Green Labor

Canadian Labor Backs Kyoto, Just Transition

With science clear, many U.S. unions say...

Time to Fight Global Warming

It was big news in Canada in December when the country ratified the Kyoto Protocol on global climate change, joining every industrial nation in the world except Australia and the U.S.

Of course scientific proof that the world is getting hotter is now irrefutable. Even the industry-backed Bush administration reluctantly released its own report last June admitting the reality of global warming – and in the process exposed its strategy of trotting out junk science to slow environmental action.

Although it didn’t make the papers in the U.S., it was also big news in the Canadian labor movement when the country’s largest union of energy workers and the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) came out to support Kyoto.

In Canada, as in the U.S., opponents of the pact focused their attack on alleged job losses. But Canadian unions, led by the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union (CEP) and the CLC, made Just Transition for displaced workers a condition of their support for the agreement. CEP even organized an intensive lobby effort, hosting “Kyoto Forums” across the country culminating in a public commitment by the Environment Minister to a transition program for workers.

“The impacts on workers and their families should be kept very much in mind,” noted Hassan Yussuff, Secretary-Treasurer of the CLC. “And ‘Just Transition’ has to be a central part of the Kyoto implementation plan.”

So Corporations oppose Kyoto, but Canadian workers – whose jobs are on the line – support it. What gives?

One explanation is that business is wildly exaggerating potential job losses to scare the public. (A joke rumored to be circulating among Canadian union members is that, to reach industry’s estimate of 450,000 lost energy-related jobs, the toll would have to include all current and future workers, as well as thousands of

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A Call to Action:
Labor, Environmentalists Must Join Forces

President Bush’s plan, unveiled in February 2002, will not reduce global warming pollution. While it recognizes the need to respond to the climate change threat, the plan fails to protect either the environment or workers.

Because the Bush approach allows emissions of carbon dioxide to continue rising, it was praised by the energy corporations that profit from global warming pollution.

The Bush plan relies on voluntary emissions targets. Even if these targets are achieved, heat-trapping CO2 pollution would keep increasing at roughly the same rate it has for the past 10 years, according to the Natural Resources Defense Council.

Rather than mandatory greenhouse gas reductions, one Bush administration report suggests adapting to the inevitable changes caused by climate change, including heat waves, disruption of snow-fed water supplies, permanent loss of Rocky Mountain meadows and some coastal marshes.

“The only reasonable benchmark for global warming policy is whether it cuts greenhouse gases,” said Andrew Stern, President of Service Employees International Union. “The Bush plan calls for more pollution at the same dangerous pace as the past decade.”

For more information, view The Bush Record on climate change at the NRDC web site: www.nrdc.org/bushrecord

GLOBAL WARMING FACT
The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change says earth average temperatures could rise as much as 10 degrees over the next century — the fastest rate in 10,000 years.

The labor and environmental movements have a common foe in corporations, but we need to work together if we’re going to win.

Why should working people fight to slow climate change? One immediate reason is that corporations and their “infectious greed” are coming after our jobs and destroying the environment whether our movements fight together or stand alone.

Another reason we should support climate change action alongside labor’s longstanding battles for fair trade and universal health care is that global warming is a problem of epic proportions that will affect the world for generations to come.

Conceding to corporations the power to decide what is done about it will only mean continued degradation of the natural world and erosion of workers’ rights everywhere.

In the coming weeks I will distribute a draft Statement of Principles and a call to participate in this critical effort. Please urge your union to join us.

Meantime, for more information, email greenlabor@erols.com.

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District 11
Dispelling Myth about Massive Job Loss

Global Warming Action that Creates Jobs

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dead workers – who would lose their jobs retroactively.)

Indeed, industry’s numbers don’t add up – either in Canada or in the U.S.

The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives released a study last year estimating that 12,800 Canadian energy workers will lose their jobs over the next 10 years if Canada acts upon its Kyoto commitments, but 16,000 new energy jobs will be created.

Dale Marshall, author of the study, says new jobs may not require the same skills or be in the same region, “which is why we need a strategy to help workers with transition.”

In the U.S., a study released last year by the Economic Policy Institute and the Center for Sustainable Economy also asserts it is possible to fight global warming and simultaneously create jobs – but with the Bush Administration determined to “go it alone” and ignore the Kyoto agreement, the study proposes other measures to slow climate change.

We’re not going to make a choice between a safe environment and good jobs. We’re opting for both.

—Bruce Raynor
President, UNITE

Clean Energy and Jobs is not a utopian study by environmentalists unconcerned with employment. Labor endorsers include Service Employees International Union; District 11, United Steelworkers of America; and UNITE. Environmental endorsers include Sierra Club, Natural Resources Defense Council and Union of Concerned Scientists.

Clean Energy and Jobs concludes that a program to combat global warming can:

- Cut U.S. emissions of carbon dioxide by 27 percent below projected levels in 2010, and by 51 percent in 2020.
- Increase new jobs by 660,000 in 2010, rising to 1.4 million by 2020;
- Reduce our reliance on imported oil by 1.5 billion barrels as of 2020;
- Cut household energy bills in the next 20 years by $475 billion.
- Provide full income replacement – up to five years – for workers dislocated during the process.

The plan proposes measures to promote energy-efficiency and clean-energy technologies; impose a tax on carbon emissions and a surcharge on nuclear and hydroelectric power; and transition assistance for workers and communities.

Bruce Raynor, President of the Union of Needletrades, Industrial and Textile Employees (UNITE), said the study is “more than just a bunch of ideas … it says that we are not going to make a choice between a safe environment and good jobs. We’re going to opt for both and we’re going to fight for them.”

For more information, go to:
www.bluegreenalliance.net

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Climate Action and Employment

Sectors with the largest job increases by 2020 due to Labor-Friendly Global Warming Plan (See Page 3):

- Hotels/Restaurants +228,000
- Retail/Wholesale +202,000
- Education/Soc. Serv. +191,000
- Medical/Nursing +150,000
- Other Services +140,000
- Bus. Services +100,000
- Construction +74,000

Source: Clean Energy and Jobs

UAW Members, Clean Cars

Counter to conventional wisdom, a recent survey of union auto workers in Michigan found they are more likely to favor tougher fuel-economy standards than the general public. According to a poll conducted by Lake, Snell, Perry and Associates for the Sierra Club, 77 percent of Michigan voters favor increasing standards to 40 miles per gallon over the next 10 years. An even higher percentage of United Auto Worker (UAW) households – 84 percent – favor increasing fuel economy to 40 miles per gallon over the same period.

For more information, go to:
www.bluegreenalliance.net

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Broad support for the plan was won because it aims to preserve jobs while recognizing that BPA may need to curtail operations during fish migration periods and because of water shortages. In recent years, BPA energy curtailments and power sales to the market resulted in more than 5,000 layoffs in the region’s aluminum industry, with many workers receiving no compensation.

— Adapted from an article in District 11 Reporter, Winter 2003
Steelworkers in the Northwest won support last fall from a coalition of environmental and public interest groups for a long-term energy plan that would help troubled aluminum plants and safeguard the environment.

Historically, labor and “greens” have often been divided in the region. But in recent years Steelworkers have forged new alliances with the environmental movement over both common principles and corporate opponents. Examples include protests at the 1999 World Trade Organization meetings in Seattle and efforts to fight anti-labor and anti-environmental practices of the Maxxam Corporation.

“We have learned environmentalists can make sustainable jobs one of the products of environmental protection and steelworkers can make environmental protection one of our most important jobs,” says District 11 Director David Foster.

USWA’s comprehensive plan would aid smelters in the region by:

- Providing a reasonable amount of federal power;
- Ensuring protection of wages and benefits for workers adversely affected by energy curtailments;
- Securing financial credit support from the Bonneville Power Administration for development of environmentally-sound power by the aluminum industry;
- Ensuring conservation measures that protect vulnerable salmon species; and
- Allowing access to BPA power only to aluminum companies that are “good corporate citizens” and complying with environmental and workplace safety and health laws.

The Steelworkers plan is supported by the Northwest Energy Coalition, an influential 100-member group representing environmental, low-income, energy, tribal, and labor organizations in the region.

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