climate declaration to secure cross-party and cross-country support for climate action (McKeon, 2023, pp.1-3), while Sunak acted secretly and 'blindsided' Whitehall and his own UK delegation in not telling them of the extent of his net zero changes while they were away at a New York climate summit (Coates, 2023d, p.1). Thus, Sunak seems trapped by the centrifugal force of conservative political ideas, traditions, and history, as his only answers to the challenge of meeting net zero by 2050 seem to lie in giving more support to the UK-based fossil fuel industry, i.e., a no-change/status quo scenario (cf. Goodwin, 2014). Indeed, it could be argued that while the old UK conservatives seemingly wanted to ignore or bypass trade unions, Sunak's new ones appear to want to do the same to business. Sunak's dilemma could be whether his new approach to net zero will win him more votes, and how he can also build decent, new UK-based green jobs in future. Right now, his conversation and narrative have moved from a focus on green jobs to one on green politics, meaning that the politics of green job creation (or neglect) looks set to take over mainstream UK debate. Ergo nowadays, due to Sunak's net zero U-turn above, the GJT era seems like a distant memory.

Study limitations

Several limitations apply to this study. These include it only focusing on a single country and one national context, alongside analyzing and discussing a single British conservative/Tory political party. It is also limited by only examining one key UK government report in depth, the GJT, and critiquing it through the single theoretical lens of conservative political ideas. Further, this study has the limitation of not robustly engaging with right-of-centre British lobbying groups like Net Zero Watch (NZW) (due to issues around the accuracy of their information), and not critically investigating them or the GJT using liberal or left-wing political ideas and alternative theoretical lenses. Additionally, this monograph could be seen

as somewhat Anglo-centric, by focusing on the UK, EU and USA at the expense of less focus on the BRIC states (Brazil, Russia, India and China) (see Razzouk, 2023, p.1; Murray, 2023e, p.1 for details on China's climate actions and future plans), and other non-BRIC countries, alongside less emphasis on the original UK role in creating the climate emergency itself (see Stop Cambo, 2023, p.1). Still, to counter this Anglo-led limitation, I offer a view of green HRM from the global south countries elsewhere (Yusoff and Renwick, 2024), which includes some discussion of green jobs, and a critique of them as a North-Western phenomenon (Renwick, Clark and Crichton, 2024), I have undertaken in-depth work on green HRM in Brazil (Renwick, 2009; Silva Souza, Roglio, Renwick, Takahashi, 2014; Renwick, Brint, Fiorini, Jabbour and Jabbour, 2024), and I am now completing a 12-country analysis of green jobs among non-Western countries including all four BRIC states too (Renwick, 2024). Further, readers can consult the international press and media for stories on the UK's role in driving the climate crisis.

Moreover, the benefits of the approach I adopted herein remain, including critically analyzing UK green jobs policy using a new theoretical lens in conservative political ideas and providing an in-depth, reflective analysis of the (GJT). Further, this study critically highlights gaps in British political and business decision-making, the lack of employee voice arising, and that the GJT places less priority on skills and training too. To my knowledge, this monograph is the world's first in-depth analysis and critique of the GJT, it provides an alternative and different road map ahead on the issue of UK green job generation and aims to act as a key learning resource to help increase knowledge on British-based green jobs and as a central focus in helping to create such decent UK jobs too.

Policy and practitioner implications

UK policymakers and politicians might wish to formulate an agreed position on green policies and to stick to them, to think through how to fund such initiatives and fully organize them, to follow through on such policies, and try not to let current events re-shape them too much and only let minimal policy drift in (cf. Hogwood and Gunn, 1994). Further, policymakers could ensure equal access to new labour market opportunities in less represented regions and demographic groups such as women and younger people, alongside 'training for skills programmes and targeted transition policies and programmes' which detail clear career paths at different points in the transition (Valero et al., 2021, p.7). Additionally, a key practitioner implication is that it seems time to move away from purely focusing on green job numbers (albeit recognizing their importance in building a new green economy) and embrace issues around staff sustainability skills, as they need building up among British workers.

Future research ideas

Scholars could initially draw inspiration from work done in the already-established fields of Political Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and the Management of Socio-Political Issues and research the aspects detailed therein (see Al-Esia, Crane and Iatridis, 2023, p.19; Sun, Doh, Rajwani, Werner and Luo, 2023, pp.23-24), alongside establishing a new HRM sub-field which I title Political HRM. Here, Political HRM may be understood as an umbrella term containing a broad church of differing (un)orthodox, mainstream, and critical viewpoints

and perspectives, to stress the importance of politics as a key factor or variable in researching external contexts influencing and interacting with organizations and their staff in HRM studies. Here, at the macro-level, researchers might usefully assess democratic versus authoritarian political regimes, and varieties of capitalism (VoC), to assess their impact in shaping respective national government green policies, and how such contexts translate into various recipes of green job creation or loss in different countries.

At the meso-level, scholars could investigate the role of the state, the role of the individual and personal liberty issues, and a focus on politics, policy and politicking (broadly defined) and any possible interactions with HRM, plus links between the intersection of government regulation and business level operations in HRM, e.g. in connecting with and shaping corporate HR strategies, policies and procedures and workplace HR practices, and vice-versa. Here, green examples could include how national government green jobs policies and plans shape firm-level, organizational and departmental HRM systems, policies, procedures and practices, the role of HR managers, line managers and employees in this process, and issues of training and skills for workers undergoing the transition from fossil fuel (non-green) to renewable energy (greener) jobs, alongside staff inclusion and exclusion in doing so. Research could also focus on any policy mistakes or disasters (Dunleavy, 1995) and real-world policy analysis (Hogwood and Gunn, 1994) issues arising regarding such green jobs policies. Further, researchers may use different political ideologies to critically analyze new green job data, i.e., from Goodwin (2014) as detailed herein, and other political theoretical lenses such as liberalism, socialism, Marxism, anarchism, authoritarianism, feminism, nationalism and green ideologies, plus neo-institutionalism, political economy, post-colonialism, and neo-Schumpeterian approaches too (see Adler, Jermier and Nyberg, 2021).

Moreover, future research at the micro-level might examine the fate of the different political leaders involved in pursuing green jobs policies. For example, will Rishi Sunak become a new James Callaghan, and perhaps ‘find that a popular leader cannot compensate for an unpopular party’? (New Statesman, 2023, p.1). Will Labour leader Keir Starmer appear as a new version of the ‘inexperienced yet highly confident’ David Cameron (Jacobs, 2023, p.16) or Neil Kinnock (Kavanagh, 2023, p.1)? Can Starmer solve the historical, systemic policy and governance issues involved in UK green job investment and creation, while doing similar regarding the British health service, social care, industry, Brexit, and immigration, while not raising UK taxes too? Will Boris Johnson make a political comeback as other UK conservative leader returnees did (e.g., Sir Winston Churchill, William E. Gladstone and Harold Wilson), or will Liz Truss with her ‘pro-growth’ agenda, or someone else, as ‘Tory women jostle for position’, i.e., Kemi Badenoch, Suella Braverman, Priti Patel and Penny Mordaunt? (The Daily Telegraph, 2023n, p.6). As the mental state of the UK conservative party is so changeable and fluid, and it previously contained arguably uninfluential leaders like Sir William Hague and Michael Howard, they could choose any leader candidate. Certainly, researching such political leadership issues and how they pertain to, and link to, green jobs policies perhaps seem a useful and interesting line of research to pursue.

Other research avenues could include investigating worker attitudes, experiences, and beliefs on decent, green jobs (or a lack thereof), how they perceive such roles and how such contemporary insights compare. Here, scholars could assess local employee workplace conversations, interactions, briefing groups, and encounters which shed light on the

opportunities, insights and challenges arising on decent, green jobs. Moreover, future qualitative-based research could reveal findings from stakeholders co-creating value, vignettes, and ethnographies to reveal eco-employment as a lived experience too. Here, scholarly interrogations could focus on structural and systemic inequalities, the regulatory framework, a lack of political will and other barriers preventing local worker take-up of decent, green job roles.

Conclusions

Overall, discursive approaches like the work herein analyzing the British GJT text possess value in revealing some abstract and eluding aspects of politics, organizations, and society, e.g., factors like power, identity, conflict and ideology (Oswick, 2012, p.488). Here, in terms of UK green employment initiatives, funding and re-training issues seem lost amongst all the political talk and (in)action, while grandstanding (Tosi and Warmke, 2020) becomes the main way the achievement of British government goals and socially useful outcomes such as new, decent green jobs dominate, are publicized, and disseminated to the wider public (cf. Oswick, 2012, p.487). Such political talk, inaction and grandstanding are seen in the many arguably hyperbolic examples detailed in earlier Chapters herein. Moreover, it is not clear how British workers can gain new green jobs if such opportunities are not properly funded, and how staff employed in the polluter industries can transition to green jobs if little re-training and re-skilling exists for them to do so. As such, the critical analysis undertaken here seems warranted, as it reveals how and why UK PM Rishi Sunak's position on green jobs (and those of his predecessor Tory leaders) is perhaps beguiling, as while he sounds green (his language), his actions seem pro-fossil fuels (his language-in-use) too (cf. Oswick, 2012).

In concluding this research monograph, I finish on a relatively optimistic note. Despite my many, extensive criticisms of the GJT, the British conservative political party, and their ideas on UK green job policy initiatives (above), the stimulus towards a 'green industrial revolution' by the often-derided former conservative leader Theresa May does show something of a start towards creating a green jobs future for the British economy and one pathway out and away from historic UK decline. Indeed, if enacted more fully, scope exists for it to create something of a brighter, greener future for British workers, if UK Labour politicians can now enhance and further expand it (see Valero et al., 2021, p.4). I am also optimistic because of: the falling costs of and available incentives around renewable energy, growth in British citizen movements demanding action regarding the climate crisis, UK and international business uptake of green job creation, British Universities embedding sustainability into their curricula, global government work on tackling, and media coverage of, the climate crisis, public opinion data that UK citizens wish to see more government action to tackle the climate emergency, and the power of government to enact macro-level policies (Stanley, 2023a, p.16), bypass critics and reduce barriers to change (Elliott, 2023, p.29).

Yet a key policy lesson specifically arising for British conservative politicians from this research book, and ample scope for some pessimism too, is that they need to provide more leadership to support and achieve net zero and be less fixated on, and obsessed about, their own conservative political ideology and ideas (especially the role of the state, society, and the individual). Due to the deep, systemic faults in their approach towards building a new

green jobs policy via their GJT (detailed herein), which are ideological, and way more historically longstanding than purely arising from Brexit (although Brexit has now exacerbated such faults), we arguably need more policy from conservative UK leaders and politicians in future, and not more politics or politicking. As such, it may perhaps be time for them to make progress through using more typical, practical conservative tools like more rapid yet incremental change, and trial and error, to take a risk, properly fund UK green industrial policy, work harder on exactly how to implement green policy goals via state intervention, and use the public sector more widely (as the USA and Europeans do), rather than relying on the private sector and private equity to do so. In making these points, I hope that this research monograph helps as a conversation starter to at least discuss British green jobs and industrial policy more widely, and through the critical angle I employ herein, to kick-start improvements in it that might ultimately play a part in providing some benefit for UK citizens looking to work in a green job in future.

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