



Climate Change and Canadian Unions: The Dilemma for Labour

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Abstract

In 2010, a group of Canadian trade unions, labour academics and environmental groups began a five year funded community-university research project, Work in a Warming World (W3), to develop effective ways for labour to take leadership in the struggle to slow global warming. We stated the problem this way:

How can labour broaden and deepen its capacity to protect work and workers from the unique threats posed by climate change, all the while contributing to the struggle to slow global warming within the context of increasingly pessimistic climate science, global economic crisis, a hostile national government and strategic paralysis in the national and international political arena?

In this 2013 paper, the authors explore the challenges and dilemmas for labour leadership in relation to environmental responsibility in the current political climate in Canada, drawing on W3 research and the unexpected uses that research can be put to, using the case of the Canadian Union of Postalworkers in catalyzing and internationalising activist engagement for climate bargaining.

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Context

To say that Canada has not, to date, been in the forefront of countries crafting policy, or strategy, or stimulus to adapt to the pressures of climate change, is a gentle understatement.¹ As early as March of 2009, the Climatico National Policy Report summarized its quarterly audit of progress in climate policy by saying: “A notable exception is Canada, which has remained largely dormant on the national scale”.² In the interim, the Conservative party, strengthened by its election as a majority government in 2011, has closed research and experimental programmes, dramatically reduced funding for climate research, fired hundreds of climate scientists, muzzled science research more drastically than the US experienced during the Bush era.³ The Conservative government also quietly terminated *every* national industry council in the country earlier this year. Less quietly, it terminated the National Round Table on the Environment and the Economy, a Conservative-created federal advisory body on the economic impact of climate change, and stopped the National Round Table from allowing its inheritor-research centre to make its more than 770 reports publicly available. To put it mildly, Canada has no national climate plan, and responding to the impacts of global warming is fragmented.⁴

While politically Canada has become a climate denier, worldwide, we know too little about the complex interactions between climate change, work and employment. But we do know that the impact of climate change is globally uneven, and globally interconnected. In poorer countries of the global South, volatile weather endangers low-lying and coastal communities, threatening life, health and food supplies, as well as employment.⁵ In the northernmost regions of the global North, communities face the dissolution of the traditional relationship in which work links the environment to the community and to the community’s history and collective memory. International research indicates that wild weather will lead millions into ‘climate exile’ on an unprecedented scale.⁶

In the global North, climate change is also changing where we produce our goods and services. It is shifting the distribution of employment within and between countries, regions, communities, age groups, genders and industrial sectors. Further, the flow-on

¹ Climate change is “a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Article 1). “It is extremely likely that human influence has been the dominant cause of observed warming since the mid-20th century” (IPCC 2013. *AR5 Summary for Policymakers*: 12).

² <http://www.climatico.org>

³ New York Times, September 29, 2013.

⁴ National Roundtable on the Environment and the Economy*****

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme (2011). *Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*. Nairobi: United Nations Environment Program.

⁶ European Commission: Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities (2008). *New skills for new jobs: Anticipating and matching labour market and skills needs*.

effects of climate change's impact on work and employment affect infrastructure, residential patterns, health and education.

How we work is also changing. In many Canadian sectors, global warming is the pivotal factor in deepening sectoral unemployment, disrupting regional labour markets, creating new industrial relations tensions. In some communities, global warming is one of a 'cluster of vulnerabilities'. In still other occupations, global warming offers opportunities to save employment by adapting work.

In the post- 2008 world, however, there is a real risk: environmental sustainability and economic sustainability are placed in competition: safeguard jobs or protect the environment. Also, as unions are forced to respond to growing attacks on workers rights and demands for contract concessions their focus is increasingly redirected towards defending the status quo as opposed to addressing pressing environmental issues. Perhaps one of the reasons for these growing attacks is to keep unions out of environmental struggles.

Canada poses an unusual challenge for trade unions in the struggle to slow global warming. It is not unusual for important state planning documents, such as Federal Budgets, to make no reference to climate policy at all. In this void, climate response policy has defensively migrated to the provinces, which regulate in geographic clusters or separately. Provincial policies focus in the main on attracting foreign investors promising large-scale and long-term investment in alternative energies. The promise of tens or hundreds of thousands of diversely defined new 'green jobs' resulting from major new investment remains vague, and largely unrealized. Green training to adapt ongoing jobs is not high on any of the provincial policy agendas, and all but invisible in the current, all-province rebellion against the federal government's proposed claw-back of skills training funding.

However, despite growing Canadian concern about the impact of climate change, research on its implications for work, workers and labour, on its flow-on impact on education and training, public policy, investment and infrastructure, and on trade union best practices, is fragmented, underdeveloped and largely invisible beyond the immediate audience for which it is destined. While the Canadian public continues to rank concern about the environment at or near the top of its urgent issues, the questions of employment and work in relation to climate change are absent from national public debate and government pronouncements. Our 2008- 2010 knowledge synthesis research project, "*What do we know? What do we need to know?*"⁷, funded by Canada's three national research agencies, was designed to gather in one place and bring to public attention, the

⁷ *What do we know? The impact and implications of global climate change for Canadian work and employment*, a knowledge synthesis project funded by Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada (NSERC). Based at York University, its team members were: C. Lipsig-Mummé Team leader, G. Bickerton, J. Eaton, R. Hatfield, J. Holmes, D. Lafleur, J. O'Grady, W.S. Tufts, Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union, Canadian Union of Postal Workers Union, Prism Economics.

best research and education on the complex interactions between climate change and the work world. These interactions have largely gone unknown, and therefore, only marginally put to use.

This paper asks:

- *How can Canadian labour broaden and deepen its capacity to protect work and workers from the unique threats posed by climate change, all the while contributing to the struggle to slow climate change?*
- *Will real engagement by unions change the culture of unionism itself?*
- *How can climate leadership contribute to effective international working class solidarity?*
- *Does political abdication by Canada's federal government on the climate crisis, open a space for labour to exercise strategic creativity and leadership, in both traditional and non-traditional arenas?*

We understand 'labour's response to climate change' to have several components. First, climate bargaining represents a concrete response to the challenges posed by global warming; to work and workers' organizations, in the labour force and the workplace. Second, it refers to the potential for labour to take *strategic leadership* in the wider public and in the struggle for transition to a low-carbon Canadian economy. Third, it refers to the ways in which the culture of the labour movement may change in response to greater leadership on the part of unions. Fourth there is the issue of international cooperation and solidarity.

The paper is divided into-five sections. The first section frames the problem. The second section looks at the uncertainty and volatility that climate change creates for the labour force and the labour process in Canada. In the third section, we focus on the influence of these climate threats on the labour movement itself, in both its external and internal functioning. In the fourth section we look at a case study of the efforts of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers to address the issues of the carbon footprint in the postal and courier sector in Canada and specifically with respect to Canada Post Corporation. In the fifth section we argue that as well as posing a uniquely threatening environment, the climate crisis has opened new sites for labour leadership. We survey Canadian labour's initiatives, and identify and discuss new ways for labour to exercise strategic leadership in pursuit of the dual goal of struggling against global warming and increasing labour's capacity to protect work and workers.

Framing the Problem

In Canada as elsewhere, the need for jobs—paid employment—will not disappear, no matter what strategy of response to global warming is pursued. Responding to climate change is, arguably, the most important challenge to Canadian labour that will be encountered in this century. In this perspective, the climate dilemma for labour in developed countries such as Canada is situated at the intersection of three debates.

The first debate emerges within climate science and concerns the relationship between economic activity and strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is shaped, initially, by longstanding disagreement among climatologists as to what role human agency plays in creating global warming, and thus can play in slowing it. The language wars that make the climate syntheses unexpectedly vivid reading demonstrates the difficulties with which climatology grapples with the debate over agency.⁸

What measures slow global warming, and can economic activity play a role? While the scientific case for human causality for climate warming is ‘unequivocal’, governments in a surprising number of developed countries feel the need to allow the climate deniers some house-room. Nevertheless, the international arms-length climate science bodies are themselves unequivocal. Mitigation is “human intervention to reduce the sources or enhance the sinks of greenhouse gases”.⁹ Adaptation is “adjustment in natural or human systems in response to a new or changing environment...which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities”.¹⁰ Climate science advances the idea that adaptation picks up where mitigation leaves off, and very recent research acknowledges, “...neither adaptation nor mitigation alone can avoid all climate change impacts”.¹¹ Adaptation and mitigation must therefore be developed in tandem, and their interdependence is essential.

Exploring the ways in which strategies of adaptation can work with strategies of mitigation leads to a new focus on economic activity. The Inter-Governmental Panel on Climate Change’s 2007 Synthesis Report argued “...there is...much evidence of substantial economic potential for the mitigation of global GHG emissions...that could offset the projected growth of global emissions or reduce emissions below current levels”.¹² It adds, “(E)conomic mitigation potential...takes into account social costs and benefits...’ (Economic mitigation potential) ...is generally greater than market mitigation potential (and) can only be achieved when adequate policies are in place and (implementation) barriers removed”.¹³

Yet as important as employment and work are to economic and social life, and therefore potentially for slowing global warming, recent international reports reflect on the failure of environmental policy and environmental research to consider employment. The 2009 ILO review of the literature on climate change and work¹⁴ drew attention to this. Indeed, the relatively few research studies about the impact on and role of work and employment in containing global warming focus heavily on the poorest countries and on clusters of vulnerabilities, adaptation, and developing adaptive capacity.

⁸ cf. IPCC 4th Assessment Report 2007.

⁹ IPCC 2013. *AR5 Glossary*: 21.

¹⁰ (IPCC 2001: *Annex B*: 395).

¹¹ IPCC 2007a: 65.

¹² IPCC 2007:58.

¹³ IPCC 2007:58.

¹⁴ Belèn-Sanchez, A. and P. Poschen (2009). “The Social and Decent Work Dimensions of a New Agreement on Climate Change” International Labor Organization Policy Integration Department.

There are exceptions. An early stand-out is the multi-country study by the European Union and member governments on regional and sectoral job movement to 2030.¹⁵ It stands out as a model for studying developed economies and predicting job movement in function of differing targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It took an industry and sectoral focus to the study of the future of employment in the context of climate warming over 20 years within the EU, and then mapped predicted industry-sectoral changes in employment onto geographic regions. It concluded that integration of climate policy, economic development, labour market and social welfare policy is essential.

Emphasizing the need for integration is also a feature of municipal and state initiatives in Argentina and Germany. Initiatives in both countries focus on micro- and meso-programmes that link mitigation of emissions to adaptation of labour processes and the built environment, and place schools and children at the heart of those linkages. The Argentinean programme distributes netbooks to children in the primary schools in La Punta province, training rural school children to eco-audit emissions in their small communities using their computers.¹⁶ The children also reforest, planting trees donated by the government and private nurseries. As the children and their teachers turn their attention to adapting their school buildings, equipment, and reducing the waste of water and energy, the schools negotiate with their municipal governments to return a portion of what they have saved by adapting practices in their schools, to the schools themselves, who use the savings to further green-adapt their equipment and practices.

German initiatives at the technical college level link student engagement with making schools more energy, water and waste efficient, and with internships with local businesses and apprenticeship programmes that provide environmentally responsible training.

In these initiatives, education and training are linked to adaptation of the built environment and school and work practices, which in turn results in mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions. Schools, communities, local businesses and local and state governments contribute in ways that allow these links to become an ongoing spiral of adaptation. It is noteworthy, however, that the labour unions play no role in this expansive integration.

The second debate concerns ‘bringing the state back in’: what strategic role might and should contemporary states in developed countries play in stimulating a green turn in reviving manufacturing and adapting modes of production? In Canada, the question becomes: how can climate policy move beyond its current ‘employment-blindness’? The convergence of the financial and environmental crisis with policy responses to climate change are already having effects on employment that the WTO predicts will be long-term.

¹⁵ Dupressoir et.al. 2007.

¹⁶ Marini, Victoria, “Presentation to the Education for Sustainability Conference”, Karlsruhe, Germany, October 1, 2009.

The conjuncture of the financial and climate crisis may also catalyze economic restructuring which itself requires an activist role for governments, of an intensity not seen in more than a generation in developed economies.

The third debate asks: but what about the jobs? For the past two decades, the focus in developed economies has been on the quantity of jobs rather than the quality of work. This has undone the considerable gains made in the post World War II decades for worker voice in the labour process, occupational health and safety, the shrinking of demographic and systemic inequalities, the flow-on effects of collective bargaining. Since the mid 1980s, however, the implacable spread of precarious employment has eroded unions and voice in the workplace. As the struggle for quantity of jobs eclipsed the struggle for quality of work, the fragmented nature of employment and the vanishing link between identity, work and employment, make it more difficult—much more difficult—for the employed to raise the issues of environmental responsibility in their workplaces. Further, the Canadian labour movement, faced with massive job losses in its membership heartland—a product of de-industrialization, repeated recessions and the lack of a labour-climate policy to transition workers in services, industries and resources—has, with few notable exceptions, been unable to exercise intellectual and strategic leadership in climate policy. It is worth remembering that since collective bargaining covers occupational health and safety, it can also cover negotiations for environmental responsibility, and does so in other countries.

Unique Threat and Strategic Challenge

In Canada as in many other countries, climate change, in all its regional variations, poses both a unique threat to working lives, and a strategic challenge to organized labour. Responding to that challenge may change the culture of unionism in the 21st century.

Our Work in a Warming World project¹⁷, which began in 2010, focuses on both the impact of climate change on where and how Canadians will work, and on labour and policy response to that impact. Our research identified seven principal challenges that climate change levels at employment and work, and by extension at labour unions:

1. What new or renewed roles are the Canadian government and the provincial governments asked to play in responding to climate change and its impact on employment? Can we identify patterns of state response at the federal and provincial levels?
2. How is Canada tackling the issue of new training and adaptive training for the climate changed economy? Is Canada preparing labour forces for:
 - a. Environmentally responsible work designs and skills in traditional industries and services?

¹⁷ “Work in a Warming World: Canada in International Perspective”. An Environment Community-University Research Alliance of the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada (2009-2015).

- b. Environmentally responsible employment in new, ‘green’ industries, professions, and occupations?
 - c. Adaptive training for ongoing workers in ongoing occupations, industries and services?
 - d. Remaking the built environment to more environmentally responsible standards?
3. How is Canada conceiving and implementing active labour market transitions for the nation as a whole? What efforts are being made to match green skills training and green jobs that need those skills, geographically, as well as in other ways?
 4. What resources need to be provided to existing industries and services, to adapt their technology, work design and work practices? What provisions are being made to resource industries and services for green reform?
 5. In order to respond adequately to the magnitude of climate change’s challenge to Canadian economy and society, education at every level needs to introduce environmental awareness and resources for response, for every age group, including those well beyond traditional school age. What special measures is Canada taking to broad-cast environmental awareness?
 6. The Harper government has directed all its economic planning towards the expansion and expansion of fossil fuel production and export, with its attendant environmentally and socially destructive results. While creating jobs in some provinces, the strategy is destroying manufacturing throughout the country, exacerbating the inequalities between regions, and creating two mutually exclusive visions of Canada’s economic and social future:
 - a. Which parts of Canada are losing employment? Which are gaining?
 - b. Which communities will have to be abandoned or extensively rebuilt?
 - c. Polarisation of opportunity between provinces that retain or gain jobs and those that lose them because of climate change is already occurring. Is this being managed?
 7. Climate change and the state’s attempt to profit from climate change—are disrupting the Fordist, manufacturing-based context in which Canadian unions grew, negotiated, and developed a relatively robust democracy for 70 years. Further, climate change is likely to be the most important force reorganising patterns of work organisation in this century. For the labour movement, taking leadership of the climate struggle may be key to union renewal. What would it take for the Canadian labour movement to take up leadership in the struggle to slow global warming?

These climate threats are broad, deep, and socially inclusive. There is also no known endpoint at which disruption and destruction stops, and a new stability is established.

Union Response and Movement Dilemma

How well are Canadian trade unions equipped to take leadership in responding to this multi-levelled threat?

The union density of the Canadian labour movement is approximately 30%. While there has not been a radical decline in union membership over the past 30 years such as Britain, France, Italy, Australia, the United States and other countries have suffered, the resource and manufacturing sectors have been hit hard by major loss of jobs since the 1980s, while the private services have suffered considerable job loss since the 1990s. As labour force participation by men declined after the mid 1970s, so too did male union membership as a portion of total membership. From the late 1970s on, women's labour force participation grew steadily, both in absolute numbers and in comparison to male union membership. Today the majority of wage workers are women as is the majority of union members. Escaping radical decline in union density in Canada then, seems to be partly the product of the growth of women's employment.

Canada has also not suffered the ruthless hollowing out of the legal regulation of unions' rights, such as the United States has experienced, although there are several attempts currently underway at the federal and provincial levels. Instead, Canada's own tradition of weak central government, and its experience with neo-liberal globalisation in the NAFTA era, and the continued expansion of precarious employment, have combined with its long tradition of decentralised collective bargaining, to deepen the movement's difficulties in influencing public policy at the federal level, on the whole suite of employment, social justice, regional integration, economic, environment and associated policies.

The map of Canadian labour union representation has always been complex, making effective collective action around climate change more difficult to mobilise. Layered beneath a national labour movement which was first colonised by American unions at the end of the 1800s, and then decolonised from the 1970s to the 1990s, is a messy legacy of partial representations. Quebec, the most highly unionised province, is home to a post-confessional (post-catholic) labour movement strongest in the public sectors. But it is also home to industrial-sector and craft-specific unions whose origins date to the American union presence in Canada and before, as well as to the large and influential Canadian public sector unions that emerged in the 1960s and 1970s as specifically Canadian labour bodies. While Canada's labour law is derived from the US New Deal, Quebec's is derived from French legal traditions.

Elsewhere in Canada outside Quebec, from the 1990s to the present, de-industrialisation and the continued expansion of difficult to organise private-sector services, have combined to turn all of the big industrial unions into general unions, organising anything that moves, in any sector, to stave off decline. Thus for example, the largest local of the United Steel Workers of America is located at the University of Toronto and is comprised of teaching assistants, sessional lecturers and graduate students. The Canadian Auto Workers Union and Communication, Energy and Paperworkers have disappeared as a separate entity and autoworkers now comprise 15% of Canada's newest industrial union UNIFOR, which includes members from the energy, communications, construction, mining, rail, shipbuilding, forestry, media, airlines, manufacturing and auto sectors.

The development of these larger, multi-sectoral unions with overlapping jurisdictions has undermined the ability of unions to effectively understand and analyze the occupations

and industries in which their members work. For example, with six unions representing nursing home workers it is not surprising that there are insufficient resources directed towards understanding the specific health and safety and environment issues that impact on the workers of this sector. Likewise, with five different unions representing groups of workers employed by the same university, it is not surprising that there is a lack of expertise and overall common strategy to deal with environment issues that impact upon the campus, the students, and the workers.

The seven challenges listed above that climate change poses to Canadian work and employment are broad in scope. For Canadian trade unions the challenge is to develop effective modes of action to respond to climate change. That action must both transcend the division, decentralisation and political weakness of the labour movement, and find ways to push the federal government into enacting an effective and integrated policy to slow global warming.

Although our research is still in progress, seven forms of response by Canadian unions to the threat of climate change, can be identified:

1. The passage of resolutions at union congresses on the immediate need to slow global warming; Statements of principle on the need to expand union involvement in the fight-back. In this category, ‘Just Transitions’ (JT), is the most important. First crafted by the Canadian Labour Congress a decade ago, JT has become a byword for international and national unions everywhere. In Canada, JT has this meaning:
“For workers affected by change in employment patterns resulting from transition to a green economy, the key to a fair and just transition is a properly planned aggressive green economic development strategy... Workers who are displaced or experience wage cuts should be fully compensated, as should communities that suffer a negative impact”.¹⁸
2. Member education on the basics of climate change; its relation to globalisation, deregulation and privatization, its impact on employment. Courses offered at all union levels, for large numbers of members.
3. Testimony before Parliament by union leaders on the urgency of responding to climate change; public activism by ‘green’ membership.
4. Election of green workplace delegates, at the workplace level.
5. Original research.
6. Collective bargaining on issues of environmental responsibility, workers’ rights and protection of employees from environmental hazards.
7. Applying new technologies and practices to reduce GHG emissions caused by union activities.

This list of forms of union response is presented in order, from the most frequent to the most rare. In relation to #5, the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux in Quebec has undertaken an extensive international and comparative study of trade union best practices

¹⁸ Canadian Labour Congress (2008). “Climate Change and Green Jobs: Labour’s Challenges and Opportunities”, Document 9 (as amended), p.10.

in responding to climate change.¹⁹ It is also exploring collective bargaining for environmental responsibility. However the CSN is one of the very few Québec union centrales that has progressed this far.

Our research to date has shown us that Canadian unions have enacted policy plentifully, and are developing member education around climate change and the transition to a green economy. But there is, to date, a gap between policy, the articulation of strategy based on policy, and mobilisation.

The Experience of the Canadian Union of Postal Workers

The Canadian Union of Postal Workers (CUPW) represents approximately 55,000 people, with urban operations accounting for 48,000 employees, and rural/suburban operations constituting 6,600 employees. CUPW includes all of the operational workers at Canada Post and couriers and sorters at approximately fifteen private sector courier companies.

Historically the union has viewed itself as the guardian of the public postal service in Canada with a mandate to ensure the delivery of high quality postal services geared to meet the needs of working people. To this end the union has worked with coalition allies to rigorously resist any attempts to deregulate or privatize postal services. The union has also fought against free trade agreements designed to restrict public services and enhance the role of the private sector in the postal and courier sectors.

In the late 1990s the union acknowledged it has a responsibility to ensure that the postal and courier services provided by its members are performed in an environmentally responsible manner. CUPW recognized that with its primary employer having the largest vehicle fleet and the largest number of retail facilities of any employer in the nation the union had a special responsibility to address environmental issues in a labour relations context via consultation and negotiations. CUPW and other union activists also raised climate change issues within the labour movement during meetings of the Canadian Labour Congress environment committee and its world and political forums such as COP UN CC conventions. In 2008 CUPW joined several other major unions, academics and environment activists in the Work in a Warming World project based in York University in Toronto. One of the union's first projects was to conduct an analysis of the GHG footprint of the postal and courier sector.

In the 2008 Federal Review of the Mandate of Canada Post CUPW made several recommendations concerning the need to reduce GHG emissions in the sector. The union recommended that the federal government should sponsor a thorough examination of the overall environmental impact of all postal and courier services including an

¹⁹ Bres, L. et G. Dionne (2009). *Mouvement syndical et environnement: L'environnement au coeur des préoccupations syndicales.*

environmental assessment of the different delivery modes such as door-to-door delivery and community mailboxes. The union also proposed that such a review should examine how the industry could be re-organized to operate in a more environmentally friendly manner. In addition CUPW called upon Canada Post Corporation to conduct an environmental audit to identify measures that can be taken to reduce its carbon footprint.

In its submission the union argued that greater competition in letter delivery, as advocated by various right wing think tanks, would create more environmental problems as there is a direct and inverse relationship between increased delivery density and environmental impact, as the decreased delivery density created by competition would lead to an increased use of fossil fuels, pollution, and traffic. According to the union, from an environmental perspective, it not only makes sense to maintain the letter monopoly but also to extend it to the parcel delivery market. Moreover, the union asserted that the postal service can and should be used to develop and test environmental practices that could be extended to other industries.

In 2005 CUPW renovated its national office. New sensors that turn off electricity throughout the building after hours were put in as well as other environmentally friendly initiatives such as reduced water usage. A full recycling program of all materials was introduced and we eliminated the use of small individual milk and creamers in favor of full size 1-liter cartons. Coffee machines with heating elements were also replaced. In 2010, partially in response to the positive reception to the results of the W3 research the union developed and conducted three-day educational programs on postal services and the environment in several regions. At its 2011 national convention the union adopted a comprehensive policy on the environment, calling on the union to work with environmental activists and to address the GHG footprint in the postal sector. In 2013 the union decided to establish a national network of video conferencing which has significantly reduced airline travel of union representatives.

Also in 2011, for the first time, CUPW entered the national negotiations with Canada Post with a proposal to include a new article in the national collective agreement which would require the parties to work together to reduce the Corporation's environmental footprint.

The proposal included the following elements:

1. Recognition of the joint responsibility of the parties to promote the protection of the environment.
2. A pilot project for recycling.
3. Joint review of environmental impact of new equipment or work processes.
4. Examination and implementation of measures to reduce the CO2 footprint.

5. Examination of best practices of other postal administrations including services, operations, pricing, training, labour relations, facilities and equipment.
6. Conducting a joint environmental audit of postal operations in a mid-sized city.
7. Conducting a joint audit of the impact of each type of delivery.
8. Analyzing the different transportation modes.

Throughout the negotiations management stiffly opposed all of these proposals. In the end the negotiations were not successful and the union commenced rotating strikes in June 2011. Almost two weeks later management responded with a national lockout and two weeks following parliament passed special back-to-work legislation imposing a process of mandatory final offer arbitration. The final settlement of the arbitration, reached in December 2012 contains only a letter of agreement entitled “Environmental Initiatives” limited to testing the feasibility of a recycling service and agreement to review practices between parties to reduce paper usage.

Following the negotiations the union decided to proceed unilaterally to investigate the best practices of other postal unions concerning the environment. Together with the W3 project at York University, and UNI (Union Network International, the Global Union Federation to which CUPW is affiliated), it developed and distributed a survey to many postal unions worldwide.

The survey, originally produced in English, Spanish and French and later translated into Japanese, asked the unions about what they are doing to reduce their own GHG emissions and also those of their employers. It asked them to provide any policies or educational materials they have produced. It also asked about any modifications in work processes, equipment or uniforms that have been introduced and if the union was involved in the decision making that led to the changes. Finally, in the context of worker rights, the survey asked if the union had attempted to negotiate collective agreement clauses that address the impact of climate change.

To date CUPW has received responses from postal unions in 25 countries and is currently involved in following up on the responses and obtaining the text of policies, education materials, agreements, etc. As expected the degree of involvement of the unions is very uneven. Once the research is finalized the union plans on producing a booklet on environmental best practices of unions and employers in the postal sector. The widespread interest in the survey suggests that environmental issues have the potential to stimulate new, industry based, cross-border, multiple-country union alliances.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this paper we referred to ‘the dilemma’ that the climate crisis posed to the Canadian labour movement. The above discussion leads us to argue that as well as posing a uniquely threatening environment, the climate crisis has opened potential new

sites for labour leadership. The void where policy should be flourishing in Canada, the lack of oversight of private enterprise in its climate-related practices, leaves a critical space.

Can labour occupy it? To do so would require deep changes in the fragmentation of Canadian labour today. Among the changes necessary if Canadian labour is to take societal leadership in responding to the climate crisis, are: moving beyond raiding; crafting a compelling public voice that the wider public listens to; carrying out original research on what is to be done; and constructing a terrain on which to hammer out policy and its enactment. In this respect much can be learned from the past history of the struggles around occupational health and safety where legislation was eventually enshrined in legal rights, procedures and protections that had been negotiated as a result of collective bargaining struggles.

Establishing an aggressive process to transition to a green economy has much in common with collective bargaining. Like collective bargaining, it would take place on several levels, and engage key stakeholders.

That is, on the level of society as a whole, establishing the policy and its steps and stages takes place on a terrain of social negotiation between unions, the State, other key labour market actors, and civil society groups. Establishing a *social* terrain for negotiating climate policy will itself be an important step forward.

At the point of production, in the unionized workplace or the enterprise, collective bargaining engages workers and their unions, and their employer. Collective agreements are able to include environmental issues such as eco-auditing the physical envelope in which work takes place, the right to refuse unsafe work, adaptation of work practices, material, distribution and disposal, as well as other issues.

Focusing labour's energies on the point of production, and bargaining for environmental responsibility, carries with it not only the potential for engaging workers as activists in restructuring work practices in their workplaces, but also the potential for contributing to the mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions.

Enlarging labour's voice in the societal struggle against global warming can only benefit the labour movement. And it will benefit society as a whole.

“We have options, but the past is not one of them”.²⁰

²⁰Sauchyn, D. and S. Kulshreshtha in D.S. Lemmen et. al. (2008): *From Impacts to Adaptation*. Government of Canada, Ottawa.