



Some Responses to the Challenge of Climate Change by North American Labour

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Abstract

Climate change represents a challenge of epic proportions not only to all of society but also to labour movements around the world to do their part. This paper discusses responses to the challenge by my provincial union, my national union, other public sector unions and the national federation of unions in Canada as well as some responses by the labour movement in the United States and that of the International Trade Union Confederation at the international level.

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Introduction

The scientific community views climate change as the greatest environmental, economic and societal challenge worldwide. Global scientific consensus has confirmed that we need to collectively reduce global anthropogenic greenhouse gases by between fifty and eighty percent in the next forty years. That is a daunting task that will require political will, scientific and engineering breakthroughs, collective action and creative thinking.

The North American labour movement, with the responsibility of representing diverse sectors of over fifteen million workers, must act to alleviate the burden of the climate crisis. However, climate change policies should not place a disproportionate burden on its labour members, minority communities, and other non-elite groups in bearing the cost of both climate change and the measures needed to combat it (Brecher, Costello and Smith, 2007).

Reducing greenhouse gas emissions will be accomplished by improving energy efficiency of buildings and transportation, increasing the market share of renewable energy and developing new construction and transportation methods. These solutions will not happen magically on the scale that is needed to solve the crisis. Every citizen, businessperson, union member and politician will have to play a role in the best way they know how.

With the advent of climate change, many North American unions were confronted with the new social issue of climate change. Amongst those in the labour movement, there were different reactions, depending on their perspective. These perspectives are of:

1. Those at risk of job loss due to efforts to deal with climate change;
2. Those who have not considered climate change as an important union issue, and;
3. Those who see the climate crisis as a call for immediate action and as an opportunity for sustainable economic development and job creation (Brecher, Costello and Smith, 2006).

These perspectives have been collected in a Yale University study (2008) *Global Warming's Six Americas: An Audience Segmentation* which provides labour with an overview of the general attitudes in its membership.

Historically, the North American labour movement has confronted critical social issues and advanced the goals of its membership using three strategies:

1. Collective bargaining
2. Political action
3. Legislation enactment

This paper will identify some of the activities undertaken by North American unions under these strategies to develop what will be called 'new politics' so as to reduce greenhouse gases and in so doing, confront the biggest social issue ever.

Collective Bargaining

The New Brunswick Union of Public and Private Employees/National Union of Public and General Employees (NBU/NUPGE) is a general union representing 8,300 members. The NBU is one of the 13 components of the National Union of Public and General Employees which represents 385,000 members across Canada. As a response to the challenge of climate change, the NBU undertook the task of developing a series of two handbooks provided for union leaders and activists.

The first handbook, *Cool Comforts: Bargaining For Our Survival* (Corbyn and Mann, 2008), launched at the Harvard Trade Union Program in 2008, was designed to help local unions address the challenges created by global warming issues in the workplace through collective bargaining. The handbook uses everyday language to educate and mobilize members, as well as arm campaign coordinators with practical strategies.

The handbook lays out practical mechanisms to respond to a call for immediate action; identifies why unions must be at the forefront in the workplace and in the public policy arena; and provides directions on how unions can assure just transition for displaced workers to new greener jobs. Further, it promotes the benefits of going green in the workplace for all stakeholders - the union, the employer, and the employees; it describes how a successful energy reduction plan should become an integral part of the collective bargaining process; and lastly, *Bargaining for Our Survival* outlines collective bargaining strategies and proposed contract language on reducing the carbon footprint, energy committees, and just transition.

The sample contract language includes:

Article 1.0: Carbon Footprint

1.0 Both parties agree to reduce the carbon footprint of the workplace by 3% per year over the duration of this agreement (Actual goals could vary based on specific circumstances).

1.1 The savings shall be distributed on a 50%-50% basis between the employer and the Union for distribution on further greening processes.

1.2 If the workplace does not achieve annual emissions reductions of 3%, the employer will invest in jointly approved carbon offsets, preferably locally, in order to meet the annual target of 3% (Corbyn and Mann, 2008, p. 53).

Article 2.0: Energy Committee

2.1 An Energy Committee shall be established to develop and implement a working plan to reduce carbon emissions from the workplace.

2.2 The Employer shall provide sufficient time for employees to participate in the Energy Committee. Committee members shall be allowed up to 6 hours per month to participate

on the Energy Committee. The Committee Champion will be allowed up to 10 hours per month.

2.3 All workplace employees receive no less than 2 hours of training per year regarding climate change and solutions (Corbyn and Mann, 2008, p. 54).

Article 35: Just Transition

35.01 *Just Transition means the response to the impact on workers caused by the Employer's compliance with greening the workplace for long term planning to reorganize or retrofit production to be sustainable by ensuring energy efficiency.*

35.02 *When the Employer is considering the introduction of change which substantially changes the duties performed by employees in the Bargaining Unit, the Employer agrees to notify the employees and the Union at least four (4) months in advance of such intention.*

35.03 *If, as a result of a change in energy use, the Employer requires an employee to undertake additional training, the training will be provided to the employee. Such training shall be given during the hours of work whenever possible. Any training due to energy use change shall be at the Employer's expense without loss of pay to the employee.*

35.04 *If, after a reasonable period of training, the employee is unable or unwilling to acquire sufficient competence, the Employer shall make every effort to give preference to this affected employee for a position in that institution for which he/she has the necessary competence and qualifications. Should the energy use change result in lay off of an employee, the affected employee shall be laid off in accordance with the layoff provisions of this Agreement (Corbyn and Mann, 2008, p. 77).*

Since its publication, the suggested contract language has been successfully negotiated into collective agreements in the New Brunswick government as well as manufacturing and private sectors. This work complements the agenda of the joint labour management committee during the administration of the collective agreement.

A second endeavor, NBU/NUPGE's *Cool Comforts II: Using Our Capital to Save Our Future* (Corbyn and Mann, 2009), was launched at the 2009 Harvard Law School's Labour and Worklife Program, 'Capital Matters'. It was designed to raise the awareness of Union Pension Trustees and Committee members, union members, and all investors about ways to make a difference in the sustainability of the planet while maximizing investment results.

Cool Comforts II offers a practical short course on how unionized workers can live up to their values with a plan to retire with the financial security that pension's provide. This handbook makes the critical connection between the United Nations Principles for Responsible Investment and the evolution of the Fiduciary Relationship. This includes the responsibility to implement a holistic investment strategy rather than to merely seek

to ‘maximize’ the financial return; socially responsible investing, environmental, social and corporate governance; and lining up workers’ capital with their values and conscience.

Socially responsible investing refers to a strategy of adopting social and ethical goals into investment strategies. As such, workplace pension funds can (and should) advance a larger social agenda reaching beyond maximizing returns. Too many pension fund managers continue to hold that the quality of an investment depends solely upon its risk and return profile, with little or no consideration of the impact upon workers, the environment or communities.

Herein lies the connection between workplace pension funds and the new economy. Workers can have significant clout and influence over where their pension funds are invested. Investment is the missing link in the development and deployment of the new available technologies to serve as the foundation of a new green economy, an economy that will create new industries, new jobs and just transitions.

Perhaps the best research study on ethical/SR investing is ‘The Wages of Social Responsibility’ by Meir Statman and Denys Glushkov (2010). This study shows that the so-called ‘best in class’ ethical/SR investing approach does in fact yield superior returns.

As well, the latest *United Nations Environment Programme Report* released in September 2010 showed that green economy investments are paying multiple dividends by reducing harm to the environment, creating jobs and alleviating poverty. Examples cited from the report include China's energy policy for the five-year plan period from 2006 to 2010 which spurred a rapid rise in renewable energy manufacturing and installation. China is now the second largest wind power producing nation in the world and the largest exporter of photo-voltaics for solar energy. Ten percent of Chinese households have solar water heaters. Over 1.5 million people are employed in China's renewable energy sector with 300,000 jobs created in 2009 alone.

The Brazilian city of Curitiba has used creative and sustainable urban planning to improve its citizen’s lives. Forty-five percent of trips within the city are now taken using public transit; excessive fuel use due to congestion is thirteen times less in Curitiba compared to São Paulo, resulting in improved health because of improved air quality; and average green space per citizen has risen from 1 m² to 50 m² (United Nations Environment Programme, 2010).

The two *Cool Comforts* handbooks have provided a boost for union building and union morale. By reminding readers that we are now into our third century, unions have played a major role in making life better for hundreds of millions of people. Unions have worked towards gender equality, freedom of speech, civil rights, better health care and better pension plans. Climate change is the next frontier at the bargaining table.

The New Brunswick Union/NUPGE recognizes that businesses, employers and management teams are beginning to appreciate the value of improving their corporate

citizen image. The Union has provided leadership in persuading some of the employers of its membership to commit to reduce their carbon footprint through the collective bargaining process.

Political Action

National union leaders in Canada and the United States have argued, from a lens of social justice, that an unregulated global economy which increases the gap between rich and poor and ignores sound environmental science will ultimately destroy good jobs and that healthy environment.

NUPGE has been a member of the Climate Action Network (CAN) – Canada since 2006. As a member of this coalition, NUPGE works closely with environmental advocacy groups, development NGOs, research institutes, human rights non-profits, labour and faith groups on the issue of promoting political action to address climate change. The CAN – Canada is unique among other national CANs in its diversity of member organizations (<http://www.climateactionnetwork.ca/e/about/index.php>). The Network has had significant success in mapping strategies and developing messaging that finds common ground amongst all member organizations.

Part of CAN-Canada's success in nurturing solidarity might be an indicator of the challenge faced in swaying the current federal government to take any significant action on climate change. Canada ranks extremely poorly in comparison to other developed countries in its environmental performance and climate change action. The 2010 Environmental Performance Index that ranks 163 countries shows Canada plunging from 12th place to 46th place in ranking (<http://epi.yale.edu/>).

NUPGE president James Clancy has stated: “Two major crises facing Canada and the world today are a deep economic recession and climate change. The Harper government thinks we have to choose either a strong economy or a clean environment. This is a false choice that sells our country short. We can and must have both. The current economic downturn actually presents us with a golden opportunity to unleash Canadian ingenuity and develop the green technologies that will renew our economy and confront climate change”.

Economic forces are the key to almost every union issue and environmental issues are no different. Union leaders in Canada and the United States recognize that companies continually attempt to ‘externalize’ their costs - to make someone else pay part of the real cost of production. An example is when workers are asked to pick up part of the cost of their health insurance.

Sometimes these costs are hidden. Bad working conditions lead to increases in occupational accidents and illness. Some of that cost is paid by the workers compensation system; most of it, however, is paid for by the victims themselves in disability or lost income and by all the rest of us in higher overall medical and insurance bills.

Often, these externalized costs are much larger than the costs the company avoids by refusing to improve conditions in the first place. But the company is concerned with its own bottom line, not the overall cost to society. Unionized workers in North America understand this process well. Struggles to win higher wages, improved pensions, adequate insurance and safe working conditions are partly efforts to stop the company from dumping its costs onto workers.

North American union leaders and activists began in the 1990's to explain to their memberships that environmental economics works in the same way. Some companies try to maximize their profits by ignoring the cost to the environment. Pollution is pumped into the air and water, toxic chemicals are allowed to escape, and greenhouse and ozone-depleting gases are generated because the cost to the environment never appears in the company's balance sheet.

Canada's labour movement involvement with climate change began in 1990 when the Canadian labour central, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) was involved in the consultations leading up to the United Nations' Framework on Climate Change in 1992. At that time, the CLC joined with the environmental movement in demanding a Canadian plan for climate change.

Following the ratification of Kyoto in 2002, Canadians saw some initiatives put in place. Most of these initiatives engaged households in the strategy. Programs like the 'One Tonne Challenge' and increased recycling and composting programs assisted in the education of all Canadians, ensuring that they took responsibility for saving 'Mother Earth'.

Following the election of the Progressive Conservative government in 2004, all of this quickly changed. Cancellation of the 'One Tonne Challenge' and other environmental initiatives soon followed. The CLC proclaimed in 2007 that 'we have traveled back in time'. The Harper government challenged everything Canadians knew about climate change. It denied the existence of climate change, the scientific evidence and the urgency of the situation.

Using the power of inclusion, the power of language, the power of shared interests, and the power of their unions through coalition politics, workers have gained breakthrough achievements on what many in our communities take for granted as part of their everyday life.

Legislation Enactment

Climate change campaigns have highlighted the activities of national unions from 2006 to the present. In 2007, The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) undertook a considerable campaign 'Get Government to Confront the Climate Crisis'. Its purpose was to educate its membership by encouraging the understanding of the complexity of the problem. Its campaign called to the forefront of its membership's imagination that;

‘The problem (threat) of global warming is real. So are the solutions. Knowledge about what is happening and why it is happening is no longer what we need most. What we need most now- what we need most to keep her cool- is to choose to do something to reduce global warming, something immediate and direct’ (NUPGE, 2007).

NUPGE promoted the position that ‘we must fight for good jobs and a clean environment as mutually reinforcing goals’ (NUPGE, 2007, p.3). NUPGE’s campaign illustrated, among other matters, that federal unemployment insurance is a good foundation for a just transition strategy, but the current employment insurance (EI) requires significant strengthening. Clearly the system was not designed to handle economic conversion, specifically where retraining, relocation and financial support may be required.

In February 2010, NUPGE President, James Clancy, called on the Canadian government to instill a focus on creating ‘a healthier, smarter, greener and more secure Canada’ as one of its top four priorities in the federal budget (NUPGE, 2010a).

The Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE), with a membership of 600,000, explained to its members during the 2008 Federal election that according to the Climate Change Performance Index 2008, Canada ranked 53rd out of 56 countries with only Australia, the United States and Saudi Arabia scoring lower. In response, CUPE provided its membership with a political action plan to make climate change a public policy issue.

In 2009, the Canadian Labour Congress policy paper to the 15th conference of the parties to the UNCCC (United Nations Climate Change Conference) lobbied for a strong international agreement in which the needs and aspirations of all would be taken into account and where a climate of change where root causes of fossil fuel dependence, overproduction, consumption and trade would be recognized and addressed. They called for urgent domestic action and effective international action.

Specifically, the CLC called on the federal government for equitable sharing of the responsibilities regarding climate protection and emission reduction including a call for the establishment of a national cap and trade carbon pricing system; direct government support for new private-sector investment in machinery and equipment; research and development; training needed to rebuild industries for tomorrow; development of clean and sustainable renewable energy sources; domestic procurement of green technologies creating jobs in the manufacturing sector; and funding of just transition programs to be allocated in support of the retraining of workers who lose their jobs due to climate change policies and to compensate workers for any income losses (CLC, 2009).

The CLC partnered with the Council of Canadians in developing the paper, *Green, Decent and Public*, which focused on the distinct opportunities of the public sector to play a prominent role in generating decent green jobs (Harden-Donahue and Peart, 2009).

The Green Economy Network (GEN) is a collection of Canadian based union, environmental and social justice organizations that have come together as a common

front for the building of a green economy in Canada. Labour representation includes NUPGE, CLC, CUPE, CAW, PSAC, CUPW, CEP, OFL, IAMAW, SEIU, USW and the Toronto & York Regional Labour Councils (<http://www.greeneconomynet.ca/section/2>).

GEN believes there is an urgent need to act, and proposes that immediate action be taken at the federal as well as provincial/territorial level on three key priority areas: 1) the rapid development of clean renewable energy sources, 2) improved energy efficiency and conservation, and 3) an expanded public transit and inter-urban rail system.

These three areas were chosen to both result in: a) significant greenhouse gas reductions and, b) substantial gains in good green jobs. All three priorities are considered equally urgent and important.

GEN is emerging from a process of creating a common ground statement and full discussion papers on each priority with an outline for action at all three levels of government.

Recent maneuvers in the Canadian House of Commons and the unelected Senate of Canada served notice to Canadian unions that much more political action is required. *The Climate Change Accountability Act*, originally tabled in the House of Commons in October 2006 as Bill C-377, would set national greenhouse gas emission targets for Canada that align with scientific assessments of the emission reductions needed to have a chance of avoiding dangerous climate change. The Bill would also require the federal government to take the necessary steps to ensure that targets are met. *The Climate Change Accountability Act* would set national emission targets that represent Canada's fair share of the global effort in order to prevent climate change.

On October 21, 2009, the House of Commons voted 169-93 to allow the Committee more time to study the Bill which delayed its passage. The Government's stance could not be influenced during negotiations on a climate change treaty held in December 2009 in Copenhagen.

The *Climate Change Accountability Act* - Bill C-311 twice won the support of elected members of Parliament, reflecting the views of the majority of Canadians who have been demanding stronger action on climate change. Despite this, on November 8, 2010, the Harper Conservatives used their new unelected majority in the Senate to vote down Bill C-311 even before members of the upper house had time to debate or consider it. The vote was 43-32. In a trick procedural move, the Conservatives called for a sudden vote on Bill C-311 while many Liberal Senators were missing. James Clancy, President of NUPGE stated:

'As we head into the United Nations climate talks in Cancun later this month, it is unacceptable that Canada's only climate change legislation has been defeated after years of majority support from our elected members of parliament and their constituents' (NUPGE, 2010b).

Canada is the only country in the industrialized world to:

- Sign and ratify the Kyoto protocol and then announce that it has no intention of honoring its commitments;
- Return from Copenhagen and announce that it is weakening its targets;
- Allow its only major federal program supporting renewable energy to run out of money;
- Allow its only major federal program supporting home efficiency to run out of money; and
- Work actively to weaken climate change policy in the United States and Europe.

The Progressive Conservative Party remains in power. Canadian unions are maintaining their political pressure to influence a change in the position of the Canadian government.

As a member of the ITUC and CAN-Canada, NUPGE attended the COP 16 meetings in Cancun in 2010. From a national perspective CAN was primarily concerned with limiting Canada's obstruction to progress at these meetings. Since the Harper government has been in office the Canadian delegations at UNFCCC meetings have been unhelpful to the process. By exposing the false rhetoric from Canada's Environment Minister, and shaming Canada for its inaction, we were able to stop the Canadian government delegation from blocking a second phase of the Kyoto protocol structure beyond 2012.

Some Responses in the United States

In our neighboring country to the south, American union leaders, labour activists, environmentalists, and social justice and community advocates met together in New York City in the spring of 2007 to educate, organize, and mobilize union members on global warming and environmental issues.

Leo Gerard, international president of the United Steelworkers said in his keynote address at the conference: 'The science is there, the economics is there; the only thing that is missing is the political will. We can do it in a generation, not 50 years. It is going to get done; it's going to get done by us: an alliance of labor people, environmental people and young people' (International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, 2007).

Labour and social justice advocates emphasized strengthening environmental justice and ensuring that poor and marginalized communities be involved in the solutions, particularly since they would be the worst hit by the impacts of climate change. In 2006, the Steelworkers had issued an environmental statement called 'Securing Our Children's World'. The Steelworkers statement noted their grave concern with global warming stating that destruction of the environment might be 'the greatest threat to our children's future' and global warming 'the greatest environmental and economic challenge to our generation'. It announced that investments in renewable energy, mass transportation and energy efficiency would create hundreds of thousands of new jobs while protecting

workers adversely affected by change in energy policy through well-funded ‘just transition’ (United Steelworkers, 2006).

At the same time, the Steelworkers with the Sierra Club launched the Blue Green Alliance. A unique labour-environmental collaboration unites more than 14 million members and supporters in pursuit of good jobs, a clean environment and a green economy. The Alliance continues to lobby American law makers for comprehensive climate change legislation that would ‘rapidly put millions of Americans back to work building a clean energy economy and reduce global warming emissions to avoid the worst effects of climate change’. This convergence of labour and environmental groups has migrated north to Canada with the development of a Canadian version of the Blue Green Alliance which is a collaboration between Environmental Defence Canada and USW Canada (<http://www.bluegreencanada.ca/>).

The labour/environmental partnership is clear in stipulating that climate change legislation must address several critical issues. Job loss from international competition must be avoided with allowance allocations to energy-intensive industries and border-adjustment mechanisms. Rising energy costs for low and moderate-income Americans and adversely impacted regions must be offset with rebates or tax credits. The Alliance also supports complementary regulation, including standards for renewable energy, energy-efficiency resources and fuel and appliance efficiency.

In 2007, the International Brotherhood of Boilermakers President, Newton B. Jones stated that:

‘It is economic suicide for labour unions to ignore or minimize the potentially negative effects of the world use of fossil fuels. Over the next several decades, the governments of the United States and Canada will be trading policies and legislation intended to reduce the amount of greenhouse gases we pour into the atmosphere. Unions need to be perceived as active partners in the search for solutions to global warming so that when our governments sit down to draw up these policies and laws, they will include us at the table. We gain nothing by refusing to face the problem. We only gain by working with legislators to craft laws and protect our members, their jobs and lifestyles at the same time as they protect future generations from the ravages of climate change’ (International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, 2007).

This is a significant position considering that the Boilermakers’ craft for the past century has been involved in the construction infrastructure (coal-fired power plants and oil refineries) which have contributed substantially to greenhouse gas emissions causing climate change.

The Boilermakers have lobbied for an equitable global framework for addressing climate change on Capitol Hill, and at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (UNCCC) in 2008. They are advocating that, for the next century, their craft will be essential to

deploying the new technology now available to reduce the carbon emissions associated with energy generation and industrial processes.

The Boilermakers see their role as encouraging investments far beyond the paltry sums dedicated to climate change mitigation thus far. They claim that this technology is available, but its development needs to be accelerated and that requires investment, both public and private. They call on the union movement to push governments and private industries to make this happen.

On the World Stage

Both Canadian and U.S. based unions have joined forces with the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) which has 120 million members. At the 2nd World Congress of the ITUC held in Vancouver, Canada in June 2010, the delegates joined together to combat climate change through sustainable development and just transition. One of the thrusts of a comprehensive resolution put before the assembly emphasized:

‘Enormous potential for the creation of green and decent work from a successful process of just transition that provides new green job opportunities, anticipates potential losses of economic activity, employment and income in certain sectors and regions, and protect the most vulnerable throughout the economy and the whole world’ (ITUC, 2010).

The Congress further recognized the importance of union-led initiatives and building membership in the green economy, while calling on all governments to comply with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and to contribute fully and appropriately to fight against climate change with significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions.

Within its action program, the Congress instructed its membership to develop regional organizations to work together with global union partners and affiliates to participate in national political and social dialogue, to contribute to providing solutions for the transition to a low carbon, green and decent working life and to strengthen out-reach work with governments, UN agencies, civil society organizations and enterprises on promoting the green and decent jobs agenda.

As part of ITUC's delegation at COP 16 in Cancun, NUPGE took part in a pilot project to provide opportunity for north and south labour unions to learn from one another. In many cases the north has created materials, reports and popular education documents created for union memberships; whereas the southern trade unions and their experiences add significant authenticity to our arguments for a just transition, international financing for technology transfer as well as adaptation to climate impacts.

Conclusion

Climate change represents an assault on our future so serious that it requires critical steps to be taken in developing a social movement to take it on. Carla Lipsig-Mummé, professor of Work and Labour Studies in York University's Faculty of Liberal Arts and Professional Studies and research fellow in York's Institute for Research & Innovation in Sustainability warned in her article 'Adapting Employment to Fit a Warming World', that: 'The social flow-on from global warming will shake up the routine of work and the availability of employment for people in every country' (Lipsig-Mummé, 2008).

Carla Lipsig-Mummé has received \$1 million over six years from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

The award will fund an international project to study the challenge climate change presents to Canadian employment and workplaces. Carla Lipsig-Mummé will examine seven Canadian employment sectors to seek policy, training, employment and workplace solutions to effectively assist Canada's transition to a low-emission economy. By combining research, workplace education, policy recommendations and pilot projects in transnational work adaptation, her project will allow Canada to re-enter the international debate about how best to engage the work world in the struggle to slow global warming.

"We need to know more about the chain of processes that comprise work, employment and training in key Canadian industries and professions – and how their decision-makers understand and respond to the challenge that global warming poses to these processes" said Lipsig-Mummé. "Our second goal is to engage community partners active in the work world and the environmental community in research that identifies critical spaces for adaptation, drawing on their hands-on experience and linking it to the expertise of the academics".

A cavalcade of environmental disasters (i.e. Deep Water Horizon oil catastrophe of 2010 in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico) and economic disasters (i.e. economic downturn) will stymie economic growth around the world in more and more ways. These will include, but are not limited to:

- Climate change leading to regional droughts, floods, and even famines;
- Shortages of water and energy and;
- Waves of bank failures, company bankruptcies and house foreclosures.

Unions must play a major role in reducing the impact on global warming and establishing a new 'green economy' through: their buying power (influencing the purchasing power of millions of workers to invest in socially and environmentally conscious companies); their knowledge power, helping their members become more environmentally aware; their negotiating win-win scenarios with the employer to reduce the carbon footprint in workplaces; and ballot power, influencing votes by learning more and demanding more of our politicians for sound public policy to do whatever is necessary to reduce greenhouse gases.

The New Brunswick Union and others in North America have made positive steps towards taking on this challenge and, in doing so, are confronting the challenge of climate change. However, these steps alone can never be sufficient to stop the tide.

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