

# CLIMATE JUSTICE IS UNION BUSINESS

NOVEMBER 4, 2021



Climate action is heating up. Here in Canada the labour movement continues to push for climate justice, while COP 26 participants gather in Glasgow, Scotland with a key goal of “securing global net zero by 2050 and keeping 1.5 degrees of warming within reach.”

Climate change is the single greatest challenge of our time. It is already affecting the lives, livelihoods and the health and safety of workers in Canada and around the world. We are in a climate emergency and addressing this emergency is urgent union work.

There are many issues to unpack around the COP discussions, where the goals are necessary but insufficient on their own. We have a chance to create millions of good, unionized jobs across Canada including opportunities for young workers, Indigenous people and equity-seeking groups. Yet some set out a false choice between good jobs and ambitious climate action. Let us be clear, we can and we must have both – for our climate, our economy and our society. We must have a just, job-rich transition for workers and communities that is democratic, worker-focused and public-service led.

Even the term “net zero” is questionable. Some corporations argue they should be allowed to continue extracting fossil fuels and offsetting the production emissions with carbon sequestration, which does nothing to reduce the emissions when the processed fuel is actually burned.

At the workplace level, only a few Canadian employers are willing to give workers a seat at the table to advise on how to reduce workplace greenhouse gas emissions. At the federal level, our government promised to introduce just transition legislation, but did not do so during their last term. Ford’s Conservatives show such contempt for the climate emergency we are in that they did not even bother to use the word “climate” in their recent Throne Speech’ let alone propose any action. In Toronto, there is a plan – Transform TO – to address climate change, but funding and teeth are needed, while York Region’s climate justice plans are vague.

So we need to press for more. When we act in solidarity, we know we often win. Workers have achieved successes in historic struggles, from winning the right to organize and strike in 1872, big steps forward to protect worker health and safety in the 1960s, and forcing governments to protect worker incomes and provide paid sick days during the pandemic.

We can demand more action in our workplaces, and negotiate real representation in workplace decisions on climate action. We can demand climate justice legislation, policies and practices by all three levels of government. We can join young people and other climate activists in the streets – in solidarity with people and especially Indigenous peoples around the world – to raise public attention to our climate emergency.

Labour Council resolves to:

1. Encourage Delegates and other Labour Council members to participate in the November 6 2021 rally at Queen’s Park for Climate Justice Now;
2. Call on affiliates to adopt the Canadian Labour Congress Climate Action Agenda;
3. Call on affiliates to work with the Labour Education Centre to develop a union management emissions reduction committee in their workplace;
4. Demand the federal government enact effective, meaningful just transition legislation;

5. Call on affiliates to work to defeat Ford's Conservative government and elect progressive MPPs in the June 2022 provincial election to ensure that climate justice is given priority as part of a just recovery;
6. Demand that municipal governments implement climate justice plans and lobby all levels of government to ensure that municipalities have the necessary funding to do so.