

LABOR NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY

MAKING A LIVING ON A LIVING PLANET



CLIMACon2: BUILDING POWER FOR WORKERS TO CONFRONT CLIMATE CHANGE

REPORT FROM SECOND LABOR CONVERGENCE ON CLIMATE

From September 23-24, 2017, the Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS) convened our **Second Labor Convergence on Climate (ClimaCon2)** in Silver Spring, MD. The Convergence process was launched at ClimaCon1 in January 2016 as a bottom-up organizing process for workers in traditional unions, other forms of worker organizing and labor support organizations to develop worker-led strategies to confront the climate change crisis. Since then, LNS has identified hundreds of people in the labor movement committed to confronting the climate crisis and has worked to connect them to the network.

ClimaCon2 represented the culmination of these 18 months of organizing. The theme for this year was **“Building Worker Power to Confront Climate Change”**.

We sought to provide a space for this growing base of elected leaders, organizers and rank and file activists to learn about their respective efforts, and update our organizing priorities and strategies for the next year. ClimaCon2 was convened at the Tommy Douglas Conference Center - owned and operated by the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU). LNS staff and Lara Skinner, Associate Director of the Cornell Worker Institute also conducted a joint training for 25 ATU representatives on climate change in the days leading up to the Convergence.

Over 130 people participated with representation from 17 unions, 3 state federations/central labor councils and 6 labor support organizations (labor centers, policy groups, etc.) We also invited key environmental and

economic justice allies.

“We have to build a grassroots movement based on hope and aspirations”

Sarita Gupta, Executive Director of Jobs with Justice, spoke to the theme of the Convergence. She noted that the role of corporations, the realities of a broken democracy and the climate crisis are connected. She called on LNS to be a force that breaks us out of the either/or debate between jobs and environment.

The first panel was an exchange of examples of effective local and state coalitions. This included the North Carolina Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, represented by Ajamu Dillahunt of Black Workers

For unions, this cannot be just about jobs. It has to be at least about jobs and environmental justice ...those two are equally important.

for Justice and NC AFL-CIO Campaign Director Aiden Graham. Roundtable organizer John Humphries and Mustafa Salahuddin, President of ATU Local 1336 represented the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs. Jon Forster of Local 375 Vice-President of AFSCME DC37, Judy Gonzalez, President of the New York State Nurses Association and Michael Yee, Treasurer of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers Local 3 described the efforts of New York initiatives including Climate Works for All and Climate Jobs New York.

Common themes from the presentations were that 1) Environmental justice partnerships are critical, 2) we must address environment and climate issues from a labor perspective, 3) recognizing that we must educate, agitate and organize - the education of both leadership and rank and file, for many of us, is still what needs the most attention.



“We want to own the bakery!”

Elaine Bernard, former Executive Director of the Labor and Worklife Program at Harvard University led off this panel with a presentation about ***Green Plans***, a concept promoted in Canada whereby workers can develop a vision and plan for sustainability for their workplace, union or industry. She gave the example of the Canadian Postal Workers Union proposal [*Delivering Community Power*](#), a comprehensive plan “that can deliver sustainable infrastructure for the next economy,” including electric vehicle charging stations, farm-to-table food delivery, community banking and more. “Workers in a bakery” she said, should aspire to not only know how to bake bread, but “to own the bakery!” Workers can not only make products, but determine what gets produced and how.

Five unions then described inspiring campaigns for making their industries sustainable.

Bruce Hamilton, International Vice-President of ATU, described public transit as a civil right, and explained that if public transportation were doubled in the U.S., we could reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 60%. Andy Banks, Deputy Director of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Matteo Colombi, spoke of the innovative Zero

Waste program developed in San Francisco that now diverts 80% of municipal waste from landfills into recycling and composting while providing good paying, union jobs to the poorest communities of the city. Maria Castaneda, Secretary-Treasurer of SEIU 1199 described how the impact of severe storms like Sandy prompted SEIU to develop programs on environmental and climate justice. The

union maps environmental justice impacts where their members live and conducts training and education on EJ and climate.

Michael Yee and David Thoni described worker training programs developed by IBEW local 3 and the Net-Zero facility built by IBEW local 595, and reported on the Climate and Environmental Justice Summit convened by the Alameda Central Labor Council. Dennis Olson described the UFCW’s organizing around a Good Food Purchasing Policy that can be a tool for both protecting and enhancing labor standards for workers in the food industry and advancing climate justice.

WORKER-LED SOLUTIONS

We also had a set of workshops that highlighted innovative organizing strategies including the Just Transition project organized by labor unions and community organizations in the wake of the closure of the Tonawanda coal-fired power in upstate New York. This included an 8-month community-labor organizing process that involved 4 major meetings: 1) workers at the plant, 2) local unions, 3) environmentalists and 4) families. The International Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen described their successful Green Diesel campaign to win cleaner fuel engines and their visionary concept for



[Solutionary Rail](#). Elaine Bernard led a workshop on Bargaining for the Common Good - integrating green plans into the collective bargaining process - including creating Green Stewards positions as part of the workforce. Trade Unions for Energy Democracy led

“It is well past time for labor to lead now on climate change and lead the way in building a sustainable future for the planet and its people.”

a discussion on International Labor’s Approach to Climate Protection: Lessons and Perspectives, and a number of unions shared Training and Education Tools that they use with their memberships.

On Day 2, LNS President Joe Uehlein provided some historical context for the Convergence. He identified at least 12 labor-environment initiatives since the first Earth Day. Although the labor-environment collaborations resulted in some important successes (the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts, Occupational Health and Safety Administration...) “it is also true that our history as a movement reveals deep complicity in bringing the planet and its people to the precipice we now find ourselves at.”

The third panel provided further context of the political landscape we are facing. Lane Windham, author of the recently released book *Knocking on Labor’s Door* spoke of the political attacks unions are confronting (including Trump’s anti-union appointments to the National Labor Relations Board and efforts to expand Right-to-Work), but also positive developments where workers are blending traditional unions with new forms of organizing. In some ways, the term is shifting from “labor movement” to “workers’ movement”. Polls are showing that workers still want traditional

unions too. The movement is also diversifying with 2/3rds of union folks now being women, people of color, or both. Women are on the way to becoming the majority of union members.

Sean Sweeney, Executive Director of Trade Unions for Energy Democracy demonstrated that the transition to a low-carbon world is not inevitable. The recent slowing of global greenhouse gas emissions is more a result in the slowing of the growth of the Chinese economy than public and private investment in renewable energy. We are also far from meeting the targets agreed to in the Paris Climate Agreement. He also pointed out that market-based approaches like cap and trade are failing and that public investment and control of energy systems will be necessary to effectively address the climate crisis.

John Braxton, Treasurer of American Federation of Teachers Local 2026 provided an overview of current national climate-related bills including the Just Transition Act introduced by Senator Bernie Sanders which establishes a fund of \$41B - providing support for coal workers And industries where 20% of workers would need to transition out of their current jobs. The Merkeley-Sanders 100x50 Act will transition the U.S. to 100% renewable energy by 2050. A bill with similar goals was recently introduced by Representative Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii. Ananda Lee Tan of the Climate Justice Alliance, spoke of an upcoming forum of the Building

Equity and Alignment Initiative, organized by environmental justice, labor, philanthropic and environmental organizations focused on the topic of Just Transition and strategies to support grassroots transition campaigns.

BUILDING A NET THAT WORKS

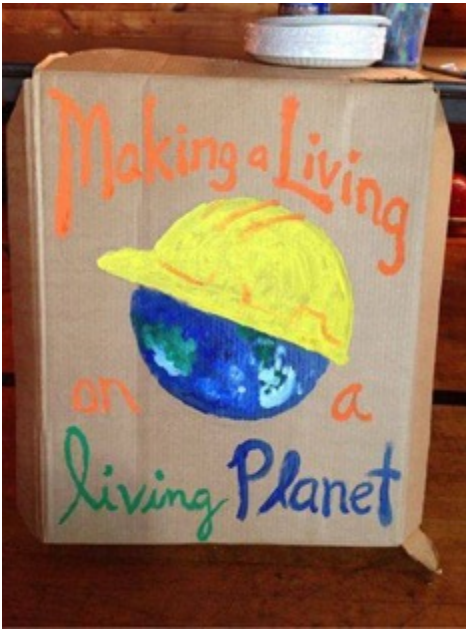
On Day 2 we also organized small groups to discuss labor-based strategies to address climate change and goals to build the network in the next year.

Divest/Invest

One group discussed the importance of addressing climate change through our pension funds.



There is huge change taking place around the idea of fiduciary responsibility. The concept of what constitutes investor interest is growing to include climate change. The idea of risk is reversing: Exxon is now no longer seen as a safe long-term investment. There is a campaign in NY State to get a vote to divest some large NY pension funds. In Montgomery County, MD: the UFCW local passed a resolution to divest as soon as possible. There is potential to work with EJ movements and organizations who want to support divestment. However, rank & file support - and local union leader support - is



critical to making this happen. Packets and programs will be shared to help folks educate their members. We want LNS to be a resource for unions that want to focus on Divest/Invest projects.

Resolutions

A couple of resolutions have been forwarded to the AFL-CIO Convention for consideration. The Washington State Labor Council and Communications Workers of America submitted a resolution on Just Transition. National Nurses United, Amalgamated Transit Union, American Postal Workers Union, Alameda Central Labor Council and the Vermont AFL-CIO also submitted resolutions urging labor leadership on climate change. A template was also developed for unions and their locals to initiate dialogue and action on climate change. We will seek to get hundreds of these passed in the next year. An open letter was developed for individual sign-ons as well and will be circulated online (see attached).

Days of Action

Another group discussed days and events that present opportunities for the entire network to do something together. We will put together a calendar of events that members and allies are organizing and explore possibilities for a network-wide action.

Membership Drive

The LNS Board of Directors approved an individual member dues structure as well as a fee schedule for union/organizational support. We are setting an initial goal of 300 individual members by the end of 2017.

TAKEAWAYS/CONCLUSIONS

The importance of broad-based coalitions rooted in worker and environmental justice was repeated as a key to success in local and state campaigns.

The importance of a strong public sector and democratically run institutions and industries was another fundamental thread. This includes expanded public transit, publicly-owned energy systems, a publicly run-development bank as a vehicle to capture and reinvest divested pension funds, democratically run rural electric co-ops, and massive public investment in renewable infrastructure and just transition.

“Owning the Bakery” soon became a rallying cry. We were all inspired by the creativity and organizing skill represented at the Convergence and people seemed energized to share what they



learned with their unions.

Good work is already being done. It also was clear that our efforts are not enough. We need to connect these efforts and scale up to a broader policy agenda and organizing strategy.

FINAL WORDS

Some of the comments from participants captured the spirit and results of the Convergence:

“With my local, I want to work on creating a vision of what my local, my union, and my industry would look like at 100% sustainability. Also get training and bring that to my local.”

“We created a great space for people to self-organize.”

“It was a rich and diverse array of sincere organizing efforts in the face of the climate crisis.”

“The only way we can ever lose is if we quit. And I’m not quitting!”



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Draft Sample Union Resolution on Climate Change and the Labor Network for Sustainability

Whereas:

1. The labor movement seeks a sustainable future for the earth and its people;
 2. Climate change represents a mortal threat to working people, the labor movement, and society at large;
 3. We have to reduce greenhouse gas emissions fast. The time for slow, careful, cautious approaches is long past.
 4. Minimizing climate catastrophe requires a planned elimination of coal, oil, and natural gas emissions, as well as emissions from agriculture, waste, and other sources. It requires a rapid movement toward 100% renewable energy. That requires a planned, rapid construction of renewable energy infrastructure on a massive scale, comparable to the economic mobilization that the U.S. undertook during World War II;
 5. As the threat of climate change mounts, the rich continue to get richer, the poor get poorer, and working people get slammed. Fortunately, we can address both the climate crisis and the inequality crisis with the same set of policies. As a labor movement we need to re-center our priorities around these challenges;
 6. Climate protection must serve as a means to challenge environmental, racial, and gender injustice;
 7. Labor's climate policy should insist on the basic principle of fairness that the burden of policies that are necessary for society—like protecting the climate—shouldn't be borne by a small minority who happen to be victimized by their side effects. A labor plan for climate protection should insist from the outset that any transition away from fossil fuels includes protection for the wellbeing of workers and communities whose jobs may be threatened;
 8. Full employment and economic security for all must be a central part of a labor program for climate protection because the threat of unemployment forces workers and unions to accept any jobs, even those that are destroying their own futures. Climate protecting jobs must provide a decent income, benefits, and the basic right of workers to speak, to organize, and to bargain collectively through representatives of their own choosing;
 9. It is the mission of the Labor Convergence on Climate (a project of the Labor Network for Sustainability) to be the organized voice within the labor movement for policies that are ecologically sustainable while also advancing the movement for good jobs and a just transition for workers and communities hurt by the effects of climate change and by the transition to renewable energy.
- Paragraphs 1-8 above summarize the principles of the Labor Convergence on Climate;

Therefore, be it resolved that _____ (name of union)

- 1. endorses the principles of the Labor Convergence on Climate and agrees to affiliate with the Labor Network for Sustainability; and**
- 2. establishes a committee on climate change that will appoint an individual to be the liaison with the Labor Convergence on Climate.**

www.labor4sustainability.org



Open Letter from Union Members and Our Families to American Labor Leaders TAKE A STRONG STAND ON CLIMATE CHANGE!

To the leaders of the American labor movement:

Working people, poor people, and frontline communities are most heavily impacted by the effects of climate change. We feel the force of this devastation first and worst—from more powerful hurricanes to wildfires, from rising sea levels to crop-destroying droughts and floods. Our families and communities receive the greatest blow and have the biggest stake in moving as rapidly as possible from a fossil fuel-based society to a sustainable energy society.

Global warming represents an existential threat to the world's people. We must act rapidly to avoid even more devastating climate change. But moving to 100% renewable energy will also impact jobs for many of us. So any transition, to be just, must protect workers and frontline communities impacted by the changes we must make from having to disproportionately bear rather than share the social cost.

Organized labor with its allies is the strongest, best-organized force to turn this around. Who will speak for the global majority of working people and poor people if organized labor does not?

The Earth is our only home. There is no Planet B. And there are no jobs on a dead planet.

As union members and families of union members, we call on you to take the lead in backing policies that call for:

- (1) A rapid transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy;
- (2) Massive rebuilding of our energy, transport, and other infrastructure in support of that transformation; and
- (3) A just transition for workers and communities directly affected by climate change and the transition to renewable energy – including income support, retraining, retirement security, and the creation of quality living-wage union-protected jobs in infrastructure, energy efficiency, and clean energy.

Future generations will ask what the labor movement did to respond to, slow and mitigate the worst effects of climate change. We urge you to take bold action to address the climate crisis with solutions that protect our planet and our people. You will have my full backing for these policies and the backing of millions of working Americans who are looking for your leadership at this critical moment.

The actions we take today will determine the world that our children, grandchildren, and future generations will inhabit tomorrow and for centuries to come. Let's act decisively now to improve rather than imperil their lives.

Name _____

_____ I am a union member _____ A member of my family member belongs to a union

Union/Organization _____ Local Union Number _____

Email address _____ Zip Code _____

Mail this to: Voices for a Sustainable Future, PO Box #5780, 6909 Laurel Ave, Takoma Park, MD, 20913

Or Go to this link to sign on to the letter: <http://bit.ly/OpenLetter2UnionLeaders>

LABOR NETWORK FOR SUSTAINABILITY: SECOND LABOR CONVERGENCE ON CLIMATE: BUILDING WORKER POWER TO CONFRONT CLIMATE CHANGE

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

8:30 AM - REGISTRATION

DAY 1 GOALS

- Provide concrete examples of climate and sustainability campaigns by geography, union, sector or industry.
- Establish creative environment for sharing of resources and ideas.
- Build relationships

9:45 AM – **WELCOME** - Bruce Hamilton, International Vice President, Amalgamated Transit Union

INTRODUCTIONS – Larry Williams, Sierra Club Labor and Environment Program

WHERE HAVE WE BEEN AND WHY ARE WE HERE: HOW THE CONVERGENCE HAS EVOLVED IN THE PAST YEAR AND REVIEW OF GOALS AND AGENDA – Michael Leon Guerrero, Executive Director, Labor Network for Sustainability

WHERE ARE WE GOING? BUILDING POWER FOR WORKERS TO CONFRONT CLIMATE CHANGE - Sarita Gupta, Executive Director, Jobs with Justice

10:45 AM - FIRST PANEL: BUILDING LOCAL/STATE POWER (Part 1): WORKERS' STORIES FROM THE FRONTLINES OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Examples of local and state campaigns: worker/environmental and economic justice coalitions.

- **North Carolina Roundtable on Climate and Jobs**
 - Aiden Graham, Campaign Manager, North Carolina AFL-CIO
 - Ajamu Dillahunt, APWU Labor Education Task Force & Black Workers for Justice Executive Committee
- **Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs**
 - John Humphries, Coalition Organizer
 - Mustafa Salahuddin, President, Business Agenda, ATU Local 1336
- **New York State Initiatives**
 - Jon Forster, Local 375, Vice President DC37 AFSCME
 - Michael Yee, Treasurer, IBEW Local 3
 - Judy Sheridan-Gonzalez, President, New York State Nurses Association

11:45 AM – **BREAK/NETWORKING**

12:30 PM - **LUNCH**

1:15 PM - SECOND PANEL: ORGANIZING BY UNION/SECTOR/INDUSTRY

Examples of climate initiatives being organized by union, industry or sector

- **Green Plans: Example of Canadian Union of Postal Workers: Delivering Community Power: How Canada Post can be the hub of our Next Economy.** - Elaine Bernard, former Executive Director, Labor and Worklife Program, Harvard University
- **United Food and Commercial Workers** - Dennis Olson, Senior Research Associate, Food & Agricultural Policy
- **Amalgamated Transit Workers Union** – Bruce Hamilton, International Vice President
- **International Brotherhood of Teamsters** – Andy Banks, Deputy Director/Matteo Colombi, Union Representative
- **International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers** – David Thoni, Local 595/Michael Yee, Treasurer, Local 3
- **Service Employees International Union, 1199** – Maria Castaneda, Secretary Treasurer

3:00 – **BREAK/NETWORKING**

3:30 PM - **WORKSHOPS**

- **Training and Education Tools** - LNS Education Committee

- **Bargaining for the Common Good** - Elaine Bernard
- **International Labor's Approach to Climate Protection: Lessons and Perspectives** - Trade Unions for Energy Democracy
- **Green Diesel Project** - Fritz Edler, Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen
- **The Huntley Experiment** - Richard Lipsitz, President, Western New York Area Labor Federation, AFL-CIO/Rebecca Newberry, Executive Director, Clean Air Coalition of Western New York

5:00 PM - FEEDBACK ON DAY 1, GOALS FOR DAY 2 - PLENARY DISCUSSION

6:30 PM - DINNER

7:30 PM - RECEPTION/FREE TIME

SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

Day 2 GOALS

- Provide analysis of labor/climate political landscape from local to international level.
- Determine strategies and processes to build the network

9:00 AM - OPENING

FROM EARTH DAY TO TODAY: THE PITFALLS AND POSSIBILITIES OF LABOR-CLIMATE ORGANIZING – Joe Uehlein, President, Labor Network for Sustainability

9:30 AM - THIRD PANEL - THE BIG PICTURE: MAJOR ISSUES AFFECTING THE LANDSCAPE OF LABOR AND CLIMATE

- **State of Labor in the Trump/Libertarian Era** – Lane Windham, WILL Empower, (Women Innovating Labor Leadership), Associate Director, Kalmanovitz Institute for Labor and the Working Poor
- **20 Years of Climate Policy - Where Are We Now?** - Sean Sweeney, Executive Director, Trade Unions for Energy Democracy
- **The Policy Landscape: Proposed Legislation and Policies Related to Climate and Labor** – John Braxton, Treasurer, AFT Local 2026, Philadelphia, PA
- **Just Transition: Current Initiatives** - Ananda Lee Tan, Project Coordinator, Just Transition Collaborative, EDGE Funders Alliance

10:30 AM - BREAK

10:40 AM - BUILDING A NET THAT WORKS: 2017-18 GOALS AND STRATEGIES (PART 1)

Small Group Discussions

- **Resolutions, National Policy Campaigns and the AFL-CIO Convention 2017**
- **Moving the Climate Conversation within the Labor Movement: Building Environmental Justice Caucuses in Local Unions and Labor Councils**
- **Divest/Invest: Strategies for Unions**
- **National Day of Action**

11:45 AM – BROWN BAG WORKING LUNCH

12:15 PM - BUILDING A NET THAT WORKS (PART 2)

- Proposals/Goals for 2018 - Reports from small groups and discussion
- Staff/CSC report on network building goals and organizing process moving forward

2:30 PM - CLOSING

3:00 - ADJOURN