



# Climate Change and Labour Union Strategy in the Accommodation Sector: Opportunities and Contradictions

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## Abstract

Climate change is affecting tourism-related industries such as accommodation and hospitality (e.g., changes in tourist flows, the ‘greening’ of hotels). The role organized labour in such industries will play in climate change mitigation and adaptation is less studied. This paper explores how such responses may be integrated into recent strategic initiatives building labour union capacities in the accommodation sector. The case of UNITEHERE, a union representing over 100,000 hotel workers in the United States and Canada, is explored. Specific attention is given to the integration of climate change into current activities such as: the union’s fight against ‘green-washing’; the scaling up of collective bargaining; the use of consumer preference as leverage against hotel companies; the implementation of a ‘high road vision’ for the sector; and campaigns for accessible public transit and community economic development. The paper concludes that climate change will be incorporated into existing union strategies, but there is limited capacity for radical transformation of the sector practices.

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## **Introduction**

Labour has a long history of tension with management, the state, and community groups over a number of environmental issues. Such tensions are well documented in manufacturing and resource industries. There is less known about such conflicts over the environment in the service sector. At the forefront of these issues today is how workers and their organizations struggle to not only to mitigate but also adapt to climate change. Worker response to climate change will be as varied as the impacts on job creation and labour processes across different sectors and economies. The capacities of labour organizations to respond will also be varied, shaped by the specific economic and institutional context.

This paper explores the response of a hospitality union to climate change within the context of organizational renewal and emergent trade union strategies. The case of UNITEHERE, a union representing over 100,000 hotel workers in the United States and Canada, is explored. Specific attention is given to the integration of climate change responses into current union initiatives including: the union's fight against the intensification of work through 'green-washing' and the 'scaling' up of collective bargaining; the use of consumer preference as leverage against hotel companies; the implementation of a 'high road vision' of labour market development in the sector; and campaigns for accessible public transit and sustainable community economic development.

I begin with a brief conceptual discussion of how environmental action is integrated into different aspects of union activity ranging from intra and extra institutional organizing to labour-management cooperation and relationships with the state. Following the discussion, I look at how climate change is or can be incorporated into UNITEHERE's existing strategic initiatives. I conclude that the union's climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts will fall short of the more radical changes needed to current industry practices and structures.

## **Climate Change and Unions**

For some time, Marxist ecological frameworks have recognized that nature-capital is a dialectical relationship. The material realities of resource location and environmental degradation shape the economic system. At the same time, capitalism actively produces nature, valuing some environments over others and failing to incorporate all of nature into market mechanisms which should, theoretically, assign value to water, air, soil and wildlife. As Scott Prudham (2005, 8) clearly states 'capitalism needs nature', yet it inevitably falls victim to environmental crisis as so many vital inputs are undervalued. This occurs even as nature becomes increasingly incorporated into accumulation (Smith, 2007). The case of climate change and tourism-related industries is an excellent example of this relationship. Tourism aggressively commodifies 'natural' amenities such as scenic beaches, yet the carbon emissions from air travel to warm seaside locations inevitably leads to global warming and rising sea levels which threaten those destinations.

Capitalism, however, is not an uncontested system as different actors contest the environmental consequences of production in a number of complex and contradictory ways. While workers are in tension with capital they are still very much implicated in capitalist reproduction. For well over a decade, labour geographers have engaged in a project to uncover how workers shape economic landscapes (Herod, 1998, 2001; Herod et al, 2007; Castree 2007, Tufts and Savage 2009). Workers have a unique position in environmental issues such as efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change as they are both members of affected communities and dependent upon wages from sectors which emit large volumes of CO<sub>2</sub>. In Canada, unions have just begun the process of educating workers as ‘climate change is a union issue’ (Pearson, 2009). European trade unions are more evolved in the issue than unions in North America, and Australian unions have also begun to engage the debates (Snell and Fairbrother, 2010).

There is some debate over the extent to which organized labour is positioned to affect change in human-environment relations. On one hand, they have the power and motivation to resist labour processes which cause environmental harm in a much more direct manner than other environmentalist activists. Workers are, however, dependent upon selling their labour power to employers in order to reproduce themselves materially. These rudimentary debates echo observations dating back to the earliest works of Marx and Engels over the efficacy of unions to regulate/resist capital. Indeed, for Snell and Fairbrother (2010, 422) unions are positioned to influence action, but only if their social purpose is expanded to include the ‘quest for ‘decent’ jobs’ as part of greening the economy.

The research question here is not ‘if’ unions are the most effective stakeholder in climate change adaptation and mitigation but rather to what extent are unions participating and what conditions influence actions on climate change. Theorizing union mitigation and adaptation strategies, must take into consideration not only the macro-economic conditions of the sector and specific economic geographies of communities, but also the existing institutional capacities of unions and labour movements. As labour unions in many Anglo-American jurisdictions narrowed their purpose to ‘bread and butter’ issues of wages and working conditions in the post-War period, organizing workers in many unorganized sectors was neglected or even dismissed. The fragmented nature of many small workplaces in private sector services, the growing precarious nature of work, new technologies, global competition, and attacks by neoliberal states challenged unions as they attempted to organize (see Fantasia and Voss 2004; Moody 2007; Panitch and Swartz 2003; Peetz 1998). The response to climate change from organized labour must be considered within this context.

Borrowing from a previous framework used to compare ‘ideal-types’ of Anglo-American unionism (see Tufts, 2010), I examine how climate change may affect different aspects of union activity and renewal/survival efforts. Indeed, the potential impacts of climate change on work and workers are vast, but can be subdivided into three categories (see Tufts 2010b) First order impacts are those changes that directly affect economic activity (e.g. warmer winters in Canada reduce demand for winter tourism). Second order impacts are those that result from mitigation and adaptation strategies which directly related to tourism (e.g. increase in air travel taxation by the state which would reduce travel); and

third order impacts are those broad aspects of climate change which affect all economic activity (e.g. declines in overall economic output reducing travel expenditures, extreme weather events in distant markets). Climate change will necessitate a response from workers in a range of sectors and affect all areas of daily union life ranging from intra and extra union organization to labour-management relations and labour state relations (table 1).

**Table 1: Union Action and Climate Change**

<b>Union Renewal Activity</b>		<b>Climate Change Integration</b>
<b>Intra-institutional Organizing</b>	<i>1. Recruitment</i>	Appeal to unorganized workers adversely affected by ‘green-washing’ labour processes
	<i>2. Servicing and collective bargaining</i>	Bargaining worker friendly ‘green policies’ and environmental standards
<b>Extra-institutional organizing</b>	<i>3. Coalition building</i>	Strategic alliances with environmental groups, ‘blue-green’ alliances
	<i>4. National/ International Solidarity</i>	Global networks/capacities for a global phenomenon, International Framework Agreements
<b>Labour-Management Relations</b>	<i>5. Labour-management cooperation</i>	‘Tactical cooperation’ on climate change
	<i>6. Training</i>	Vocational training for greener industry, worker oriented environmental audits
<b>Labour-State Relations</b>	<i>7. Economic development</i>	Uneven tri-partism on climate change initiatives
	<i>8. Labour market regulation</i>	Regulation of changes in labour supply due to climate change (e.g. climate change migration)

***Intra-institutional Organization***

The failure to organize large numbers of workers in traditionally non-union sectors is perhaps the most significant contribution to overall declines in union density in Anglo-American countries. These are growing sectors (e.g. foodservices, retail) that often entail exploitive work, but they are not facing any *crisis*, which is often a necessary spark for recruitment. Climate change, however, can spark a crisis (e.g., decline in demand for large cars, extreme weather events, new environmental regulations) which force employers to engage in practices against worker interests as demand for labour decreases and there is pressure on wages and working conditions.

Such crises present *opportunities* for unions. Adversely affected sectors which have no history of trade unionism may open themselves to organizing non-union workers or the mobilization of unionized workers. There are also strategic opportunities for unions to engage with employers over ‘greening’ business. Consumer boycotts over a firm’s poor record on climate change mitigation may exert the same (or perhaps even more) leverage than any poor record as an employer.

Perhaps the most important impact of climate change on intra institutional organizing is that the phenomenon requires a ‘scaling-up’ of action and organizational capacities. As David Harvey (2009, 196-197) continues to re-iterate, local communities are always the launching point of struggle and ground for universal action. However, if local movements fail to expand the scale of their actions (especially against global capital) they are reduced to militant particularity. Albo (2007) similarly criticizes an eco-localism that limits its action to ‘local’ change. Indeed, climate change is a global problem and it is difficult to conceptualize any significant action that does not build global institutions.

This has important implications for organized labour, as international networks and the expansion of pattern bargaining a greater geographical scales, may be required to leverage change over multi-national employers. The collective bargaining process is a means of regulating firms and mitigating climate change, but this will be of limited use if only carried out in a few places and sectors.

### ***Extra-Institutional Organization***

A great deal of research has been focused on the importance of alliances with non-labour groups to achieving common goals at a number of different scales from local community unionism to larger ‘social’ union movements (Fletcher Jr. and Gaspasin 2008; Fantasia and Voss 2004; Sadler 2004; Wills and Simms 2004). For some union renewal is defined by labour’s ability to form coalitions with other social groups (Clawson 2003; Fantasia and Voss 2004). However, community unionism remains an uneven project with different types of coalitions enjoying different levels of success (see Tattersall 2010).

In the case of greening work and dealing with climate change, Blue-Green alliances (initially founded by United Steelworkers of American and the Sierra Club) have emerged in North America as one type of coalition to deal with climate change (see Mayer 2009, Snell et al 2009). It remains yet to be seen what the long-term impact of such alliances (which are only a decade old in their most recent formation), but there are challenges and promises as there are to all coalitions and social movements (see Gould et al 2004 for a complete discussion). What is noted is that such organizations will most likely be required to ‘scale up’ their presence and develop transnational capacities in order to exert any real pressure on nation states.

This is also relevant for a new labour internationalism that may seize the opportunity to develop networks of labour organizations to address climate change. A resurgence in the interests and challenges to cross border alliances as a key element of labour union renewal has also attracted a great deal of attention (Munck, 2002; Cumbers 2004; Herod 2003; Waterman and Wills 2001, Stevis and Boswell 2007). New international alliances

and union bodies are driven by the need to increase labour's strategic capacities in order to organize against multinational employers. Some unions have been able to establish international framework agreements forcing large companies to adhere to labour standards in multiple jurisdictions by strategically exerting pressure in places where labour is strongest in order to aid organizing in places where labour is in a weak relationship with employers (see Wills 2002 for a good example). There is, however, debate over the how these new international formations can be maintained over the long term as workers inevitably are thrown into geographical competition for jobs and local investment (Castree et al. 2004). While Snell and Fairbrother (2010) have also noted that international framework agreements negotiated by the Global Union Federations can include environmental clauses, the same issues of enforcement and widespread adoption across uneven economic landscapes remain.

### ***Labour Management Relations***

Among the most controversial strategies adopted by unions is engagement in new labour-management partnerships as new tradeoffs are made between increasing productivity and maintaining job security. Through 'social partnerships', it is argued that labour can strengthen their position by 'trapping' capital investment in local markets through 'high road' strategies that emphasize training and increased productivity in the workplace (Kelly 2004). Labour continues to actively cooperate with capital in lobbying for state subsidies to support economic development initiatives (e.g. auto assembly plants, training) that have been devolved from nation-wide to local strategies placing cities and regions in direct competition.

Economic development strategies have often found labour and the state in a tight tripartite relationship with local capital to attract international investment through civic boosterism (Harvey, 1989; Hudson and Sadler, 1986). Union leadership is also implicated in the coercive management of dissent against neo-liberal states restructuring of social contracts as they (paternalistically) defended against capital flight.

### ***Labour State-Relations***

Unions continue to engage in processes of seeking out and exploiting new state spaces created by the re-territorialization of states in an increasingly global economy (Brenner, 2004). Such unions re-territorialize their relationship with the state increasingly to the local level as they look identify the new points of leverage created by re-scaled state accumulation strategies based on urban accumulation. For many unions in North America there is relatively less concern with national electoral politics as they are finding new ways to exploit the slippages created when states download responsibilities to local scales. Again, this presents unions with limited national political presence with a problem given the international agreements on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions are negotiated by nation states.

Similarly, in terms of labour market regulation, unions must also look to regional and national governments. Unions will have to engage with states on a variety of issues as climate change affects labour market development. For example, climate change refugees will have to relocate increasing the labour supply in destination countries (most likely in

metropolitan centres. Unions with a vested interest in controlling the flows of immigrant labour will need to engage with the state. In terms of adjustment unions may also be able to *discipline* workers facing climate change related crisis. For unions in specific sectors who can manage the negative effects of restructuring and suppress dissent from marginalized workers, they may be able to elicit support from the state (e.g. subsidies for retraining).

Admittedly some of these developments are at a hypothetical stage given the severity of climate change remains unknown, only expressed in different scenarios. In the case of hospitality workers, however, the below vignettes indicate the future may already be here.

### **Climate Change and UNITEHERE Strategic Initiatives**

UNITEHERE was formed through a merger of textile workers (UNITE) and hospitality workers (HERE) in 2004 (a merger that was largely unsuccessful, as most of the UNITE workers recently affiliated with SEIU). The once corrupt and ineffective union began an extensive period of renewal beginning in the early 1990s. Previous work has documented this process and attempted to characterize the union's strategic direction with specific reference to UNITEHERE Local 75 in Toronto (see Tufts 2006, 2007a, 2007b). Admittedly, the union is only beginning to 'green' its strategies and most of what is discussed below remains conjectural. Nevertheless, I argue that responses to climate change are likely to be incorporated into existing campaigns and tactics. I illustrate this point with four 'snapshots' involving the union at different scales of action.

#### ***Against green-washing hotels***

On November 18, 2010 a group of women workers and a small delegation of community supporters entered the Sheraton Centre hotel in Toronto to protest the 'Make a Green Choice' program which gives guest a \$5 per night discount if they choose not to have their room serviced. The hotel company claims that the savings in energy (and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions) and chemicals is beneficial to the environment. The workers represented by UNITEHERE Local 75 countered that there was no real reduction in harm to the environment as rooms that have not been serviced in days consume the same amount of energy to clean. The work is intensified for room attendants who still clean room on a quota system and the 'Green Choice' programs is simply a means of reducing labour costs through 'green-washing' the hotel experience (UNITEHERE, 2010).

For some time, the union has been wary of how hotel companies use the environment to shift labour processes. For example, the 'choice' given to consumers to re-use towels or not change their sheets daily has been in place for some time. In the above case, however, hotel guests are given the opportunity to 'opt-out' of a major hotel service. Room attendants are the largest group of workers in hotels. Largely immigrant, female, and racialized, they work largely on a room cleaning quota system. The above program reduces the number of rooms to be serviced (decreasing the amount work) while increasing the amount of cleaning to do in rooms that have not been serviced daily



(intensifying work). Clearly, the program has significant immediate and future implications for workers.

There are, however, opportunities presented to the union at this moment. First, the *crisis* created by management (related to, but not directly linked to climate change), opens a window for the mobilization of workers against the employer. Second, the union is able to publicize what is largely an insignificant policy in terms of harm reduction to the environment. Educating its members and the public about ‘green-washing’ in hotels is an important task, and if done properly can result in negative publicity for the firm. Third, it is an opportunity for the union to develop the ‘scale’ of its bargaining with multinational hotel companies such as Starwood (which owns the Sheraton brand). These ‘programs’ are rarely local initiatives and are developed in head offices and executed in multiple locations. In 2006, the union launched its Hotel Workers Rising campaign in North America (and to a limited extent abroad), which aimed at raising standards through coordinated and some limited pattern bargaining in major markets. The union will have to work towards negotiating language that regulates the impact of climate change policies on work at an international scale to be effective. Thus, the ‘scaling up’ collective bargaining will become even more important.

### ***The Greening of INMEX?***

Presently, there is significant pressure on hotels to pursue some sort of environmental certification. Green certification processes remain uneven and the impacts on the labour process unclear. For example the Hotel Association of Canada has recently endorsed the ‘Green Key’ certification system. Green Key is a significant certification process but is completely voluntary and privately run. Furthermore, Green Key’s rating is granted after a short self-assessment by the property and the submission of an annual ‘membership fee’ (see [www.greenkeyglobal.com](http://www.greenkeyglobal.com) for an overview of their programs and rates). Eco-certification processes by second party assessors (let alone independent third parties) are less common. Such systems leave the industry open to accusations of green-washing their product. While calls are made for national or even international rating systems, they have not yet been developed.

There are opportunities for hotel unions such as UNITEHERE to intervene in the green certification process. Specifically, the union itself could rate its employers and issue a union ‘rating’ similar to the well known diamond and star systems used by travel providers. There are precedents for this type of action at scales ranging from communities rating local firms to international ratings of firms based on their environmental and social responsibility (often carried for socially responsible investment purposes). There are benefits to union involvement in the process. First, while not completely independent, the union rating would have more legitimacy than a rating for a fee provider. Second, the union could incorporate social and industrial relations criteria into the rating system (e.g. community involvement of the firm, neutrality in organizing practices). Third, perhaps most important, the differentiated ratings could be used to play employers against one another if the rating became accepted and valuable.

Admittedly, this is largely in the conceptual stages but the union's existing strategies could incorporate such an initiative. Specifically, in the United States, UNITEHERE established the Information Meeting Exchange (INMEX), a web-based utility which assist meeting planners with socially responsible event planning (see [www.inmex.org](http://www.inmex.org)). Founded in 2006, the non-profit organization alerts meeting planners to upcoming potential work-stoppages in hotels, promotes 'force majeure' clauses in contracts allowing events to be moved during a strike, and even provides assistance with logistics in order to attract business to union hotels. Building a rating system for hotels would be consistent with the INMEX mandate. Fortunately, there are precedents for this strategy in other jurisdictions. For example, in Australia the LHMU has developed the 'First Star' accreditation for hotels based upon social and environmental practices. Presently, no hotel has achieved the designation ([www.thefirststar.com.au](http://www.thefirststar.com.au)).

There are, however, critiques of this approach. The long-term effectiveness of union lead consumer boycotts has been questioned for sometime (Pruitt et al 1988, Meyer and Pines 2005). The INMEX strategy effectively puts pressure on employers at specific moments, but does little to transform or challenge the entire sector. Consumer pressure in conjunction with other uses of power (e.g. strikes) may increase overall leverage.

### ***High Road Visions***

In the 2006 round of collective bargaining, the union advocated for a 'high-road partnership' model with employers to improve the quality of jobs and service delivery in the industry. In Toronto, Local 75 struck a task force (in which the author participated) to participate in a report which was released in late 2006 titled *An Industry at the Crossroads: A High Road Economic Vision for Toronto Hotels*. In the report, a call is made to develop a 'high road' labour-management partnership and long-term labour force development strategy for Toronto's hospitality sector. Specific reference was made to the models used in US cities such as the Culinary Union Training Centre (CUTC) in Las Vegas. The American high-road partnership model is largely inspired by a 2003 report by the Working for America Institute on the hotel sector.

The 'high road' partnerships practiced and advocated by UNITE HERE and some US employers are aimed at creating and sustaining secure, high-paying jobs and competitive sectors through cooperative and innovative joint labour-management training strategies with public and private funding. The goals of such partnerships are to: strengthen internal labour markets by developing well defined career ladders; upgrade the skills of all workers; provide training for entry level workers; development the Toronto tourism industry; and address the short and long-term labour requirements of the sector. The recommendations in *Industry at the Crossroads* call for higher wages and benefits, greater union representation and training and equal opportunity in the workplace.

The union's high road vision for the sector easily incorporates climate change action. If the union was to develop its own green certification system discussed above it would provide an opportunity to develop the capacities of members who would be trained to audit their employers for rating purposes. Further, true partnership with employers in mitigating and adapting to climate change within the confines high road model would

isolate employers from accusations of ‘green-washing’ their properties and services. Effective labour-management relations could also lead to successful joint-lobbying for state support (e.g. funding for training auditors). Indeed, Local 75 has already established a training-centre in Toronto (based on the CUTC in Las Vegas) for hotel workers which could offer programs in environmental literacy and practices.

### ***Public Transit and Community Economic Development***

The task force report went go beyond sectoral issues to advocate for community programs which hotel workers require such as daycare, affordable housing and improve public transit. Since 2001, Local 75 has advocated for employer subsidized transit passes. The initial campaign involved a coalition among Local 75, the Toronto Environmental Alliance (TEA), Rocket Riders Transit Users Group and the Amalgamated Transit Workers Union (ATWU). Over the last decade, the union has secured subsidized transit passes from significant employers (the Fairmont Royal York was the first to introduce the passes). Employers buy the passes at a bulk rate from the transit system and distribute to employees as a benefit.

In the early stages of the public transit campaign, the issue was about fairness to hotel workers and smog reduction. Over the years, however, the public transit advocates have shifted their discourse from accessibility to a climate change mitigation strategy. In the case of the Local 75 subsidized passes, there is a critique of what on the surface appears to be a useful benefit. It only increases access to transit for a select number of workers with power. Further, in theory, if an employer provides subsidized passes for workers who would otherwise purchase standard full rate passes or not use the transit system, the result is an *increase* the overall use of the system but a *decrease* in revenue from fares. If several unions negotiate transit passes, the current funding model Toronto transit (largely fare dependent) would come under pressure. The result could potentially be an increase in regular fares to offset the discounted bulk passes.

In subsequent campaigns, however, Local 75 has advocated for more accessible public transit. For example, the union has formed a coalition ‘Communities Organizing for Responsible Development (CORD) in Rexdale, a low income community in northwest Toronto. The coalition was formed to secure a Community Benefits Agreement from Cordish Company, a Baltimore based company developing the racetrack lands located in Rexdale. The billion dollar retail and entertainment develop is largely subsidized by a \$120 million tax break from the city (see Tufts 2010a for a full account). CORD demanded a community benefits agreement with the developer and the city which included environmental benefits (see table 2).

**Table 2: CORD demands for Community Benefits Agreement with “Woodbine Live!”**

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*Economic benefits:*

- Reduced poverty by creating jobs that pay a living wage, benefits, and where workers rights are protected (e.g. employer neutrality in union organizing campaigns)
- Local hiring targets of 30% with targets for socially excluded groups such as youth, immigrants and newcomers and women
- \$1 million to fund high quality training, including apprenticeship, to ensure job readiness and transferable skills
- A commitment to equity targets in the overall hiring process

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*Social benefits:*

- Access to affordable, accessible, high quality child care
- Recreational and social amenities for families, youth, and seniors that are culturally appropriate, affordable and easily accessible
- Mixed income housing
- Health care facilities

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*Environmental benefits:*

- Access to safe, affordable public transit
- Meeting LEEDs or other environmental standards for buildings
- Green space and air quality monitoring

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Source: CORD’s proposed value/goal statement and informant interviews (reproduced from Tufts 2010a).

In the end, the CBA established with the Cordish was meagre and did not include any of the environmental benefits demanded (although it is likely many of the buildings will be designed to LEEDs standards in any case). What is of importance is that the union through the coalition shifted the demands for accessible public transit beyond the workplace and included climate change mitigation criteria (e.g. LEEDs certification). However, the community coalition was very much a ‘top-down’ effort (the key organizers were Local 75 staff) and a primary objective was to secure neutrality agreements with new hotel projects at Woodbine. It is also possible to raise the question concerning the extent to which CORD, given its focus, effectively suppressed more significant climate change mitigation demands and managed the dissent of more radical opposition to developers and the local capitalist state.

### **Concluding Statement: Centring Labour in Climate Change Research**

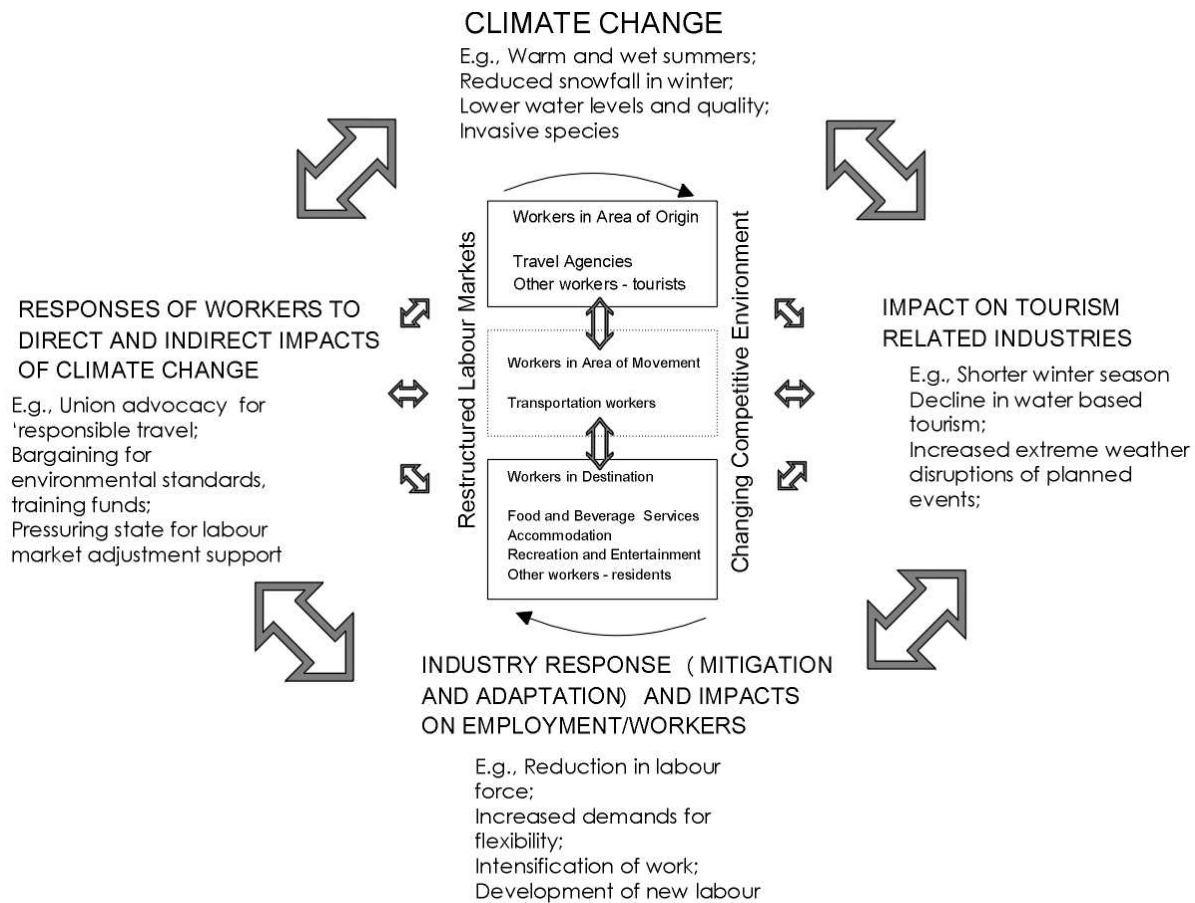
The four vignettes from UNITEHERE highlight how climate change is implicated in existing union strategies and campaigns. Intra and extra institutional organizing, labour-management cooperation and labour-state relations are all affected. While climate change may not be a primary driver in any single activity, it is incorporated into several aspects of daily union function. There are three points which should be emphasized in conclusion. First, UNITEHERE is a North American union, but has limited capacity to

mobilize internationally. While there is significant union density in major North American accommodation markets, there is overall low union density in most tourism-related industries (e.g., foodservices). Organized labour will have to increase its presence in the sector. Similarly, the ‘scaling-up’ of bargaining and development of international networks will be necessary if it is to develop effective international agreements with multinational hotel companies. Local innovations in bargaining climate change mitigation and adaptation on behalf of workers is an important beginning point but must not be contained to examples of militant particularism or limited action in markets where the union has power.

Second, there is of course the real tension between the dependence on tourism-related activity for jobs and environmental considerations. Even the most radical criticisms of global tourism often fail to answer the primary question: Can the planet sustain a global tourism industry? Air travel is among the fastest growing sources of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (currently about 5% of all emissions, see Simpson et al, 2008). Even eco-tourism is rife with contradiction and part of larger exploitive systems (see Nowicka 2007). But contemporary mass tourism really has no present technological alternative to its carbon based-infrastructure (see Monbiot 2006, chapter 9). It is simply unthinkable at the present juncture that UNITEHERE (or any other union for that matter) will even begin to advocate for radical changes which would drastically reduce our collective airmiles and hotel room nights.

This political reality should not, however, lead to the abandonment of analysis of how hotel unions can mitigate and adapt to climate change. To do so would embrace a fatalism that fails to comprehend the complexity of the nature-economy dialectic. Asking ourselves ‘what to do’ in absence of radical restructuring is the final point – we require a framework for understanding the dialectic among climate change, hotel employers, workers and the state. In depth qualitative research linking mitigation and adaptation practices to changes in labour processes and a better understanding of the specific role tourism-related workers and their organizations play (positive) and can play (normative) in climate change mitigation and adaptation is necessary. There are, however, two barriers. First, intellectual trends in tourism studies have shifted away from political economy approaches toward culturalist understandings of the phenomena biasing consumer behaviour at the expense of service providers (see Bianchi 2009). More importantly, the uneven institutional capacities among labour market actors in the tourism sector impede developing research that can be turned into strategic action. The relatively weak presence of organized labour giving voice to workers and how they might shape the response to climate change remains a primary concern, but as the above snapshots demonstrate efforts are being made.

**Figure 1: Centring workers in tourism and climate change research**



Source: Tufts 2010b.

We can therefore begin to experiment with an employment-centred framework is required to understand the specific role tourism-related workers and their organizations do play and can play in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Before we can begin to imagine a greater role for workers in these processes, we must centre labour in discussions of adaptation and mitigation in the tourism sector (figure 1). Specifically, we can look at how workers in destinations, areas of origins, and the spaces of travel between, are affected by, and shape, climate change processes. This must, however, be done with consideration of existing competitive contexts and labour markets. The focus should then turn to look at not only how industry and government responses to climate change impact workers, but also how workers' actions and workplace knowledge can shape employer and state understanding of what is to be done. Clearly, this involves a shift away from approaches which tend to focus solely on the response of capital and the state, but revealing the power of workers is a first step to building power and affecting change.

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