

Report: Building a Movement for Climate Action

Executive Summary

On Tuesday November 26, 2019, MPP Bhutla Karpoche brought together activists, climate advocacy groups and legislators to discuss how to build a movement on climate action and the importance of building solidarity by approaching the issue from Indigenous, racialized, worker and eco-justice perspectives.

The Building a Movement for Climate Action meeting also sought public input, in order to inform climate action plan moving forward. A few key directives became clear after the meeting. Climate solutions must be inclusive, and we must take into account the source of the climate crisis issue, which is rooted in colonization and the extractive economic system of today. Mobilization of the masses is required to tackle the climate crisis.

Core Values

In building an inclusive movement for climate action, the message was loud and clear: climate action needs to be intersectional. There is a need for a plan that is people-powered, guided by four core values of equity, affordability, reconciliation and unity.

Equity

An effective climate action plan needs to ensure that the transition to net-zero emissions is equitable and just. It should not leave any community or group behind, with a focused lens on including, and providing opportunities for marginalized communities, such as Indigenous and racialized peoples, people living with disabilities, newcomers, migrants, women and youth.

Affordability

Taking action on the climate crisis should not have to come at a cost of making life more unaffordable. An effective climate action plan needs to ensure that poor and working-class communities are not unfairly burdened.

Reconciliation

The commitment to a true and meaningful reconciliation is a must. In transitioning to a net-zero economy, the climate action plan must be informed by traditional Indigenous knowledge, with respect to solemn treaty responsibilities, and it must be rooted in true government-to-government relationships.

Unity

The climate action plan needs to put people at the heart of every decision, and needs to work towards building a province for everyone.

There is a need for unity in this mass movement of people from different backgrounds calling for a complete change to the social and economic system that is currently destroying the planet. The burden of climate change has thus far been borne by low-income communities and oppressed people for too long in the current system. The biggest climate polluters need to be held accountable. During the meeting, this led to the question: How do we redesign the system?

Guest Speakers

Nawal Mohammed – Workers’ Rights, \$15 & Fairness

The climate crisis can be stopped by empowering workers to be part of the solution.

- This includes ensuring that existing low-paid workers in low-carbon work are paid higher wages, given respect and fairness.

There needs to be a redistribution of wealth and power in workplaces, and the climate crisis presents an opportunity to change the relations of power between ourselves and the people who currently wield power, the way we see the work we do, and the value systems instilled upon us.

In transforming the economy and transitioning to a just and sustainable future, no worker should be left behind, and our well-being shouldn't come at the expense of others.

In striving for affordability and reconciliation, think global.

Cricket Cheng – Youth Organizing, Climate Justice Toronto

The root causes of the climate crisis lie in capitalism, colonialism, extraction and white supremacy.

It is important that an effective climate action plan goes beyond demanding a measly climate tax; climate solutions must be bold, courageous, and clear-eyed, and centered on justice, dignity for migrants, for Indigenous peoples, and those who bear the brunt of climate crisis consequences to avoid ending up with ecological apartheid.

The climate crisis should be addressed through grassroots organizing, solidarity-building, and mobilizing a broad-based youth movement to actively dismantle the systems of oppression.

Carolynne Crawley – Indigenous activist

Climate action and reconciliation must go hand in hand.

Indigenous peoples have deep relations with the earth; they refer to the land as their mother, teacher, healer, and companion and see the land and being interconnected, reliant on one another; thus what happens to the land impacts all.

Climate action must be in partnership with Indigenous peoples leading the way, and Indigenous knowledge must be at the forefront, supported in whatever way necessary.

Ian Arthur – MPP for Kingston and the Islands & Ontario NDP Environment Critic

The Ontario government voted against the opposition's motion to declare the climate crisis an emergency; the government is not even at the acceptance stage yet.

Under the Ford government's administration, countless environmental safeguards have been weakened or eliminated including Bill 32, *the Green Energy Act*, Bill 4, *the Cap and Trade Cancellation Act*, Bill 132, *the Better for People, Smarter for Business Act* as well as Bill 108, *the dismantling of Ontario's Endangered Species Act*, and more.

There has been a lack of meaningful steps taken to reduce carbon pollution and fight climate change in Ontario under the current government.

Peter Tabuns – MPP for Toronto–Danforth & Ontario NDP Climate Crisis Critic

The Green New Democratic Deal is currently a consultant, grassroots document seeking input from the public for best action plans to mitigate the climate crisis.

The document's climate targets align with the Paris Agreement, which aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 50% below 2005 levels with a proposal of a massive retrofit program for homes to reduce carbon dioxide outputs.

The climate plan aims to create 300,000 green jobs in affordable housing, renewable energy, infrastructure and transit, and aims to invest in the transition to a net-zero economy without having people fall through the cracks.

Breakout sessions

Following the panel, attendees participated in smaller discussion groups, each of which focused on a different theme. Emphasis was placed on applying the four core values into policy and program ideas and discussions from participants.

The different themes were: Transportation, Adaptation and Resilience, Energy and Conservation, Fairness and Jobs and Opportunity.

The discussion groups were facilitated by various climate justice advocates and activists. The five breakout groups came up with recommendations to mitigate the climate crisis.

Group One: Transportation

Facilitated by Karla Danan, Parkdale People's Economy & Toronto Environmental Alliance

How can Ontario best reduce emissions from personal passenger vehicles?

- Replacing current technology with energy-efficient cars is not enough, there is a need to refocus our energy
 - Tolls should be implemented on public highways, the revenues from which can be invested in public transportation
- There is a need for better bike transportation infrastructure
 - There isn't enough cycling infrastructure and city bikes
- Create incentives to reduce cars—limiting insurance to create incentives for car sharing
- Incrementalism does not work, bold initiatives such as the war on cars must be implemented; automobiles must be eliminated
- For parents dropping kids off at schools, car idling is a major issue that can be addressed by making entrance parking free

How can Ontario better invest in and expand public transportation?

- A transition to a transit system with a smaller carbon footprint needed
- Provide rebates to create incentives for using presto cards, particularly for retirees and students
- There needs to be a working relationship between the three levels of government to provide subsidies for public transportation
- Accessibility for transit in different community neighborhoods must not be forgotten
- Seniors should have access to free transit, as well as children
- There are elements of income redistribution that should be prioritized
 - Those using public transportation often belong to the poor, marginalized and working-class communities, whose needs must not be overlooked

Other action ideas:

- Investing in research and technology is important
- Restructuring of income distribution is part of steps that need to be taken to alleviate the climate crisis
- Transition: urgent measures need to be taken in steps without eco-shaming
 - Create incentives and reward those who are environmentally-friendly in their practices, provide further education to others
- Find other ways to ship and manufacture goods
 - Fees should be levied on manufacturers to support such infrastructure

Group Two: Adaptation and Resilience

Facilitated by: Andrea Bastien, Indigenous Climate Action

What are some of the most pressing environmental issues facing our community locally and how can Ontario best respond?

- People currently have unfulfilled needs
- There is a public housing crisis, hence investment needs to be made in low-income and public housing
- There needs to be a mental shift in the way people live as a collective and as individuals
- Root sources of goods and services need to be examined
 - Where do things come from? Do they impact the environment/society in a negative way?
- Critical thinking needs to be practiced more
- Focus should be on building relationships to give a greater sense of accountability and care for the community, as well as learning the root causes of everything
 - There is a need for housing, but where are the resources to build houses coming from? Is it ethical/supportive of local economy and is it sustainable?
- Must adapt to the idea that Indigenous peoples carry:
 - Living life with a clear sense of honor, respect and kin –in relation to society and the environment
 - Build relationships with the mother earth, with both nature and people, and learn the language of the land

How can Ontario best protect our freshwater?

- Water is sacred
- We are not valuing and treating water the way we should
 - 95% of water goes towards agriculture, it gets polluted by chemicals, human waste
- There needs to be a change in the way we think about water
 - We are made mostly of water, 3/4 of the earth is covered by water

- Climate changes alter water quality and quantity, water protection plans need to be implemented especially from dam projects, industrial development and contamination
- Safe water supply needs to be protected and conserved

Group Three: Energy and Conservation

Facilitated by Diana Yoon, Climate Justice Toronto

How can Ontario ensure we have clean, reliable, and affordable energy? How can Ontario tackle energy poverty with more demand for electricity as Ontario transitions to net-zero emissions?

- The province should mandate that all new buildings within Ontario must have solar panels and renewable energies, and it be must included in their building code
- The provincial government needs to ensure that all buildings are mandated to report on their energy use
- Must ensure that all new buildings have the capacity to accommodate electric cars
- Invest in Air Source Heat Pumps
- Make the Toronto Green Standard mandated and not voluntary
- Ensure utility companies assist individuals in putting renewable energies in their homes

What are the best ways to encourage residential and commercial property owners to participate in retrofit program while protecting tenants? What are ideas for protecting tenants at the same time, so costs don't get passed onto renters?

- The government needs to provide incentives and rebates to encourage property owners to utilize retrofitting programs
- Individual home retrofits need to be treated as community infrastructure projects
- A public education campaign is needed to make sure people know what the climate solutions are, and should include the climate crisis as an imminent threat to our existence
- Educate the public on fire safety standards, and include some kind of protection for tenants in the same vein
- Putting in place air quality standards for air in homes is needed
- Rent control must be implemented so tenants aren't bearing the burden

What measures should we take to tackle both the housing crisis and the climate crisis as extreme weather events disproportionately impact the most vulnerable, including those without homes, as we face as serious lack of affordable housing in the city?

- Invest in cooperative housing

- Frame homelessness as a public health issue
- Make public transportation free for everyone
- A certain percentage of new condos should be allocated for lower income people
- Look into alternative energies for Indigenous communities
- Mandate the media to treat climate crisis as an emergency and ensure the real message reaches the public

Group Four: Fairness

Facilitated by Paul Taylor, FoodShare Toronto

In transitioning to a net-zero economy, how can we ensure we don't leave anyone behind –which communities will be disproportionately affected? How can we best support and lift those communities?

- More incentives need to be created for landlords to shift to net-zero in their renovations, and ensure that this protects tenant rights
- The labour and workforce needs to be more involved in the conversation and transition to net-zero
- Change the conversation about taxes and what they're used for
- Financial education needs to be invested in from a young age
- Look at the root causes of issues we face i.e. capitalism and how it impacts us all
- Shift the conversation for workers in the fossil fuel industry to discuss how transitioning to a climate job will come with less stress about its future –climate jobs are long-term
- Workers' rights need to be protected and must include temporary, contract, part-time and migrant workers
- Create opportunities to bring communities together; even within communities there needs to be more cohesion
- Create more opportunities, pathways and visibility for minority folks to become leaders in their communities
- Create opportunities to have deep connections with the earth, together as communities –how can we confront the climate crisis without understanding our connection to the earth?
 - Have community garden projects, ravine clean-up activities and more!
- Become intentional about being inclusive, being accessible, learning and acting on reconciliation and ensure that conversations are intersectionalist

What needs to be done for folks disproportionately affected –women, racialized people, unskilled labourers, youth, and Indigenous peoples? How can we ensure that during this transition, they are at the forefront?

- Communication: create inclusive documents that are available in different languages, for different learning styles and building spaces for people who may face the most barriers
- Ensure our elected officials represent or at least are committed to understanding the diversity in our communities
- There is a need for strong policy and collaboration with the private sector to ensure conditions for workers are equitable, and include a commitment to reconciliation
- Must use the word 'investment,' need to change the way we think about long-term structural change; just because change is not immediate does not mean it is impossible
- Invest in child care, mental health care, pharma care, food security; ensure that there is access to good and healthy food for all
- Representation is general; should always be thought of, and, in particular, who is being represented?

How can Ontario's tax system be improved in order to help finance our transition to net-zero emissions?

- Tax the rich
- Need to create a more comprehensive and digestible language around taxes, how they are collected, why they are collected and what they help to fund
- Need elected governments who provide clear guidelines for their fiscal plans
- Must have the public understand that making a big structural change will cost money but it is an investment in all of our futures

Group Five: Jobs and Opportunities

Facilitated by Mercedes Zayas, Parkdale People's Economy

How can Ontario ensure that the millions of new jobs created by the transition to net-zero emissions are good jobs with pensions and benefits?

- Transition needs to be just
- Need to learn from Push Buffalo
 - Mobilize residents to create strong communities with affordable housing, expand local hiring opportunities, and advance economic justice
- The government must set in place a guaranteed basic living wage
- Growing tech sectors enable menial jobs to disappear, displacing a lot of people, and it is associated with extreme inequality
- The government needs to implement a progressive taxation

How do we challenge the current system?

- Nationalize plants that make up a larger sector of the economy
- Strengthen unions by boosting membership

- Government must lead research in green vehicles
- The government should not nationalize infrastructure around fossil fuels
- Boost respect for community work –social services, teachers, in the medicine field and more
 - Create better pay for care and education work, needs more oversight from the Ministry of Labour
- Corporations should be made responsible for pay back to the public
- Push to nationalize economy