

## OPINION CLIMATE CHANGE &amp; UNIONS

# Trudeau needs unions to achieve his ambitious climate agenda

In recent research, the International Labour Organization found that the world of work in industrialized countries like Canada produces 80 per cent of human-created greenhouse gas emissions. That's why the transition to a green economy will require the transition of work: adapt work to mitigate the greenhouse gases produced by work itself.

Third, unions contribute to developing a nationwide campaign for environmental literacy, including green training for young workers and workers shifting to low-carbon production.

Financial provision is made for those workers whose industries become stranded assets. In the new, low-carbon economy, unions will be at the creative forefront in the struggle to slow global warming.

Just transition is also unfolding at the bargaining table as 'climate bargaining.' Workers generally know where, in their workplaces or supply chains, energy is wasted and how goods transportation could be made more efficient. Ordinary members in the whole range of workplaces—from universities to hospitals to mines to stores—have ideas about how to save energy. They want to help reorganize the workplace to make it more environmentally responsible.

'Climate negotiators' are beginning to be trained by their unions to include GHG mitigation clauses in collective bargaining. Unions in a whole sector are beginning to develop 'green plans' with environment-conscious employers, setting joint GHG reduction targets, measuring GHG reduction annually, making sure that successes are widely known and borrowed.

Climate bargaining is growing rapidly. York University's project on Adapting Canadian Work and Workplace to Respond to Climate Change has built a database of environmental clauses negotiated into union contracts. Its the first of its kind, and contains over 100 green clauses found in collective agreements across the country. The database is queried frequently by climate negotiators looking for ways help improve their workplace through collective bargaining.

Can Canada's unions help to build a

green economy? The answer is yes, they can. But it will require policy-makers to work closely with workers' organizations like the Canadian Labour Congress and its broad array of member unions such as CUPE, Unifor, the Postalworkers, United Steelworkers, Public Service Alliance of Canada, United Food and Commercial Workers, and others, to ensure that the false 'jobs vs. environment' argument does not derail efforts to reduce Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.

Following the Paris summit in 2015, CLC President Hassan Yussuff said, 'The collaborative approach we saw in Paris must continue as Canada moves forward to meet and realize its commitments. Governments at every level, as well as business, labour and civil society organizations all have a responsibility to work together and act urgently and decisively to protect this planet's future.'

Now is the right time for the government, employers and unions to achieve a just transition that brings about a green economy built on fairness and cooperation.

Carla Lipsig-Mummé is Professor of Work and Labour Studies at York University and Lead Researcher of the Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces to Respond to Climate Change Research Group.

carlalm@yorku.ca  
The Hill Times



CARLA LIPSIG-MUMMÉ

Prime Minister Trudeau has invited Canada's unions to bring their expertise to one of his new government's top priorities: climate change.

His request has a lot of people talking. He made the appeal at an historic meeting of last fall, the first time in more than 50 years that a sitting Prime Minister has attended the Canadian Labour Congress' gathering of union leaders.

"Labour is not a problem, but a solution," Trudeau said, signalling a clear departure from the previous Conservative government's contemptuous attitude toward organized labour.

The Trudeau government is on the right track. In fact, labour's involvement in efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change is not just helpful, it is essential.

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During the last decade, when Canadian unions were seen as the problem rather than part of a solution, unions made some gains.

In Alberta, unionized workers and environmentalists found common cause in preventing the harm caused by the rapid expansion of the oilsands. They stood together and were arrested together in protests on Parliament Hill.

Similarly, auto workers lobbied unsuccessfully for the federal and Ontario government to encourage Ford to build its new, fuel-efficient engines in Windsor instead of Mexico. The union recognizes that future jobs in Canada depend on building vehicles that appeal to climate-conscious consumer, not gas-guzzlers that have limited appeal at home and little hope of success in export markets.

Canadian unions are now preparing for a 'just transition' from a high-carbon to a low-carbon economy. The term, coined in Canada in the late 1990s was adopted worldwide. It puts the workforce front and centre in moving to low-carbon in the Canadian economy and describes a three-pronged shift.

First, unions use their expert knowledge to identify ways to reduce GHGs in the workplace.

Second, working actively with governments, unions negotiate how work is actually to be 'greened' in the private and public sectors.

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