

CLIMATE SOLIDARITY: Workers vs. Warming



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FOR SUSTAINABILITY



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This book is dedicated to all who are building climate solidarity.

Chapter 1: Introduction: Climate and Work

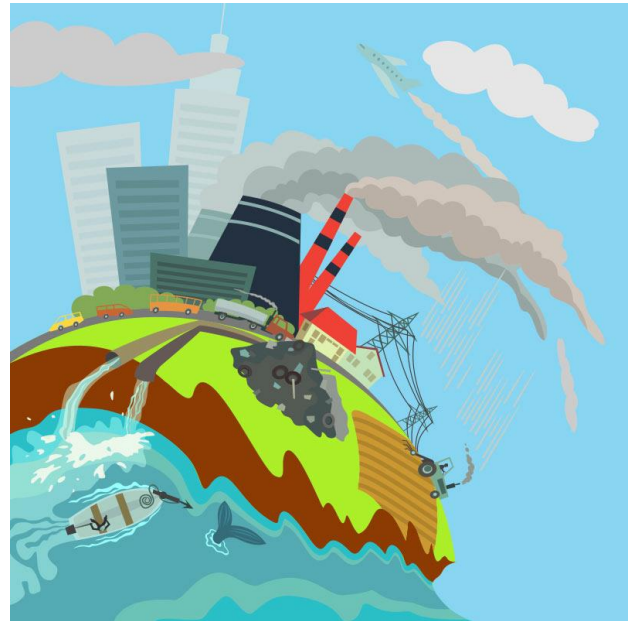
Every day, billions of people get up and go to work. At work, we produce something that is useful to or at least desired by somebody. We may produce a profit for ourselves or, more likely, for our employer. For ourselves we produce a livelihood, great or small. But we also produce something else: a lesser or greater amount of the greenhouse gases (GHGs) that are making the Earth's climate less and less habitable for us and our posterity.

Workers have no greater interest than to prevent the destruction of the Earth's climate. Yet workers often act as an organized force to oppose climate protection measures in the name of our interests as workers. The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO), the largest federation of unions in the United States, long opposed the 1997 Kyoto Protocol on the grounds that it would hurt U.S. jobs and economic competitiveness. The Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA), with backing from the AFL-CIO, has fought to build the Keystone XL pipeline and charged that unions opposing it were under the skirts of "delusional environmental groups." The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) union opposed the climate-protecting Clean Power Plan issued by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) on the grounds that it will lead to the closing of some coal-fired power plants.

There is a persistent gap between working people's goals and the actual destruction of the Earth's climate that we produce through our work and activities. We seek such goals for ourselves and our posterity as survival, health, happiness, security, quality of life, and doing something useful, enjoyable, interesting, and productive that has a positive impact on the world. But we are actually producing self and mutual destruction by means of destroying the Earth's climate. There is a term for such a persistent, paradoxical gap between intent and realization: alienation.

The term "alienation of labor" has long been used to refer to a condition in which workers labor not for our own individual and collective ends, but rather for those who control our labor. What we will here call "climate alienation" represents a particular form of the alienation of labor: producing through our own labor the greenhouse gases that are destroying the climate on which we all depend. It is a form of dehumanization in which we use our own human capacities for our own destruction.

Climate destruction began as an unintended consequence of our labor—we did not know we were producing it. But for the past quarter-century, we have increasingly known that human activity is destroying the climate system that is the basis of our life on earth.



Climate alienation is a feature of the way we work day by day. It is often also a feature of the collective political action of working people when we tolerate or even promote the use of our labor in ways that lead to climate destruction.

How is such a paradoxical state of affairs possible? How did we get in such a state? How can we change it? How can the working class transform itself to fight for climate protection and ultimately to reverse climate alienation? *Climate Solidarity: Workers vs. Warming* tries to provide a plausible answer to these questions.

When scientists confirmed in the 1980s that burning fossil fuels was causing global warming, their findings presented humanity with a problem the likes of which it had never faced before. Despite a quarter century of effort, virtually no country, industry, or institution has reduced its emission of greenhouse gases in accord with what scientists say is necessary to prevent climate catastrophe, and our species as a whole continues to accelerate toward its climate doom.

Since 2007, I have been actively involved in writing about and trying to affect how the American labor movement addresses climate change. The approach taken in *Climate Solidarity* draws on previous works of mine, in particular *Strike!* for worker movements; *Building Bridges* for labor coalitions; *Save the Humans?* for social movements; and *Climate Insurgency* and *Against Doom* for climate protection movements, as well as on what I have learned from my participation in the labor climate movement.¹

Work is not the whole story of climate change. Not all GHGs are produced at work; workers play many roles in life outside the workplace; other people besides workers play a role both in creating and in solving climate change. But work is a crucial and neglected aspect of the process of human self-destruction—and of reversing it.

Not just labor but every element of society will have to change in order to address the challenge of climate protection. People need to organize and act for climate protection not only in the world of work but in every milieu and venue. So the transformation proposed here for the role of workers is also an example of the kind of transformation necessary across every element of society.

The presidency of climate-change denier Donald Trump presents workers and organized labor with the temptation to support expanded fossil fuel burning despite the accelerating climate destruction it will cause, in order to garner the short-term economic benefits of his trade and infrastructure policies. Such a course would be suicidal for labor. It would divide the working class and separate labor from the allies it desperately needs to fight Trumpism's anti-labor agenda. It would brand unions as special interests just out for themselves. Worst of all, it would leave the lives and livelihoods of American workers, the rest of humanity and future generations at the mercy of the climate catastrophe. There are no jobs on a dead planet.

Climate Solidarity proposes a different course. It describes how workers and their organizations can help lead a broad people's coalition that can challenge all aspects of the destructive

¹ Jeremy Brecher, *Strike! Revised, Expanded, and Updated Edition* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014); Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, Eds. *Building Bridges: The Emerging Grassroots Coalition of Labor and Community* (New York, Monthly Review Press, 1990); Jeremy Brecher, *Save the Humans? Common Preservation in Action* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2012); Jeremy Brecher, *Climate Insurgency: A Strategy for Survival* (West Cornwall, CT: Stone Soup Press, 2016); and Jeremy Brecher, *Against Doom: A Climate Insurgency Manual* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2017).

Trump agenda. And it presents climate protection as the great unifying common interest that can provide the core for that coalition.

Climate alienation and worker solidarity

Climate alienation is part of the broader problem of the alienation of labor. Climate destruction is only one of many problems working people face that we perpetuate with our daily labor. Poverty, insecurity, injustice, war, pollution, resource depletion, discrimination, domination, oppression, degraded work, democracy deficit, and the denial of human freedoms and dignity are ubiquitous everywhere around the world, and are in considerable part produced and reproduced by what working people do in our daily quest to make a living. Workers produce the pesticides that poison our food and the weapons that shoot down strikers and protesters, as well as the greenhouse gases that are destroying our climate.

There has been a centuries-long historical struggle for working class self-liberation from such alienated labor. Today, the first thing the working class needs to liberate itself from is modern society's drive to destroy the Earth's climate. Climate protection is a fundamental aspect of the self-liberation of the working class.

The history of the working class all over the world is the story of the emergence and development of solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority. Solidarity counteracts the isolation and competition of workers in the labor market and more generally in a competitive society. Self-organization counters the organization of workers' activity by those who employ us. Challenge to authority counters the unilateral control of workers by the authority of others and our exclusion from a role in shaping our work and society. While these patterns are carried in traditions and organizations, they also repeatedly re-emerge and are reinvented by workers facing the fundamental conditions of working class life. However, solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority are normally limited in their reach and remain partially subservient to other forces.

The prescription of *Climate Solidarity* is to extend solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority to climate alienation. I will call the result climate solidarity: workers' collective action to halt climate doom. It is one case of what I have elsewhere called common preservation—cooperation in service of mutual wellbeing.²



² Jeremy Brecher, *Save the Humans? Common Preservation in Action* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm, 2012) p. 5.

Overview



This Introduction, “Climate and Work,” poses the paradox of workers producing the GHGs that are producing catastrophe for us and future generations.



Chapter 2, “The World Order of Climate Alienation,” describes the features of the modern world order that helped create and perpetuate climate alienation, including the nation state system, private property, markets, wage labor, and dependence on fossil fuels. It demonstrates how these features can lead workers and our organizations to pursue short-term particular interests at the expense of our long-term common interest in a sustainable, climate-safe planet. It shows how these same features render workers largely powerless to protect the climate should we wish and choose to do so. It explains how short-term particular interests and powerlessness interact to produce climate alienation. It concludes with a broad outline of how these features must be changed to make effective climate protection possible.



Chapter 3, “Worker Self-Organization,” describes the ways in which workers have come together throughout modern history to act on common interests. It shows how worker actions have been rooted in patterns of mutual solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority. It describes how worker solidarity, organization, and action have often been restricted to limited groups and objectives. It indicates how those restrictions have limited the power of workers to influence our conditions of existence. And it tells how those limits have often been overcome in new forms of collective action.



Chapter 4, “Organized Labor and Climate Protection,” describes how the tension between the apparent short-term interests of particular groups of American workers in particular climate-destroying activities and workers’ common interest in climate protection have been expressed in two major trade union statements on global warming and in the controversy over the Keystone XL pipeline.



Chapter 5, “Workers Fighting Global Warming,” shows many ways in which American workers are expressing our common interests in climate protection and finding ways to act on them.



Chapter 6, “A Climate-Protecting Workers’ Movement,” explores how workers could move beyond short-term special interests in climate-destroying activities to develop broader solidarity and self-organization through the struggle to protect the Earth’s climate.



Chapter 7, “Working to Protect the Climate,” proposes a program of social change that workers need to impose on those in authority to eliminate climate alienation.



Climate Solidarity tries to explain both why labor’s response to climate change was what it has been, and why and how we might change it. It presents an interpretation of climate alienation and proposes what I hope is a rational and plausible pathway toward its abolition.

Neither victims nor perpetrators

Those who do the world's work are both the victims of climate change and its perpetrators. Every day at work we are producing our own doom. How do we stop? For our own survival and wellbeing, we need to organize to counteract the problems created by the world order.

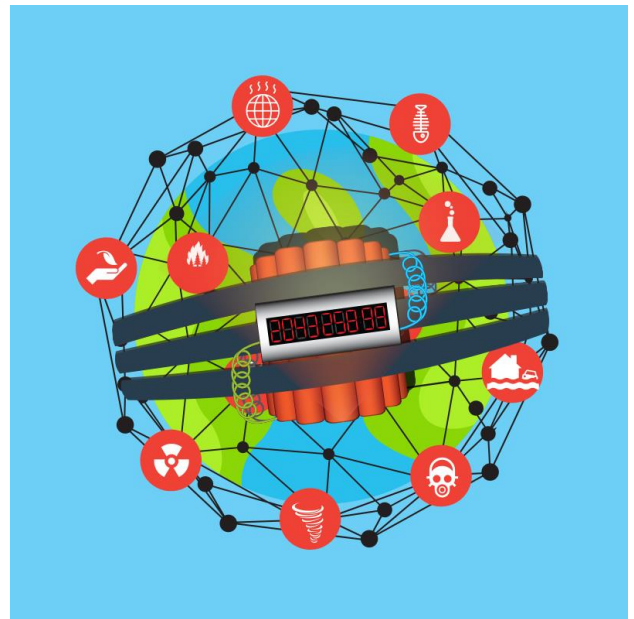
Underlying all the problems that block climate protection is the fundamental alienation of human action, embodied in alienated labor and production. Climate protection is fundamentally taking control of an aspect of our own activity and bending it to our purposes. De-alienation is democratization. Worker climate protection is an aspect of worker self-liberation. And since it can only be accomplished collectively, it is also common preservation.

Chapter 2: The World Order of Climate Alienation

Why is humanity producing its own doom? Why are workers producing the greenhouse gases that will destroy us and our posterity? Why is that destruction so difficult to stop? The explanation lies in the way human beings organize our life on earth—our world order. This chapter describes the origin and development of the disordered system, our contemporary world order, from which and into which the climate catastrophe emerged.

The patterns that account for climate alienation can be traced back to the beginnings of the modern world, when two intertwined and evolving systems came to characterize human activity. One was a nation state system based on sovereign states—individual states that assert absolute sovereignty over a defined territory and its population and hold the power to engage in inter-state diplomacy, domination, conflict, and war. The other was a capitalist economic system that combined private property rights with market exchange and wage labor. Together they constitute core elements of our world order today.

The nation state system and the capitalist system emerged gradually out of the feudal system in medieval Europe, although parallel developments were occurring in other parts of the world as well. Because they dominate the world today—and because they are the systems primarily responsible for the production of global warming and climate alienation—they can provide a starting point for our investigation. Human life can't be reduced to these institutions; there are still also communities, regions, religions, subcultures, voluntary associations, the ecosphere, bioregions, and many other overlaid patterns of human organization. But the nation state and capitalist systems have shaped the use of human labor and the use of fossil fuels over the long-term history of the modern world. It is these institutions and processes that primarily determine the relation of labor to climate change as climate alienation.



Nation states

While the nation state system can seem as universal as the law of gravity, in fact it is neither eternal nor unchanging. It emerged from a very different system, feudalism, and today is being modified though hardly abolished by globalization.

Medieval Europe was governed by a multi-level political system in which monarchs shared law-making power and legitimate authority with feudal lords below them and the Holy Roman Emperor and Roman Catholic Church above. A “patchwork of overlapping and incomplete rights of government” was “inextricably superimposed and tangled.”³

Within this system, monarchs began to assert supreme authority within their territories. They developed cadres of officials to manage the state. At the same time, markets, trade, and a class of capitalists gradually grew. The budding capitalists found a territorially centralized state increasingly useful for protecting property rights at home and abroad, while monarchs found capitalist wealth an important source of revenue for their emerging states. By the 17th century, the medieval multi-layered patchwork of political power had been superseded by a system of territorial states exercising a monopoly of authority against church and feudal authorities within their territories and sovereignty against emperor and Pope. This system of territorial states whose rulers assert absolute sovereignty and independence has characterized international relations ever since. It is sometimes known as the “Westphalian system” after the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) that supported the absolute sovereignty of monarchs.

Economic conflict, war, and imperial domination were constitutive features of the system of sovereign nation states. States required wealth to pay for military and imperial operations lest they be unable to dominate others and instead be dominated by them. Successful states generally developed strategies of economic development designed to increase taxable wealth by increasing production.⁴

Initially only very restricted classes and elites had any influence within the emerging territorial states. Gradually those excluded began to demand representation in the state. The idea of democratic self-government arose in conflict with monarchical domination and usually took the form of demands that state rulers be selected by the people, who would thereby be transformed from subjects to citizens. In the “age of democratic revolutions” from 1760 to 1800, revolutions and insurrectionary movements in North America, France, Great Britain, Latin America, and elsewhere replaced existing states with more democratic ones or forced existing states to provide vehicles for popular representation. Nonetheless, states generally continued to play the role of preserving “public order,” including the prevailing distribution of economic and political power, by suppressing challenges to it by force and violence.

³ John Gerrard Ruggie, “Territoriality and Beyond: Problematizing modernity in international relations,” *International Organization*, Vol. 47, No. 1, Winter, 1993. This historical discussion draws on Jeremy Brecher, “The ‘National Question’ Reconsidered,” *New Politics*, Summer, 1987; Quentin Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978); Michael Mann, *The Sources of Social Power*, Vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) and Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), and Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

⁴ Economic growth has been an objective of states from the ancient encouragement of agricultural improvement to today’s promotion of a rising Gross Domestic Product. See Edmund Burke III, “The Big Story,” in Edmund Burke III and Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Environment and World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009).

The people ruled by early modern states were often ethnically diverse, geographically scattered, and culturally unconnected with their rulers—a German could be King of England, for example. Starting around the late 18th century, however, nationalist movements began seeking to align states as territorial power centers with nations as communities of people who asserted common linguistic, racial, ethnic, religious, or historical bonds. In the nationalist view, humanity was assumed to be divided into distinct peoples. Each people was entitled to form a nation, which in turn was entitled to a monopoly of political authority within a given territory. The sovereignty of states, originally conceived as the “divine right of kings,” was redefined as a right of peoples.

From both a nationalist and a democratic perspective, the nation state was defined as the embodiment of the will of the people—meaning the citizens of the nation. The nation was generally presumed to possess a collective identity and a “national interest” which included the common interests of all ethnic and religious subgroups and of different social classes.

Even in democratic countries, however, most people remained excluded from control over economic institutions. In the 19th and 20th centuries, movements arose among the excluded groups and classes to extend democratic control over markets and enterprises either directly or via the state. Some governments used their authority to establish welfare states and to regulate the behavior of economic actors and of the economy as a whole. In Communist countries the state became the possessor of productive wealth, ostensibly for the benefit of the people but often for political and economic elites that controlled the state apparatus. Many states used their political authority to extend their power over their economy for purposes of government aggrandizement and economic nationalism. Since the 1970s, neoliberal economic doctrine has advocated restriction of the economic role of the state, but the state role in the economy remains a contested zone.

Since World War II, the nation state system has ostensibly been modified by the global authority of the United Nations. That authority, however, has remained subordinate to the power of nation states. While in theory each nation state is sovereign, in fact, effective power within the nation state system is largely concentrated in a few dominant nations. While the United States and its allies dominated this system during the 20th century, their hegemony is now being challenged by China and other rapidly developing nations.

The nation state system has helped cause and perpetuate climate destruction. National sovereignty makes states the arbiters of what can or cannot be emitted into the atmosphere in their territories; it is states that authorize the emission of climate-destroying GHGs. The sovereignty of nations ensures that common human interests are trumped by the authority of states—allowing governments to destroy the global atmospheric commons without restraint from higher authority. The system of sovereign nation states generates a competition in which each state must encourage the exploitation of labor and nature’s resources or face loss of power and wealth within the world order. The direct and indirect dependence of states and their officials on dominant economic actors—notably industries that produce and use fossil fuels—often makes governments subordinate to those with an interest in perpetuating climate destruction. In the absence of adequate democratic control, the state often becomes a vehicle for imposing climate destruction on society.

The nation state system has also helped cause and perpetuate climate alienation. National sovereignty entails the right to make the rules that exclude working people from determining

the nature and use of their labor. National allegiances and economic, political, and military competition and conflict among nations divide the world's workers and give us an apparent interest in the triumphs of our own nation over others, even if the consequences of those triumphs for us are pyrrhic. The lack of vehicles for expressing and implementing common global interests impedes workers from pursuing our common interest in climate protection.

Property

Systems of property rights exist in most societies, in part to reduce conflict over who can use what resources. But property rights are far more complex than a simplistic view of private property that asserts, "I can do whatever I want with what is mine." Property ownership consists of what legal scholars often describe as a "bundle of rights." The rights to access a piece of property, to exclude others from it, to determine its use, to have the benefits of its use, to modify it, and to convey it to others can be distributed among different individuals, groups, and institutions. Property can be private, public, or common; held individually or jointly; held for oneself or in trust for another. Even the most privatized "fee simple" property ownership involves obligations such as paying taxes and not violating the rights of your neighbors.



Property rights are claims that can be enforced by courts, executive officials, or popular will. In modern societies around the world, the arbiter of who has what rights—whether as property owners, citizens, workers, or human beings—is normally the state. States determine the bundle of property rights, regulating conflict among social players and forces. Without their systems of laws and law enforcement, property ownership would be meaningless. "Security of property" depends on the state. The state, conversely, is largely dependent on property owners for both economic and political support.

Property rights change, even within capitalism. Landowners once had rights to the space above their land "all the way up" but the arrival of airplanes put an end to that. One of the most venerable forms of property, slavery, was simply abolished -- though it took a global abolitionist movement and an American civil war to do it.

In Europe in the feudal era, rights to use and control the most important form of property—land—were distributed among a hierarchy of lords and vassals, with nobody exercising absolute control of any piece. Members of rural communities held common rights to use land, water, flora, and fauna. No one could sell a parcel of land because no one person owned it.

The emergence of capitalism involved the gradual shifting of property rights. Through an extended process, modern private property law, which makes it possible to own a piece of private property and sell it at will, emerged. The feudal "bundle of rights" was redistributed, but not as a simple transfer from one class to another. For example, the owners of land no longer held authority over those people once attached to it as serfs. Conversely, community rights to glean, hunt, and otherwise make use of the fruits of the land were progressively constricted.

The assignment of the property rights bundle had consequences that were unintended and not even imaginable at the time. In particular, the right of ownership and use included the seemingly innocuous right to burn something you own and to let the resulting emissions dissipate in the atmosphere. This right eventually would lead to the greatest challenge in human history.

Property rights continued to evolve within capitalism. For example, property law came to provide limited liability and separation of ownership and management in the modern corporation.⁵ Business firms evolved from individual proprietorships and partnerships to limited liability corporations, which organize an ever-increasing proportion of the world's economic activity. American law granted such corporations the legal status and rights of living persons. Running companies became the province of professional managers, who might well not be the owners. A growing proportion of people became corporate employees. In the 1930s, the rights of such corporations were restricted by their duty to bargain collectively with their employees. By the mid-20th century a small number of giant corporations, integrating all aspects of production from raw materials to the consumer, dominated major markets in each major country.

Of course the right of property owners to exploit labor and pollute the environment is not absolute. Workers may retain some of their rights as human beings, as citizens, and even rights specifically as workers—though courts have often maintained that such rights are superseded by collective bargaining contracts. The right to harm the environment is limited by the police power of the state and the right to prevent a public nuisance—though courts often find that private property rights trump such considerations. The right to do harm to others is limited by criminal and civil law. Under the public trust doctrine, essential natural resources are the common property of the people, which the government cannot authorize private parties to privatize or harm.

Private property rights lie at the heart of climate alienation. The law gives property owners the right to employ workers, direct their labor, and retain what they produce. It thereby excludes workers from control over the process of production, what is produced, or what happens to the product. And property law generally allows property owners the right to use their property as they see fit—including the right to spew greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and thereby disrupt the equilibrium of the Earth's climate system.

Protecting Earth's climate and reducing climate alienation will require a struggle to limit the right of private property owners to order workers to destroy the environment.

Markets

While markets of one kind or another go back thousands of years, in feudal Europe markets were quite limited; most economic activity was controlled by feudal lords, whose peasants produced for them directly, or by local guilds of craftsmen who prevented competition through their monopoly control of the practice of their crafts and the goods produced. As property ownership became increasingly private and feudal forms of coordination atrophied,

⁵ For a classic examination see A.A. Berle and Gardner Means, *The Modern Corporation and Private Property* (1932). Recent Supreme Court decisions have expanded rights such as freedom of speech, financing of elections, and liberty of conscience to corporations, which have the effect of a reciprocal restriction of rights for the people.

markets became more and more necessary to coordinate production and consumption. The property rights bundle was reconfigured so that land and other objects of property could have a single owner and therefore be “alienable,” that is, subject to buying and selling. Fee simple ownership, in which owners have unrestricted rights to a piece of property, became increasingly prevalent. The illusion of property rights as something unitary, rather than as a separable bundle of rights, grew.⁶

Markets developed far beyond the realm of material objects. Slave markets sold human beings. Labor markets sold the productive capacity—time, effort, and skill—of workers. Financial markets exchanged money for promises of repayment with interest; they channeled current wealth into speculative investment to produce greater wealth in the future. Services were provided in exchange for money. Capital markets bought and sold shares of corporations.

The combination of an exchangeable bundle of property rights, markets to exchange them in, and the buying and selling of labor power constituted a persistent pattern or system, albeit one marked by periodic disorder, conflict, turmoil, collapse, and transformation. Together they characterize what is generally known as capitalism or the capitalist system.



Market-based economies developed their own dynamic, composed of intentional actions but not resulting from any common plan. Companies produced in order to sell their products in the market; consequently the market came to guide production. The unsteady “hidden hand” of the market produced price fluctuations, speculation, shortages, and gluts. Competition meant that each company tried to reduce its costs. This led to efforts to buy labor power as cheaply as possible and to control it as fully as possible. It similarly incentivized “externalizing” negative consequences of production—for example, by using technologies that released destructive pollution into the environment where its burden would be borne by others. Control of production by the market meant that private enterprises would pursue their own private interests at the expense of common interests—even common interests they themselves shared.

The emerging system of markets and capitalists had an ambiguous relation to the system of territorial states. Many capitalists traded internationally, but most also developed close ties with their “home” states, each providing support to the other. According to historical sociologist Michael Mann, by the time of the industrial revolution, “capitalism was already contained within a civilization of competing geopolitical states.” Each of the leading European states “approximated a self-contained economic network,” and economic interaction was largely confined within national boundaries—and each nation’s imperial dominions.⁷ States shaped international trade, often aiding domestic businesses by economic policies, war, and empire. By the 20th century, Europe and its off-shoots such as the United States—what came to be known as “the West”—controlled most of the world market.

⁶ See Jeremy Brecher, “A Legal Blueprint for Our Ecological Survival,” *On the Commons*, September 20, 2013, <http://www.onthecommons.org/magazine/legal-blueprint-our-ecological-survival>.

⁷ Michael Mann, *Sources of Social Power*, Vol. I, p. 513.

Market-based economies gave rise to cycles of boom and bust with devastating recessions and depressions. From the 1930s through the 1960s “Keynesian” macroeconomic policies were used to counter these cycles, but they became less and less effective over time.

Starting in the early 1970s, as the “golden age of capitalism” gave way to an era of global economic stagnation and crisis, corporations and their political supporters increasingly strove to create a world safe for enterprises to go anywhere and do anything they wanted without “interference” from governments, unions, and civil society organizations. Corporations radically expanded “off-shoring” of production to foreign countries with cheaper labor costs; work became strung out over many countries in a “global assembly line”; financial markets and institutions went global; and governments scrapped economic regulation and labor and environmental protections to become “more competitive.”⁸

The result was just what corporations had hoped for: a global “race to the bottom” in which workers, communities, and whole countries bid against each other to provide the cheapest labor, the weakest social and environmental protections, and the largest corporate subsidies. The process became known as “globalization” and the doctrine and public policies that promoted it as “neoliberalism.”

In the deregulated global economy, what came to be known as “financialization” shifted resources from the real economy to financial speculation. The financial sector’s share of total U.S. corporate profits rose from 25 percent in the early 1980s to more than 40 percent 25 years later. Globalization, neoliberal policies, and financialization contributed to deepening global economic crises, culminating in the 2008 financial meltdown and the extended period of general economic decline in world markets known as the “Great Recession,” the most severe and extended economic downturn since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Markets drive the alienation of labor. Employers make workers work in ways they do not choose for purposes they do not choose, not primarily out of their wish to do so but because they will lose in the competition of the market unless they produce what the market requires at the cheapest possible price.

Markets also drive climate destruction. It is the need to make a profit in the market that leads companies to extract and burn coal, oil, and gas. It is the same need that leads other companies to use the energy thereby produced. Climate protection therefore requires going against “the logic of the market.”

In combination, these market dynamics result in climate alienation. The exclusion of workers from control of the purposes and processes of work leaves us at the mercy of market forces. These forces require us to produce the greenhouse gases that are destroying our environment and the Earth’s climate for posterity, or else lose our livelihoods. Market forces drive our employers to seek to profit by unconstrained release of greenhouse gases. And that leads our alienated labor to be guided by the hidden hand of the market to produce our own destruction.

⁸ On economic globalization see Jeremy Brecher, *Global Village or Global Pillage* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1998) and *Globalization from Below* (Cambridge, MA South End Press, 2002).

Wage labor

People have to transform nature in order to live. To do so they need to use nature's resources and the products of past human labor, including material objects, knowledge, and other elements of culture. Under the property systems of the contemporary world order, these means of production are mostly private property; most of the remainder belongs to states.



In the modern world, a small proportion of people are self-employed and own the means of production that they themselves use; another small proportion are slaves and other unfree laborers who are not legally entitled to sell their ability to work. The great majority—commonly referred to as the working class or now colloquially as “the 99%”—have no ownership rights in society's means of production. We therefore have no way to make a living except by working for those who do. We have no control over what we produce and how it is produced—including our own production and release of the greenhouse gases that are destroying the climatic conditions on which our wellbeing and the survival of future generations depend. Our condition has been variously characterized as the commodification of labor, proletarianization, or worker alienation.

The commodification of labor has several aspects. Workers compete as individuals in the labor market, giving each an interest in “getting ahead” at the expense of the others and thereby disincentivizing collective action. While workers normally work as part of groups, the organization and control of our labor is directed not by ourselves but by our employers. What workers produce belongs to the tiny minority who own society's means of production—currently characterized as the capitalist class or the 1%. When workers work for the owners of private property, the authority over our labor belongs to our employers. Workers have little voice or influence in what we do or how we do it—and little control over how it affects us or how it affects the wider society. The purposes and methods that determine our work—including the use of the fossil fuels that are destroying the Earth's climate—are determined by those who own the means of production.

Because workers need jobs to live, we are highly dependent on our own employer and on employers in general. This gives employers enormous power over workers. If workers challenge company practices—say, carbon dioxide emissions—we can be disciplined or fired.

Ostensibly, workers do have power through the democratic state. But the power of other interests—notably employers and fossil fuel corporations—is normally far greater. In the middle decades of the 20th century, workers in many countries won rights that represented a partial de-commodification of labor. But the current era of neoliberalism is witnessing a re-commodification of labor in which our human rights, citizen rights, and rights as workers have been significantly eroded and workers have come to be treated as little more than the bearers of the commodity “labor” to be purchased or discarded as employers wish.

Workers' position in society contributes to climate alienation in several ways. Workers' economic dependence on our employers for our economic survival gives us a powerful interest in supporting our employers' preferences—such as their right to freely pollute the atmosphere. Since workers have little control over our own labor, we are largely powerless to control its undesirable effects. The fragmentation of workers among different employers and our dependence on our employers mean workers have few ways to express common interests such as climate protection. The division of workers among different countries similarly deters the pursuit of common interests—workers pledge allegiance to and generally accept the authority of their national state and its presumed national interests, not to other workers. These conditions lead workers sometimes not only to accept climate alienation, but to actively pursue the “opportunity” to destroy our planet.

As we will see in the next chapter, workers have not always accepted our conditions passively. The history of the working class is largely a history of struggle against the various facets of worker alienation.

Fossil fuels

Up until the industrial revolution, the main sources of energy were humans, animals, water, and firewood. In conjunction with the industrial revolution came rapid growth in the burning of fossil fuels for energy. Between 1750 and 1900, coal mined for fuel in Great Britain, the cradle of the industrial revolution, went from less than 5 million tons a year to 240 million tons a year. By 1960, oil accounted for more energy globally than coal. Between 1800 and 2000, worldwide energy use grew eighty-to ninety-fold. Since the early 19th century there has been a thousand-fold increase in the consumption of fossil fuels.⁹



Historian John R. McNeil describes the growth of fossil fuel energy as “the most revolutionary process in human history” since domestication of animals. Today humans use 50 to 100 times as much energy per capita as before the extensive burning of fossil fuels.¹⁰ One gallon of gas can do the equivalent work of 350 to 500 hours of unassisted human labor.¹¹ Fossil fuel energy is a key component of food, transportation, communications, housing, and virtually every other feature of modern life.

The expansion of fossil fuel use was essential to the series of industrial revolutions, from machine production to today's computer-based technologies, that immensely increased human productive capacity. Recent historical research suggests that increased burning of fossil fuels may account for a large proportion of the growth in wealth generally attributed to industrialism.

⁹ Edmund Burke III, “History, Energy, and the Environment,” in Edmund Burke III and Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Environment and World History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2009) p. 45.

¹⁰ John R. McNeill, “Global Environmental History in the Age of Fossil Fuels,” *Cartografare il presente*, June 23, 2008, <http://www.cartografareilpresente.org/article254.html>.

¹¹ Craig Collins, “Petroleum Junkies of the World, Unite!” *Truthout*, November 25, 2011.

Just 90 private and government-owned fossil fuel companies (along with a few cement companies) are responsible for nearly two-thirds of all carbon emissions since 1750—with half of them produced in the past 25 years. Nineteen of the world’s 50 leading corporations are fossil fuel producing companies and utilities. They account for 48 percent of the revenues and nearly 46 percent of the profits of the top 50 companies in the Fortune Global 500.¹²

Workers are not just dependent on our own employers and employers in general for our livelihoods; we are directly or indirectly dependent on fossil fuel producers as well. Workers in coal, oil, and gas extracting and burning industries are directly dependent on fossil fuel for their jobs. Beyond that, everyone whose work requires energy is largely dependent on fossil fuels and the companies that produce energy with it. Many of the workers who have been the backbone of organized labor—for example coal miners, truck drivers, and factory workers—work in industries that would not exist were it not for fossil fuels. Challenging climate alienation can put us in opposition to the lifeblood that drives the industries on which our livelihoods depend.

Climate alienation and the world order

The burning of fossil fuels has had unintended side effects. Rays of light from the sun warm the Earth; if just the right amount of that heat goes back out into the atmosphere, Earth’s average temperature stays stable. But if too much heat is trapped by carbon and other gases in the atmosphere, the average temperature of the Earth rises. This “greenhouse effect” is like a blanket warming the planet. According to NASA, “97 percent of climate scientists agree that climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities.”¹³



The Earth has already warmed nearly 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit since the industrial revolution, when fossil fuels started to be burned on a large scale. GHGs already in the air will cause another 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit increase; unless we reverse current trends, there will be a 4 to 9 degree Fahrenheit increase by the end of century. Unpredictable “tipping points” may make it far worse.

The effects of global warming can seem contradictory, producing snowstorms as well as heat waves, downpours as well as droughts. That is because global warming destabilizes and disrupts the Earth’s entire climate system, leading to opposite extremes. Results already include:

- heat waves
- droughts
- wildfires
- crop failures
- floods
- hurricanes

¹² “Fortune Global 500,” CNN Money, http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/global500/2013/full_list/. Totals calculated in Sean Sweeney, “Unions, Climate Change and the Great Inaction,” unpublished article.

¹³ “Scientific consensus: Earth’s climate is warming,” NASA website, <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus>.

- tornadoes
- food shortages and price spikes
- water wars
- extinction of species

Until the 1980s, these side effects were not only unintended; they were uncertain. However, over the past quarter century the causal connection between greenhouse gas emissions and climate change has become ever more certain, and the resulting devastation has become not only certain but manifested around the globe. In response there has been a global effort to establish policies and agreements to reduce GHG emissions on the part of governments, business, and civil society. But that effort has been ineffectual; GHG emissions have continued to soar. Humanity as a whole has been unable to counter the greatest threat in its history.

Any society would have an incentive to use fossil fuels. Leaving aside their inconvenient side effects, they allow people to produce far more of what they want with far less effort. But there are ways our actual world order provides additional incentives—and makes a reduction in fossil fuel use far harder. While theoretically other economic and social systems might also burn large amounts of fossil fuels and thereby create atmospheric warming, actually existing climate change has been caused by the features of the actually existing world order.

The system of sovereign nation states provides governments the authority to permit the emission of the GHGs that are destroying the climate. It allows them to disregard any responsibility to protect the future of humanity as a whole. It renders the institutions representing global human interests powerless or captive. It promotes economic and military competition that leads each country to pursue purported national interests in refusing to limit its GHG emissions. It divides workers and provides us apparent interests in national self-aggrandizement that override workers' common interest in climate protection. And it renders us relatively powerless by imposing property laws that deny us any authority over the processes and products of our labor.

The distribution of the bundle of property rights in a world order based on private ownership of the means of production lets individuals and corporations pour GHGs into the environment without effective restraint. And it excludes workers from control of what we make, how we make it, or what is done with it.

The competitive structure of markets creates a motive to accumulate wealth, which provides a drive (beyond mere consumption) for profit maximization of businesses, which in turn maximizes utilization of fossil fuels for energy. Without such a drive, the use of fossil fuels simply for consumption would have been less. And it could have been restricted without threatening business failure or economic contraction. The same drive leads to a maximization of the exploitation of labor, incentivizing maximizing control over workers and thereby maximizing the alienation of labor. In this era of globalization and neoliberalism, product, labor, capital, and financial markets have become increasingly global and decreasingly subject to non-market regulation. The institutions representing public interests have been progressively dismantled, leaving these market dynamics to rule with little restraint.

There are two principal ways the features of the world order lead workers and our organizations to participate in climate destruction—to perpetrate our own climate alienation. They empower those who emit GHGs and make it difficult for workers to act to effectively

reverse climate destruction. And they give workers short-term special interests in climate-destroying activities that can easily override long-term common interests in climate protection—they appear to give many workers an interest in preventing climate protection in order to protect their own jobs. These features interact: powerlessness to affect broader problems leads to pursuit of limited objectives; limited objectives impede the broad solidarity that would provide the basis for far greater power.

The immense wealth and power of the fossil fuel industry sets an obstacle to efforts at climate protection. The dependence of workers on fossil fuels provides an apparent interest for workers to support the use of fossil fuels, despite their destructive long-term effects.

Overcoming climate alienation

The necessary condition for abolishing climate alienation is to halt the burning of fossil fuels. But because fossil fuels are so enmeshed with the other features of the world order, there are many modifications of that order that are necessary or at least supportive for achieving that result. These modifications do not need to eliminate the capitalist and nation state systems at the heart of the world order, but they do need to change them enough to enable the urgent and timely elimination of GHG emissions.



The system of sovereign nation states must be changed to forbid rather than permit governments to authorize the emission of GHGs. States must be held accountable for protecting the Earth's climate and the future of humanity as a whole. Institutions representing global human interests must be strengthened and freed from domination by the great economic and political powers. Allegiance to common human and worker interests must trump allegiance to alleged national interests. Limits on GHG emissions must trump the pursuit of economic and military competition among nations. States must be made effectively accountable to their people in fact as well as in law. The alignment of workers with apparent national interests in freedom to pollute must be limited by our common interest in climate protection. National laws must allow workers to monitor and halt fossil fuel emissions.

The distribution of property rights must be changed to limit the freedom of owners of the means of production to emit GHGs into the environment. Likewise it must provide workers influence over GHG emissions by giving us more power over what we make, how we make it, and what is done with it. The power of property ownership over public policy and society more broadly must be reduced by a process of democratization.

The system of unregulated markets must be modified to eliminate the incentive to hire workers to produce GHGs. Macroeconomic patterns must be modified so that restricting fossil fuel use does not cause economic contraction. Freedom to pursue maximum profitability must be curtailed by allocating rights to labor that limit exploitation and domination. Market forces must be made subject to non-market institutions representing public interests.

The system of wage labor must be modified to eliminate the incentive for workers to protect their livelihoods by supporting and encouraging the burning of fossil fuels, thus sacrificing their long-term interest in a life-sustaining climate for an apparent short-term interest in jobs. Workers whose jobs are threatened by climate protection policies must be guaranteed a “just transition” that protects them from adverse consequences of fossil fuel reduction. All workers must be protected against any negative economic consequences of fossil fuel reduction by policies that ensure jobs for all who want them and social provision for those for whom work is not the appropriate source of livelihood. The labor system must provide workers a role in determining the purposes and methods of production.

The power of the fossil fuel industry must be restricted and ultimately eliminated. The dependence of society on fossil fuel energy must be reduced by developing alternative energy sources and using energy more efficiently to reduce the amount needed. Workers’ dependence on fossil fuel related jobs must be eliminated by policies of just transition, full employment, and economic security.

Chapters 3-6 will explore the emergence of a workers’ movement for climate protection, the obstacles it has faced, and how they might be overcome. Chapter 7 will examine how such a movement can seek to establish the conditions for eliminating climate alienation.

Chapter 3: Worker Movements

The patterns of the world order described in the previous chapter have often given rise to another pattern: worker self-organization. From the emergence of the nation state and capitalist systems, those who depend on their jobs for a living have organized worker movements. Such movements could provide the basis for overcoming climate alienation. But they also produce some of the obstacles that make climate alienation difficult to overcome.

Worker self-organization has normally emerged from particular groups of workers in response to particular problems like low wages, long hours, and poor working conditions. But because those problems have often resulted from the general situation of workers, self-organization is also a response to the position of working people within the prevailing patterns of society. The history of worker self-organization is largely a struggle to establish rights and powers that counter proletarianization, disempowerment, alienation, impoverishment, insecurity, and the commodification of labor. It represents a form of common preservation—cooperation in service of mutual wellbeing.

While workers as individuals are largely powerless vis-à-vis our employers and the class of employers as a whole, even so, employers are dependent on their workers and more broadly



on the working class. If workers don't work, employers' means of production can produce nothing. This provides workers a potential source of power—if we organize and leverage that dependence to compel change. When workers collectively withdraw our cooperation from our employers and act on behalf of our own interests, we are thereby de-alienating ourselves.

Working class self-organization has taken many forms, including informal workgroups, trade, industrial and general unions, labor and socialist parties, local and regional labor councils and chambers of labor, revolutionary workers councils, and others. It has had a wide range of objectives, from self-protection on the job to the incorporation of worker rights in nation legal systems, to revolutionary social transformation. It has used many forms of action, from informal on-the-job non-cooperation to strikes and boycotts; from negotiations, lobbying, and participation in elections to civil disobedience, labor upheavals, mass strikes, and worker uprisings. Over the centuries it has changed gradually or rapidly in its forms, objectives, and methods, and in its size and power.

Looking more specifically at the United States, the roots of the American labor movement go back to colonial times. As enterprises grew larger and more powerful, they hired growing numbers of workers. Workers in trades such as shoemaking and printing began to organize trade unions to balance the power of their employers, bargain collectively with them, and pursue other common interests. An ethic of solidarity—embodied in the classic labor slogan “an injury to one is an injury to all”—helped workers stick together in a highly individualistic society.

The reason for what at the time were called “combinations” was the growing inequality of power between employer and employed, as articulated in a statement of the National Typographical Society in 1850: “To remedy the many disastrous grievances arising from this disparity of power combinations for mutual agreement in determining rates of wages and for concert of action in maintaining them, has been resorted to in many trades and principally in our own.” The success of combination demonstrated its utility. “Indeed, while the present wage system continues in operation, as an immediate protection from pressing calamities, it is clearly the only effective means which labor can adopt.” Such combination “destroys competition in the labor market, unites the working people and produces a sort of equilibrium in the power of the conflicting classes.”¹⁴

As many workers came to see their problems as shared with other workers, whatever their trade, broader working class movements also developed, demanding reforms to improve workers' position in society—the right to vote, free public schools, an end to imprisonment for debt, and a shorter working day.

Early American workers by no means accepted the idea that they must permanently remain in what seemed to many of them the unnatural position of employees, and much of their organized effort was directed toward alternatives to the emerging system of wage labor. They created producer cooperatives, rural utopian communities, and movements to keep public lands available for settlement as an escape from permanent status as workers. As the printers' union continued in its argument for working class organization, we “regard such an organization not only as an agent of immediate relief, but also as essential to the ultimate destruction of those unnatural relations at present subsisting between the interests of the employing and the employed classes.” A combination merely to fix and sustain a scale of prices

¹⁴ Quoted in Norman Ware, *The Industrial Worker, 1840-1860* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1964) p. 58ff.

is of “minor importance” compared with that combination which looks to an “ultimate redemption of labor.” When labor “determines to sell itself no longer to speculators, but to become its own employer, to own and enjoy itself and the fruit thereof” labor will be “rescued from the control of the capitalist.”

Immediate economic objectives for specific groups of workers, social reforms, and system transformation have remained aspects of the labor movement for its entire history.

The extent of union organization has ebbed and flowed. At the peak in the late 1950s, about one-third of all workers and about half of all manufacturing workers in the United States were union members. Unions addressed a wide range of concerns of working people, including not only wages, hours, and working conditions, but, to varying degrees, such issues as housing, health, full employment, education, social welfare, and the environment. In 2011, 12 percent of wage and salary workers in the U.S.—14.7 million people—were members of unions, including 36 percent of public sector employees and 7 percent of private sector employees.¹⁵

Principles of action

Despite their diversity, workers’ movements have generally shared three principles of action—solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority—that are manifested in diverse ways. They have repeatedly emerged as responses to the conditions workers face in modern society.

The world order puts workers in competition. We compete in the labor market for jobs. We compete in the workplace to keep our jobs and to “get ahead.” Workers compete not only as individuals but also as members of groups: black against white, women against men, immigrants against native-born, young against old, employed against unemployed. And workers of different corporations and nations compete against each other as part of their own corporate and national economic interests.

These patterns of division leave workers isolated and therefore largely powerless. As individuals we are insignificant against the wealth and power of corporations, nations, and powerful economic interests. The result is often exploitation and oppression.

In response to such competition, another pattern has repeatedly emerged, a principle of action known in the labor movement as solidarity. Solidarity is the principle of mutual aid: acting in support of others on the basis of a mutual understanding that they will help you and/or others in similarly appropriate circumstances. Such reciprocal support is based neither on pure altruism nor pure self-interest, but rather on recognition of a mutual interest that can only be realized through collective action. Through mutual support, workers can acquire the power to assert our collective interests as human beings rather than just accepting our status as commodities.

Worker solidarity is expressed in many forms. In strikes, workers exercise collective power by utilizing the dependence of their employer on their collective labor. In trade unions, workers

¹⁵ Bureau of Labor Statistics, “Union Members Summary,” January 23, 2013, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.nr0.htm>.

formulate common objectives and negotiate with their employers to realize them. Workers also act collectively to make governments respond to their needs through involvement in political parties or pressure groups, voting, and direct action. Solidarity is also expressed in less institutionalized forms, ranging from informal cooperation by workgroups to occasional periods of mass strikes in which millions of workers support their own and each other's objectives through massive direct action.¹⁶ While organized labor represents solidarity as an institutionalized practice, new forms of solidarity frequently arise, both by extensions of existing forms and by emergence of new expressions among previously unorganized workers.

Workers are normally organized in the workplace by their employer. But if we want to organize our activity for our own common benefit rather than our employer's, we have to create a different organization. So worker self-organization is a second characteristic of the labor movement. It can be quite informal, such as workgroups formed to identify and adopt norms and practices to make work a little less onerous. It may take the form of unions with elaborate institutional structures. It may emerge with a bang, such as the "Fight for \$15" strikes of fast food and other low-wage workers in cities across the United States or the informally coordinated upheavals that followed the shooting of a young black man by police in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014. Such formal or informal organization makes possible collective deliberation and action.



When workers work on other people's property, authority over their work resides not with them but with the owner or the owner's representatives. Control of the production process gives the owners of the means of production enormous power not only in the workplace but in the rest of society as well. Workers, conversely, are largely excluded from significant voice or power in workplace and social decision-making. Indeed, employers are often in a position to make decisions that are directly to their detriment—that is, exploit and oppress them. If workers wish to escape such domination and pursue our own common interests, we have to resist employer authority and assert our own power to affect decisions and their implementation. Challenge to authority is therefore a third important component of the labor movement.

Such challenge can arise in varied arenas over a great range of topics. It can involve immediate workplace struggles over working conditions and protection of workers' rights on the job. It can focus on company policies, from wages and job security to investment and location, to the right to collective bargaining. It can address labor market issues, from minimum wages to labor hiring agencies. It can concern social welfare issues such as healthcare, discrimination, and poverty. And it can engage any other subject that workers want to act on—in recent years, American workers have asserted themselves on issues ranging from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to the rules governing the global economy.

¹⁶ See Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!*

Solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority provide a potential basis for overcoming worker alienation, including climate alienation.

Limits to solidarity

Solidarity is a practice built up through mutual interaction. It reflects mutual need and mutual expectation. While it can sometimes be extended to new partners, it is often restricted to those who already have established patterns of reciprocal aid. Union “strike” or “solidarity” funds, for example, are usually used only for members of the same union, who pay in over time to make such support available to each other. While solidarity is potentially a universal principle, it is not universalized automatically.

Historically, American craft workers often manifested powerful expressions of solidarity—often, for example, workers would put their own jobs at risk by refusing to work with those who were not members of their union. Yet this solidarity could be highly restricted. Even where workers from different crafts worked side by side, members of one craft often continued working when others went on strike, even though doing so greatly enhanced the power of the employer. This led the craft union-based American Federation of Labor (AFL), sometimes to be referred to sarcastically as the “American Separation of Labor.” For much of American history, the solidarity expressed in the refusal to work side by side with workers who were not union members in practice often meant the exclusion of black workers from employment.

Restricted forms of solidarity have often provided important support for climate alienation. For example, solidarity with coal miners has often been evoked to persuade trade unionists to oppose environmental restrictions on the burning of coal. During the Keystone XL pipeline controversy, the Laborers union LIUNA demanded that other unions show solidarity with their members by supporting construction of the pipeline.

Certain forms of worker organization can also serve as barriers to collective action for common ends. The American Federation of Labor was built on the principle of “craft autonomy” in which each craft would have its own union based on solidarity among the members of the craft. No federation or other higher authority could legitimately override them, even in the broader interests of the labor movement, the working class, or society as a whole. The AFL was primarily a vehicle—rather like a trade association for independent companies—to strengthen the independent unions in pursuing whatever course they chose.

In addition, unions can often serve as a barrier rather than support for self-organization of their members. When power becomes concentrated in a narrow leadership group or structure, for example, it can deter rank-and-file workers from coordinating and acting together. And when workers in the same company belong to many different unions, cooperation can be impeded. Often there is no bargaining council or other vehicle through which workers in the same company can coordinate their actions. Workers in the same company or industry are of course likely to be even more divided when they work in different countries.

And worker organizations can, rather than challenging established authorities, acquiesce to or even support their policies and power. While it is a cliché that union leaders are often “in bed with management,” unfortunately it is too often true. Perhaps more important, the weakness

and vulnerability of unions often make their leaders go along with employer objectives rather than challenging them in the interest of their members because they reasonably fear a devastating counterattack. The weak position of organized labor in society leads to similar reluctance to challenge those in political and social authority. Whatever the reasons, many unions take their cues from the corporations for whom their members work.

Overcoming the limits to solidarity

The limits on solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority are variable and can often be overcome.

Back in the early 1980s, I attended a retreat sponsored by the New England United Automobile Workers (UAW) with local leaders and members of allied organizations. A gay rights leader from Hartford, Connecticut addressed the group, advocating for gay rights and also describing how people from the Hartford gay community had walked picket lines to support striking workers. Afterward an older UAW member got up and asked with hostility, “Why is our union making alliances with ‘lifestyle groups?’” Then a younger member got up and described how he was lying wounded on the ground in Vietnam and a fellow soldier came up, dragged him back, and saved his life. He concluded by saying that he knew the soldier was gay, but he also knew he wouldn’t be alive today if the gay soldier hadn’t risked his life for him. You could feel the vibe in the room change. Another older UAW member got up and said that, after listening to the brother from Hartford, he was persuaded that gay people not only had rights but that they had a movement, and the union should support them. The sentiment was echoed around the room and I heard no more complaint about “lifestyle groups.” Within a few years, organized labor had become a strong supporter of gay rights.



Forms of worker organization that restrict solidarity can also be transformed. In the 1930s, the American Federation of Labor actually expelled those who advocated “industrial unionism”—a structure in which all workers in the same company or industry belong to the same union regardless of skill or trade. The expelled unions formed the Congress of Industrial Organizations—the CIO—and began organizing both skilled and unskilled workers in major industries on an industrial union basis. Soon autoworkers, rubber workers, steelworkers, and electrical workers were organizing into unions representing all workers in General Motors, Goodyear, US Steel, and other giant corporations. Within a few years the AFL reversed course and itself began organizing workers into industrial unions. The AFL and CIO eventually reunited as the AFL-CIO in 1955.

Acquiescence to the impositions of established authority can also be transcended. Where unions and other established organizations have not been responsive to the wishes of their

members, workers have removed their leaderships, acted independently, or formed new organizations. When the leaders of the United Mine Workers of America refused to take effective action on black lung disease, for example, miners organized the Black Lung Association and in 1969 40,000 unionized miners in West Virginia went on a month-long wildcat strike, closed the state's principal industry, marched on the state capital, and refused to go back to work until the state legislature passed legislation making coal companies pay for healthcare and retirement benefits for miners with black lung.

The virtuous circle

The labor movement emerged as an effort to counter the effects of worker alienation. Internally, the movement sought solidarity among working people and collective democratic control of our own actions. Externally, the movement resisted the authority of employers and their supporters; sought to forestall the competitive race-to-the-bottom by suppressing competition through organization of workers and society; and created movements and alliances that drew together broad social groups.

But there were also counter-tendencies within the working class and even within the labor movement. Internally, there were often tendencies to restrict solidarity to limited groups such as particular trades, industries, unions, ethnicities, genders, or countries, with the result that labor organizations pursued their specific interests in conflict with other workers and broader class interests. These limited organizations could become fiefdoms of undemocratic leaders, bureaucracies, and organizational bosses. Externally, such labor organizations often came to acquiesce, submit to, or support authority, even to the detriment of their members. They pursued narrow interests that conflicted with broad working class interests and those of society as a whole.

Where these limitations on solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority prevailed, they undermined the capacity of labor organizations to solve the problems of working people. As the working class moved toward the pole of fragmentation and passivity, it became less and less able to realize even immediate workplace or economic gains. And workers became ever more powerless in the face of broad social problems such as climate destruction, inequality, and breakdown of democracy. That powerlessness, in turn, closed the vicious circle in which workers sought limited gains for restricted groups even if doing so further undermined the unity, power, and wellbeing of other workers and the working class as a whole.

The strategy for renewing labor organization as a means to counteract the problems workers face today involves overcoming these tendencies and breaking out of the vicious circle.

Internally, it involves reasserting a broader solidarity that draws together all workers around common needs, objectives, and modes of action. This requires a democratization in which initiative and control of working class actions lie with rank-and-file workers rather than union officials.

Externally, it requires a willingness and developing ability to challenge authority, in order to transform the working class movement into an ongoing insurgency against the domination of employers and those who support them. It involves suppressing competition and forcing

conflicting power centers to cooperate in the social interest. It demands a widening solidarity among working people and building of alliances around a program that represents the common interests of working people and humanity as a whole. Climate protection can be a central focus and motivating force for that unification.

Solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority make possible a transcendence of climate alienation. Because all workers are adversely affected by climate change and have a common interest in opposing it, there is a basis for climate solidarity among all workers. Where they have a basis for solidarity, workers have shown that they can organize themselves to act on it. And where those in authority impose policies and practices that hurt working people, workers have shown they can challenge those authorities. But to transcend climate alienation, workers will have to overcome some of barriers that have restricted them from applying the principles of solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority to climate protection.

Chapter 4: Organized labor and climate protection

American workers, like the rest of the world's people and institutions, were unprepared for the threat of climate change. As organized labor in the United States confronted the emerging realities of climate change, it did so in the context of the established patterns of the world order and worker self-organization.

Competition among nation states led organized labor to approach climate protection largely in terms of national economic benefit or loss. Workers' exclusion from ownership of society's means of production, and their consequent dependence on jobs offered by employers, led many unions to fight for any kind of employment, even if it accelerated global warming. Globalization and neoliberalism exacerbated global competition in the labor market, wild gyrations in global capital markets, and unrestricted trade in climate-destroying fossil fuels—leaving workers and society at the mercy of unregulated global markets. American industry's dependence on fossil fuels fostered labor support for an “all of the above” energy policy that paid little heed to climate impacts of fossil fuels.

The tension between narrow and broad definitions of solidarity generated conflict between the need for jobs for workers within a single workplace, craft, or industry, and the broad worker and social interest in protecting the climate. Unions' dependence on employer goodwill gave them an incentive to support their employers' profit-driven push for industry growth—including growth of GHG emissions. The erosion of workers' power and right to act collectively, and the correlative difficulty of envisioning and implementing broad social alternatives, encouraged union acquiescence to fossil fuel industry hegemony.



The result was climate alienation—acquiescence to or even promotion of climate-destroying forms of labor and political action. This tragic dynamic saw worker dependence on jobs leading to environmental damage and self-destruction due to apparent lack of viable alternatives. But as awareness of the threat to survival posed by climate change grew, so did the challenge to climate alienation within organized labor.

The AFL-CIO and climate change

In 1990, the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) issued its First Assessment Report, which established that global warming was real and probably caused at least in part by human release of greenhouse gases. As the global public grew more alarmed by extreme weather, the UN General Assembly initiated negotiations for an international agreement to protect the climate.

Even before preliminary climate protection negotiations began, the U.S. oil and auto industries and the U.S. National Association of Manufacturers established the Global Climate Coalition to oppose any mandatory actions to address global warming. Housed at the National Association of Manufacturers, the industry group would spend tens of millions of dollars on advertising against international climate agreements and national climate legislation. Drawing on the experience of the tobacco industry, its advertising and lobbying campaign successfully cast enough doubt on the reality of global warming to undermine U.S. support for climate protection efforts.¹⁷

The UN climate protection process began with the negotiation of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 1992. Organized labor's early engagement with climate change can be judged from the fact that, for the first decade, fewer than 10 trade unionists attended any of the annual gatherings of the UNFCCC's Council of Parties which formed the principal venue for climate negotiations; in contrast, hundreds of non-governmental organizations participated.¹⁸

The U.S. fossil fuel industry used the "jobs issue" as a central argument against the 1997 UN Kyoto Protocol, which set binding country-by-country emission reduction targets. It maintained that the proposed standards for GHG emission cuts in developed countries would raise energy costs in the United States, leading jobs to flow to developing countries not required to make such cuts.¹⁹

Union opposition to the Kyoto Protocol was spearheaded by a self-described "partnership" called Unions for Jobs and the Environment. Its members represented a powerful sector of organized labor including the United Mine Workers, construction trades, transportation, and some manufacturing unions.²⁰ It lobbied against the Kyoto agreement and against

¹⁷ Climate Insurgency, p. 18.

¹⁸ Sean Sweeney, "Climate Change and the Great Inaction: New Trade Union Perspectives," p. 4. Trade Unions for Energy Democracy, <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/TUED-working-paper-2.pdf>.

¹⁹ Stephen Schneider, *Science as a Contact Sport* (Washington DC: National Geographic, 2009), p. 155.

²⁰ A successor organization, Unions for Jobs and Environmental Progress, has continued to campaign against the EPA's proposed Clean Power Plan. <http://ujep4jobs.org>.

environmental legislation in the United States that it considered unfavorable to labor. Its position was aligned with mining, electrical, and other energy companies.

In February 1997, as negotiations began for the Kyoto Protocol, the AFL-CIO Executive Council issued a statement on the UN climate change negotiations. The statement noted the devastating impact that globalization had had on American workers and unions. It put that impact in the frame of rivalry between the United States and other industrialized and developing countries and applied the same frame to climate protection. “We believe the parties to the Rio Treaty made a fundamental error when they agreed to negotiate legally binding carbon restrictions on the United States and other industrialized countries, while simultaneously agreeing to exempt high-growth developing countries like China, Mexico, Brazil and Korea from any new carbon reduction commitments.” That will create “a powerful incentive for transnational corporations to export jobs, capital, and pollution” without stabilizing atmospheric concentrations of carbon.

The AFL-CIO statement emphasized the impact on specific sectors of labor in the United States: “Such an uneven playing field will cause the loss of high-paying U.S. jobs in the mining, manufacturing, transport and other sectors.” It also criticized proposals to put a price on carbon emissions through taxes or cap-and-trade programs as unfair: carbon taxes and emission trading programs would raise consumers’ energy prices, “harming citizens who live on fixed incomes or work at poverty-level wages.”

The statement urged the United States to insist on “commitments from all nations to reduce carbon emissions” and “a reduction schedule compatible with the urgent need to avoid unfair and unnecessary job loss in developed economies.” It concluded that “the President should not accept and the Congress should not ratify any amendment or protocol that does not meet these standards.” It did not propose alternative ways to combat global warming.

Most of the world’s labor movements, in contrast, supported the Kyoto Protocol and subsequent climate protection efforts. A few unions in the United States, including the United Steelworkers (USW), supported the negotiations that resulted in the Kyoto Protocol. But the AFL-CIO has not supported legislation or international agreements with binding targets and timetables for GHG reduction down to the present day.

In 2006, as national climate legislation and international negotiations loomed, the AFL-CIO established an Energy Task Force. It was composed primarily of mining, industrial, and construction trade unions—all unions with direct dependence on the fossil fuel economy. Its initial statement, “Jobs and Energy for the 21st Century,” acknowledged the scientific evidence that fossil fuels are contributing to global warming.²¹ It called for “balanced measures” to combat global warming. But it opposed “extreme measures” that would “undermine economic growth,” “harm particular sectors,” or place the United States “at a disadvantage to other nations.” U.S. efforts to address climate change should be “conditioned on similar actions by U.S. trading partners and developing countries.”

The statement argued that any program for tradable emission permits (e.g., cap-and-trade) should initially seek only to “gradually slow the growth in greenhouse gas emissions”—in other

²¹ AFL-CIO Energy Task Force, “Jobs and Energy for the 21st Century,” (ND)
<http://www.epa.state.il.us/air/climatechange/background/afl-cio-position-statement.pdf>

words, it should allow emissions to continue to grow. Measures to actually reduce fossil fuel use should wait until nuclear, clean coal, and other alternatives assured abundant energy. And a cap-and-trade program should also include a “safety valve” cost cap “to protect the economy.” The statement’s only positive suggestion for combatting global warming was to target revenues from any auction of carbon permits to finance “improvements in technology that will allow clean energy to be produced at prices close to what consumers pay for energy from conventional sources, and to encourage deployment of this technology in a manner that promotes domestic production and jobs for American workers.”

This statement reflected many of the features of American labor’s position in the world order, as delineated in Chapter 2. It portrayed the national economy as the paramount unit that shapes the wellbeing of the nation’s workers. It viewed national success in economic competition with other nations as the key economic objective. It treated economic growth as the necessary condition of workers’ wellbeing, which should override efforts to protect the Earth’s climate. It assumed dependence on fossil fuel energy and maintained that it must be used until economic and/or technical changes provide an alternative. Reflecting the sectoral organization of the American labor movement, it viewed the wellbeing of particular sectors of the economy as critical. Its solidarity stopped at the water’s edge—it appeared ready to continue or aggravate global poverty and inequality to protect American jobs.

However, like the rest of American society, organized labor’s approach to climate change has continued to evolve. For example, when he was head of the United Mine Workers, Richard Trumka opposed the Kyoto Protocol and advocated expanded use of coal and other fossil fuels. But in his current role as president of the AFL-CIO, Trumka said, “Scientists tell us we are headed ever more swiftly toward irreversible climate change—with catastrophic consequences for human civilization.” Far from being a threat only in a distant future, “climate change is happening now.” And this demands action: “The carbon emissions from that coal, and from oil and natural gas, and agriculture and so much other human activity—causes global warming, and we have to act to cut those emissions, and act now.”²²

“The carbon emissions from that coal, and from oil and natural gas, and agriculture and so much other human activity—causes global warming, and we have to act to cut those emissions, and act now.”

**—Richard Trumka
President of the AFL-CIO**

Nonetheless, the approach laid out in the AFL-CIO’s 2006 Energy Task Force statement has continued to guide its policy toward U.S. climate legislation and international climate negotiations. The AFL-CIO still has not endorsed any targets for carbon reduction, even those proposed by the world’s leading body of climate scientists, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, let alone the reduction of carbon in the atmosphere to 350 parts per million (ppm) that America’s leading climate scientist, James Hansen, and many other experts say is necessary to prevent those “catastrophic consequences for human civilization.”

²² “Remarks by AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka,” January 12, 2012, <http://www.aflcio.org/Press-Room/Speeches/Remarks-by-AFL-CIO-President-Richard-Trumka-UN-Investor-Summit-on-Climate-Risk>.

Meanwhile, organized labor has become an enthusiastic proponent of “green jobs.” The AFL-CIO has established a Center for Green Jobs to promote green jobs, establish appropriate job standards, and help train workers to fill them. The United Steelworkers co-founded the BlueGreen Alliance (BGA) with the Sierra Club to expand the “clean economy.” Many unions have established green jobs programs. Labor and environmental groups helped make green jobs a key part of Obama’s 2008 campaign message. But most unions also continue to promote jobs that accelerate climate catastrophe.

“Securing Our Children’s World”

Could American labor have taken a different approach to climate change? Some unions did. One example is the United Steelworkers. The 850,000 members of the USW formed the largest unionized sector in steel, aluminum, copper, pulp and paper, oil, chemical, glass, rubber and tire, and nearly all other North American manufacturing except auto assembly and aerospace. The overwhelming majority worked for large multinational corporations that competed globally. A 2005 study of members in one USW district found that 83 percent worked for companies that employed workers in similar occupations in multiple other countries.²³ According to David Foster, former director of Steelworkers District 11, an iron miner in Keewatin or Eveleth, Minnesota might work for US Steel of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, or for Mittal Steel of Rotterdam and London, or for Leiwu Steel of Shandong Province in China. The union represented workers in the vanguard of globalization.

The Steelworkers have had a long involvement with environmental issues. In 1948, 20 residents were killed and 6,000 sickened around a zinc mill in Donora, Pennsylvania, 35 miles from Pittsburgh. The recently established USW represented workers in the plant, and as the horror of the event and the extent of the cover-up by company and government officials became clear, the Steelworkers union recognized the close connection between health and safety issues in its plants and environmental issues in the surrounding communities. The union became an environmental advocate: in 1963 it supported the U.S. Clean Air Act and in 1969 held a national legislative conference on air pollution. In 1990, the USW created an executive board committee on environmental issues and released one of the first policy statements by a union addressing global warming, warning that it may be “the single greatest problem we face” and noting that “some have compared its possible consequences to the aftermath of nuclear war.”

In 2006, the same year as the AFL-CIO’s statement on “Jobs and Energy for the 21st Century,” the Steelworkers issued a statement on the environment called “Securing Our Children’s World: Our Union and the Environment.”²⁴ It brought together several themes essential for an alternative labor response to global warming.

The statement pointed to the visible evidence for the reality of global warming. For example: “The 2005 hurricane season with 27 named storms, including three Category 5 hurricanes, is the worst on record.”

²³ District 11. David Foster, *New Labor Forum* (Winter, 2007).

²⁴ United Steelworkers, “Securing Our Children’s World,” <http://www.usw.ca/community/environmental/issues?id=0002>.

It identified the human causes of global warming: “Carbon dioxide results from the burning of fuels containing carbon, like petroleum, coal, natural gas or wood. One mile of driving a car, or one-half kilowatt-hour of coal-generated power, releases about a pound of carbon dioxide. Altogether 18 billion tons are released every year.”

It recognized that the United States is the largest producer of greenhouse gases, contributing over 25 percent of the world’s emissions. “Most of the Earth’s population contributes three tons per person to this total; North Americans contribute twenty tons each.”

It recognized the severity of the problem: “Over the last century, the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere has risen by 25 percent. At the present rate, it could double in the next century, triggering massive changes in the global climate.”

The statement addressed global warming in a long-term context: “We believe the greatest threat to our children’s future may lie in the destruction of that environment. For that reason alone, environment must be an issue for our union.” And of all these threats: “Global warming is the greatest environmental and economic challenge of our generation.”

Like the AFL-CIO energy policy statement of the same year, “Securing Our Children’s World” identified economic issues that were of direct concern to unions; but the Steelworkers put them in a very different frame. For example, it pointed out the competitive disadvantage countries would face if they didn’t address global warming. “The future of manufacturing in the global economy will belong to those nations who solve the problem of the world’s growing shortage of fossil fuels through energy efficiency technology and building redesign, mass transportation systems, and new forms of renewable energy.”

It emphasized the opportunity for new jobs created by economic conversion: “Renewable energies like wind and solar power and mass transportation systems can create millions of new jobs. In Germany, for example, 40,000 people are employed directly in its wind energy industry, which consumes more steel there than any other industry, except for automobile manufacturing.” That could mean good union jobs. “A strategic response to environmental challenges like global warming is key to our union’s long-term survival. The good jobs of the future will be based on principles of environmental sustainability.”

The statement addressed the costs and benefits of climate protection as a broad class issue, rather than a jobs issue affecting only a particular group of workers. “The programs to deal with global warming can differ widely. Conservative programs will force these costs off on consumers and taxpayers, while protecting corporate interests. We have no choice but to fight around this vital union issue.”

The statement put climate change in the context of global economic justice: “A planet populated by 6.5 billion human beings, virtually all of whom share our own aspirations for a better life, cannot imagine a future of peace and growing prosperity without also imagining a global economy that lifts 2 billion people out of poverty in a sustainable fashion.” As David Foster explained, in the global economy “the USW has acquired the obligation to speak out for union members not only in North America, but across the world on fundamental issues of wealth, poverty, and the creation of sustainable economies across our ever-shrinking planet.”²⁵

²⁵ David Foster, “Steel Magnolias: Labor Allies With the Environmental Movement,” *New Labor Forum*, Winter 2007.

Finally, the statement put climate in the context of conflicting class interests: “Our union faces powerful corporate interests that care more about the next quarter’s profit report while we care about saving our children’s world.”

“Securing Our Children’s World” held up as a model the global warming platform of the USW-supported New Democratic Party of Canada. It promoted an alternative with “a strong program to cut greenhouse gases by investing in new renewable energies, mass transportation systems and energy efficiency, thereby creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs in Canada. Workers who are adversely affected by the change in energy policy will be protected through well-funded ‘just transition’ programs.”

The Steelworkers statement advocated similar policies for the US, not only to combat global warming, but to provide a more secure economic future: “New environmental regulations, enacted through state and national legislation like increased CAFE standards (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) and RES (Renewable Energy Standards) that mandate increased use of wind, solar, biomass from waste wood and slash, and even landfill methane for generating electricity, and public bonding for mass transportation and clean energy development are critical for rebuilding North America’s manufacturing base.”

It envisioned massive, job-creating public investment linking environmental protection and good jobs: “Imagine a twenty-first century Clean Energy Authority whose mission is to bring renewable energy to our communities, much as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Bonneville Power Administration brought electrification to millions of Americans during the 1930’s and 40’s with their hydroelectric projects.”

Conversely, it argued that “ever greater reliance on the shrinking pool of Middle Eastern oil” guarantees that “more and more manufacturing jobs will leave North America as industry tries to offset the rising costs of energy with the low costs of Third World labor.”

“Securing Our Children’s World” placed climate protection policy in the context of the long-term global interests of working people. It advocated public policies, such as international agreements and national industrial policies, that would make climate protection and jobs synergistic. The same year as the statement was issued, the Steelworkers joined with the Sierra Club, America’s largest environmental organization, to co-found the BlueGreen Alliance, whose mission was to advocate for “the growth in the number and quality of jobs in the green economy.”²⁶ The BGA currently includes 15 of the country’s largest unions and environmental groups.



²⁶ Labor Network for Sustainability – Sustainability Profiles, Blue Green Alliance, at <http://profiles.labor4sustainability.org/bluegreen-alliance/>.

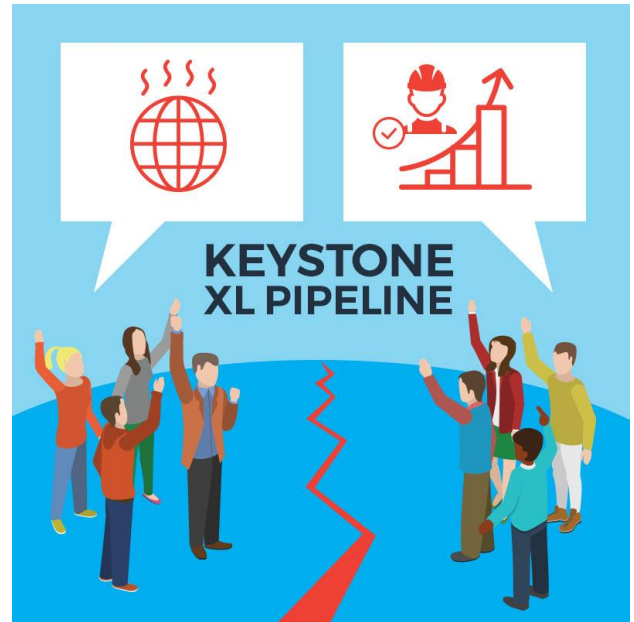
Despite its expressed concern about climate change, the Steelworkers union was not consistent in its support for climate protection policies. At the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in 2009, for example, the Steelworkers did not support the BlueGreen Alliance taking a stand for the targets and timetables for GHG reduction proposed by the IPCC.²⁷

Keystone XL Pipeline

While American labor continued in tension between the narrow interests of particular groups of workers and the broader threat that climate change posed to all workers, efforts to deal with climate change went down in flames. Negotiations for a new global climate agreement crashed in Copenhagen in 2009. So did the effort to pass climate legislation through the U.S. Congress. In response, the climate protection movement shifted its attention from legislation and lobbying to more direct confrontation with industry and government. For labor this potentially posed the question, which side are you on? The question came to a head with the struggle over the Keystone XL (KXL) pipeline, which would carry oil produced from tar sands in Alberta, Canada nearly 2,000 miles to Nederland, Texas.

In September 2010 TransCanada, a Canadian pipeline company, offered a “project labor agreement” to the Teamsters and Plumbers, Operating Engineers, and Laborers unions promising union-friendly conditions for work on the KXL pipeline. The union presidents agreed and issued a statement saying that the project would “pave a path to better days and raise the standard of living for working men and women in the construction, manufacturing, and transportation industries.” It would allow American workers to “get back to the task of strengthening their families and the communities they live in.”²⁸

In June, 2011, Bill McKibben, leader of the international environmental organization 350.org, and a group of other climate movement leaders called for a month of unprecedented civil disobedience actions against the KXL pipeline.²⁹ McKibben pointed out that burning the recoverable oil in the Alberta tar sands by itself would raise the carbon level in the atmosphere by 200 parts per million. It wasn’t hard to figure out that this would increase the 390 ppm



²⁷ For background on BGA policy in international negotiations see Sean Sweeney, “Green Capitalism Won’t Work,” *New Labor Forum*, 2015, <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/New-Labor-Forum-2015-Sweeney-12-7.pdf>.

²⁸ Letter to Honorable Hillary Clinton, Secretary of State, October 22, 2010, http://www.transcanada.com/docs/Key_Projects/Labour_Union_Signatures_22October2010.pdf.

²⁹ Bill McKibben et al, “Join Us in Civil Disobedience to Stop the KXL Tar-Sands Pipeline,” *Grist*, June 23, 2011, <http://grist.org/climate-change/2011-06-23-join-us-in-civil-disobedience-to-stop-the-keystone-xl-tar-sands/>. For information on 350.org, visit www.350.org.

carbon in the atmosphere at that time by more than half. He called the pipeline “a fifteen hundred mile fuse to the biggest carbon bomb on the planet.” He quoted Jim Hansen, head of the NASA Goddard Institute and widely regarded as the leading American climate scientist, saying that tar sands “must be left in the ground.” Indeed, “if the tar sands are thrown into the mix it is essentially game over” for a viable planet.

The media rushed to portray the pipeline as a typical case of “jobs versus the environment” — pitting the labor movement against the environmental movement; NPR proclaimed, “Pipeline Decision Pits Jobs Against Environment.”³⁰ However, efforts began immediately to develop labor opposition to the pipeline. A series of articles by the Labor Network for Sustainability questioned whether the KXL was really in labor’s interest.³¹ A widely publicized study by the Cornell Global Labor Institute challenged the industry’s job claims.³²

The Transport Workers Union (TWU) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) issued a joint statement saying, “We need jobs, but not ones based on increasing our reliance on Tar Sands Oil.” It called for major “New Deal” type public investments in infrastructure modernization and repair, energy conservation, and climate protection as a means of “putting people to work and laying the foundations of a green and sustainable economic future for the United States.”³³ Terry O’Sullivan, president of the LIUNA laborers union, cracked back: “It’s time for ATU and TWU to come out from under the skirts of delusional environmental groups which stand in the way of creating good, much needed American jobs.”³⁴ LIUNA threatened to end support for legislation that benefits transit workers.

With its member unions divided, the AFL-CIO decided not to take a position on the pipeline. The BGA also took no position, even though more of its members opposed than supported the pipeline. (Many took no position.) Six unions and several environmental groups issued a statement that was neutral on the pipeline but supported President Obama’s decision not to give it an accelerated permit. LIUNA President Terry O’Sullivan responded, “We’re repulsed by some of our supposed brothers and sisters lining up with job killers like the Sierra Club and the Natural Resources Defense Council to destroy the lives of working men and women.”³⁵ LIUNA withdrew from the BGA, testified for some of the most anti-labor members of Congress, and even participated in events funded by the Koch brothers. Jack Gerard, president of the American Petroleum Institute, gleefully proclaimed, “We will stand shoulder to shoulder with

³⁰ Ari Shapiro, “Pipeline Decision Pits Jobs Against Environment,” *NPR*, November 3, 2011.

³¹ Jeremy Brecher and Brendan Smith, “Pipeline Climate Disaster: The Keystone XL Pipeline and Labor,” <http://www.labor4sustainability.org/articles/pipeline-climate-disaster-the-keystone-xl-pipeline-and-labor/>; Brendan Smith and Jeremy Brecher, “Dirty vs. Clean Jobs: Labor’s Keystone Dilemma,” <http://www.labor4sustainability.org/articles/dirty-vs-green-jobs-labors-keystone-dilemma/>; Brendan Smith, “Five Reasons the Keystone Pipeline is Bad for the Economy,” <http://www.labor4sustainability.org/articles/dirty-vs-green-jobs-labors-keystone-dilemma/>.

³² Lara Skinner and Sean Sweeney, “Pipe Dreams?: Jobs Gained, Jobs Lost by the Construction of Keystone XL,” Cornell University Global Labor Institute, January 2012, http://www.ilr.cornell.edu/globallaborinstitute/research/upload/GLI_KeystoneXL_012312_FIN.pdf.

³³ “ATU & TWU Oppose Approval of the Keystone XL Pipeline and Call for End of Increased Use of Tar Sands Oil,” August 19, 2011, <http://www.atu.org/media/releases/atu-twu-oppose-approval-of-the-keystone-xl-pipeline-and-call-for-end-of-increased-use-of-tar-sands-oil>.

³⁴ McAlevey, *op. cit.* LIUNA considers itself an environmentally aware union which has supported timelines and targets for carbon reduction, and supports comprehensive climate policy.

³⁵ McAlevey, *ibid.*

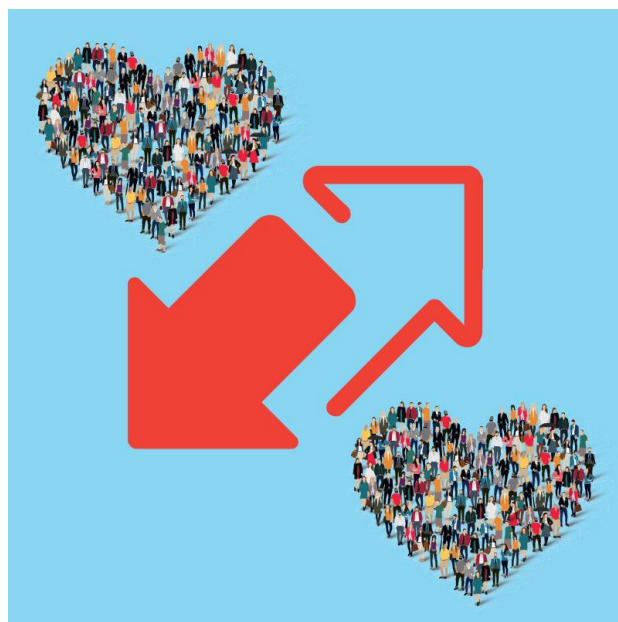
labor unions that have backed the pipeline, including the Teamsters and the AFL-CIO's Building and Construction Trades Department."³⁶

By the end of 2014, AFL-CIO president Richard Trumka, asked if Congress and the President should approve the pipeline, answered: "Yes. We want to get every jobs issue that we can out and as many jobs created as we can to get the economy going."³⁷ United Steelworkers president Leo Girard said he would back the pipeline as long as the steel used to make the pipes was produced domestically.³⁸ In November 2015, after four years of controversy, President Barack Obama brought the matter to an apparent close by rejecting the KXL pipeline.

Two hearts

The labor movement in the United States reveals two hearts beating within a single breast. It often fights climate protection policies in the name of protecting jobs. This is climate alienation: workers and unions fighting for the right to make their world unlivable. This approach is contested by an alternative vision that sees climate protection as necessary for the wellbeing of workers and as a potential means to address other problems of workers as well. This is climate solidarity: the conviction that organized workers should protect each other by protecting the climate on which our common life depends.

American labor's support for climate alienation grows out of the features of the world order: the nation state, property, market, labor, and fossil fuel systems. The AFL-CIO's approach to climate change negotiations is explicitly justified by the need to prevail in economic competition among nations. It presumes the power of corporations to do what they wish with their property, free to export jobs, capital, and pollution. The fear that climate protection policies will lead jobs to migrate from the United States to developing countries reflects the role of markets as a means of putting workers into competition with each other, thereby generating races to the bottom. The advocacy for the KXL pipeline as a source of jobs illustrates the dependence of workers on those who control the means of production for our livelihoods. The fear that putting a price on carbon emissions would harm workers and the poor indicates our dependence on fossil fuels.



³⁶ McAlevey. *ibid.*

³⁷ Sean Higgins, "AFL-CIO urges approval of Keystone XL pipeline," *Washington Examiner*, November 5, 2014, <http://www.washingtonexaminer.com/afl-cio-urges-approval-of-keystone-xl-pipeline/article/2555805>.

³⁸ Steven Greenhouse, "A.F.L.-C.I.O Backs Keystone Oil Pipeline, if Indirectly," *New York Times*, February 27, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/28/business/energy-environment/afl-cio-backs-keystone-oil-pipeline-if-indirectly.html>.

U.S. labor's support for climate alienation also reflects long-established limits on worker solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority. Rather than seeking cooperation among all workers or all people for mutual protection against climate catastrophe, solidarity takes the truncated form of seeking to protect American workers against "foreign" competition. As a leader of the laborers' union LIUNA said in justifying his attack on unions that opposed the Keystone XL pipeline: "If there's legislation or a project that's good for another union, and my members don't have equity in the work, I'm going to be supportive or I'm going to say nothing."³⁹ In this rather limited concept of solidarity the existential interest of all workers in halting climate change is trumped by the asserted interest of a small number of workers in one union whose job prospects might be harmed.

The way workers are organized in the American labor movement accentuates this problem. Each union is a fiefdom controlled by what is usually a self-perpetuating leadership group; some formal democratic procedures may exist but political machines based on union-paid staff are often in a position to call the shots. And since the days of AFL founding president Samuel Gompers' "craft autonomy," labor federations like the AFL-CIO have been regarded as vehicles to support the interests of individual unions, rather than those of organized labor or the working class as a whole. The climate policy of the AFL-CIO has been largely determined by the most fossil fuel-dependent unions, which dominate its Energy Task Force. Two of the largest and least fossil fuel-dependent unions, the Service Workers and the National Education Association, are not members of the AFL-CIO. This "American Separation of Labor" structure erects high though not insurmountable barriers to the assertion of broad worker and social interests like climate protection.

Climate alienation also reflects the way that American unions habitually follow rather than challenge the economic policies of their employers. The climate policy of the American labor movement on the whole follows the climate policy of American industry. In the struggle over climate legislation, for example, the AFL-CIO largely devoted its efforts to protecting the interests of fossil fuel companies and Midwestern industrial corporations; one Energy Task Force staff member boasted in 2009 that its lobbying had taken a climate protection bill and turned it into an economic development bill. Such subservience makes it difficult to pose labor friendly alternatives that will increase both the environmental and the economic wellbeing of all workers while protecting those who might be harmed by secondary effects of climate protection.

Climate alienation is not the only tendency within organized labor, however. We can see in "Securing Our Children's World" that a different philosophy and strategy is possible. Union opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline, however limited, shows that labor can be an active force for climate protection in a way that asserts the immediate as well as the long-term interests of their members.

Chapter 5: The emergence of climate solidarity

Climate change confronts workers and our organizations, like the rest of society, with a novel and radical challenge. In the absence of a concerted institutional response from organized labor as a whole, many individuals, networks, unions, and other groupings at every level within

³⁹ Jane McAlevey, "Unions and Environmentalists: Get It Together!," *The Nation*, May 7, 2012.

the house of labor have begun responding on their own initiative. These diverse initiatives, while often unconnected to each other, constitute a nascent labor climate protection movement.

These efforts begin to redefine solidarity from an effort to protect the interests of a restricted group of workers to mutual support among all workers and indeed all people affected by climate change. They often involve new forms of organization within and across the established boundaries of labor organizations. They start to define unions and the labor movement as part of the broader climate protection movement. They challenge and begin to transform the established practices that perpetuate climate alienation.

These efforts often connect climate protection to other issues. Many relate climate and jobs. They advocate for and themselves create “green jobs” that protect the climate. They seek forms of “just transition” that protect workers’ livelihoods and wellbeing from negative side effects of climate protection. They also pursue a range of climate justice issues, from protecting impoverished communities from unfairly bearing the burden of pollution to fighting for jobs for those discriminated against in the labor market by race, class, ethnicity, and gender.



Such labor climate initiatives involve varied balances or syntheses of climate concern and self-interest. They are not always unambiguous. Many unions, for example, advocate forms of “green energy” like solar and wind, but do so as part of an “all of the above” energy policy that also supports so-called “clean coal” and other fossil fuels. The website of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) features a “working green section” to help members understand the importance of green jobs and to help them launch their green careers. But the IBEW president stated that “renewable energy alone is not enough; we must include coal, using carbon capture and storage technologies now in development, and expand nuclear energy generation as a part of the U.S. energy mix,” warning that otherwise, “economic disruption and job losses” will “make the current recession look tame.”⁴⁰ Some unions, for example the laborers union LIUNA, support scientifically determined targets and timetables for GHG reduction while also fighting for pipelines and other facilities that will create jobs for their members but also increase GHG emissions.

Notwithstanding such ambiguities, these efforts at climate protection represent partial negations of climate alienation. They embody attempts by workers to counter climate alienation by establishing more control over their own organizations, their workplaces, their social networks, and the power centers of society. They may be harbingers of more extensive worker self-liberation to come.

⁴⁰ Unless otherwise noted, facts and quotations in this chapter come from the Labor Network for Sustainability’s Labor Landscape Analysis, “Profiles of 38 unions,” <http://profiles.labor4sustainability.org>.

In the union

Unions constitute their own social and political worlds, and many efforts have aimed first of all to address labor-related climate change issues within unions themselves. These include education for members and the public, local and national resolutions, greening unions' own buildings, organizing, training, and green networks and caucuses.

Most unions pass resolutions that take positions on public issues, so labor climate protection advocates have used resolutions as a handy vehicle to educate members, put unions on record, and begin shaping other forms of labor climate action. Typical of local resolutions is one passed by UAW Local 551 at the Ford Chicago Assembly plant. It first noted environmental concerns: "Fossil fuels reserves on this planet are finite" and "the health of the planet we leave to our children and grandchildren is adversely affected by the burning of fossil fuels." Then it noted jobs concerns: "The United States needs an all out effort to achieve a full employment economy for our citizens" and sustainable energy and mass transit systems could "bring good union jobs in the manufacturing sector back to America and the Mid-West." It called for legislation to "further manufacturing of green energy sources" and "green economy jobs" as a step towards full employment.⁴¹ The resolution was widely circulated among other unions and community groups in the Midwest.



Some resolutions call for meeting scientific targets for GHG reduction. A 2008 resolution on Global Warming and Green Jobs from the national convention of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME) called for federal legislation to "reduce national greenhouse gas emissions to levels consistent with the recommendations from the IPCC" and for "60 to 90 percent reductions" of GHG emissions. AFSCME's Climate Action Plan resolution called for government GHG reduction programs with "specifications for public contracts to include equitable opportunities for green jobs among historically disadvantaged communities," "fair wages and benefits for workers," and "preference for unionized, local firms."

Many union statements on climate protection are ambiguous, however, often supporting an "all of the above" energy policy. A Teamsters statement confirms that "human use of fossil fuels is undisputedly contributing to global warming" and that "aiding a transition to more fuel-efficient rail and trucking technology, expanding high-speed passenger and cargo rail and mass-transit, retrofitting and building energy-efficient homes and public facilities, expanding recycling and sustainable warehousing, building wind and solar farms, and revamping the electrical grid" are all "clean energy" solutions that will "create new jobs," and "increase the demand for existing Teamster jobs in industries like warehousing, freight, rail, construction,

⁴¹ "Full Employment/Green Jobs" resolution, passed August 13, 2014 by executive board, UAW Local 551, Chicago, IL. Email message distributed by Sam Stark, Southeast Michigan Jobs with Justice, August 18, 2014.

waste and recycling.” However, the statement also calls for expansion of nuclear and “clean coal” energy. The Teamsters also helped spearhead labor support for the Keystone XL pipeline.

Some union resolutions call for giving workers a direct role in climate protection at work. A Service Employees International Union (SEIU) convention resolved that “healthcare, public service, and property service workers have an opportunity to make a direct contribution to promoting quality green jobs” by “working with management to make changes that address climate change and environmental health.” It called for contract negotiations and union-management partnerships that lead to “public transportation benefits, adoption of more energy efficient equipment, reduced use and improved disposal of hazardous substances, schedule changes (such as day cleaning that will reduce energy use),” and more. It advocated help with energy efficiency for childcare providers and homecare workers. It also called for protections for workers whose jobs are affected or eliminated by efforts to stem climate change. A resolution from a California AFSCME local called for the union to “encourage locals and councils to negotiate environmentally related issues into their contract language,” including “joint labor-management committees” that would “apply an environmental ethic” to workplace practices.

Unions often play a role in educating their members and the public on public issues ranging from labor rights to health care, and increasingly climate change. Such education often includes the causes of global warming, the future threat, and the impacts already occurring, as well as the potential for jobs fighting climate change.

The New York State Nurses Association, for example, held seminars for hundreds of registered nurses in four major medical centers focused on nurses and climate change. The seminars reflected their RN understanding that “climate change and fossil fuel expansion” constitute “a global health emergency.” Nurses “advocating for climate justice” provides “a strong statement to help blunt and reverse global warming.” Confronting energy corporations, their fossil fuel-burning operations, and the policies that support these energy enterprises are “part of the RN strategic mission.” Nurses shared their stark observations: increased rates of asthma, especially among the population of children; heart disease and lung disease; heat-related ailments, especially for the elderly; and cancer.⁴²

A few unions have explicitly defined themselves as part of the climate protection movement. The United Association (UA), with 340,000 members in plumbing and pipefitting across North America, portrays itself as part of a “Green Building Movement” and promotes its green initiatives on its website. It created the United States’s first union sustainability office which developed three new craft-specific “green” certifications in plumbing/pipefitting, sprinkler fitting, and heating, ventilation, air conditioning, and refrigeration (HVAC). UA also drives “Green Training Trailers” around the country to educate members and the general public about the importance of energy efficiency. It has trained its instructors to educate and certify members in “green systems awareness” and has opened the program to both its employer partners and the general public.

According to the UA, “the design and installation of sustainable water and energy systems in our buildings and homes” are “just the starting point of energy efficiency and sustainability.” If a

⁴² “Nurses Confront Climate Change Head On,” New York State Nurses Association, <http://www.nysna.org/nurses-confront-climate-change-head#.VYCdB6ZwWc8>.

building or home is to remain green over time, it must be maintained and serviced by workers who “feel ownership in the Green Building Movement.” UA pipe trade industry workers are “the heart, lungs, brain, and circulatory system of the Green Building Movement.” The UA says its commitment “does not stop once a building has been built or renovated,” but continues “throughout the entire life cycle of the building.” Notwithstanding its “green” orientation, the UA supported the Keystone XL pipeline as necessary to provide energy security.

Some unions target workers in green jobs for recruitment. LIUNA, for example, negotiated a card check agreement with Conservation Services Group, a company that conducts nearly a half million home energy assessments annually for utilities and energy efficiency organizations nationwide. LIUNA also chartered Green Jobs Local 58 for workers specializing in weatherization and other green jobs. Its first round of recruits graduated from LIUNA’s training center in 2012. To fund the program, LIUNA joined forces with local environmentalists to pass the New York Green Jobs Financing Law that provides funding for residential weatherization work. Its website points out: “An effort to weatherize 100 million inefficient homes will create more than 500,000 construction jobs and hundreds of thousands more jobs in manufacturing and related activities.”

Some unions put climate protection in the context of a wider program for social and economic change. The Communication Workers of America (CWA) union has emphasized the need for “a broad progressive movement to both address climate change and create good jobs.” Its report, *Networking the Green Economy*, advocates long-term public and private investment in high-speed broadband to build more sustainable communities and the development of smart grid and smart building technologies. It has developed a Green Production Module to teach industrial workers about environmental practices and regulation to enhance the green-related skills of manufacturing workers.

Many unions have invested in energy efficiency for their own buildings both for climate protection and cost reduction, sometimes meeting Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards. Many also encourage their members to “go green.” AFSCME, for example, offers an AFSCME Advantage credit card that provides discounts on professional home energy audits, HVAC service contracts from a union contractor, energy efficient home heating systems, and union made green vehicles. Purchases for home energy audits provide a small donation to the BlueGreen Alliance.

Unions are also beginning to use their pension funds for climate protection initiatives. For example, AFSCME worked with the investment staff of CalPERS, the \$239 billion pension fund for State of California public employees, to develop language for an infrastructure investment policy that specifically targets green infrastructure as a priority area. A few unions have voted on, and many others are now debating, whether to join the movement to divest from fossil fuels and move their investments to clean energy. For example, in the state of Maryland, the Montgomery County Government Employees Association and the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW) Local 1994 with its 6,000 members voted to divest their union pension funds of all fossil fuels.⁴³

Climate protection activists have created their own organizations within a number of unions.

⁴³ See “Unions Supporting Divestment in North America,” https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1e6E16iXgVnpw2IYKb3GZIZUdpNE7_wIT9b6IZHTPEVM/edit#gid=0.

The AFSCME Environmental Stewardship Employees Network, for instance, includes many AFSCME members who work in jobs protecting the environment. The AFSCME Green Environmental Caucus aims to bring environmental protection into collective bargaining and to form greater links between labor and environment to “help the environment while also fostering family-wage jobs and a healthy economy.”

In the workplace

While workers, as non-owners of the means of production, might appear to be excluded from affecting what happens in the workplace, in fact workers have many ways for influencing the work process. Many of them are being used to promote climate protection. These efforts represent an initial stage of climate de-alienation.

Workers are uniquely situated to serve as the eyes and ears of the wider public about what goes on in the hidden precincts of the workplace. Worker whistleblowers have often been the means by which the public has found out about environmental violations and threats. A particularly dramatic case occurred in 2006 when the Bush administration ordered NASA’s James Hansen and other government scientists not to provide the public with scientific information about global warming. In response, staff members at the Environmental Protection Agency initiated a petition that was taken up by leaders of 22 local unions representing more than 10,000 EPA workers asking Congress to take immediate action against global warming and demanding an end to the gag orders: “We request that Congress mandate that U.S. EPA inform the public about their ‘right to know’ regarding the current technology that is available to control carbon emissions” and “allow U.S. EPA’s scientists and engineers to speak frankly and directly with Congress and the public regarding climate change, without fear of reprisal.”⁴⁴



Many unions play a significant role in workforce development for their industries and employers. They are increasingly providing recruitment, apprenticeship, education, and training to develop the workforce skills necessary for a transition to a climate-safe economy. SEIU’s Property services Local 32BJ in New York has pioneered programs in green building management, such as 1000 Green Supers which helps “ensure the gains made through retrofits are fully realized by a well-trained property services workforce.” SEIU has also advocated for worker advancement to green jobs; for example, it created a Healthcare Career Advancement Program to “create a new career ladder for 3,000 entry level environmental service workers” in Los Angeles, Seattle, New York, and the Baltimore/DC corridor. AFSCME’s Civil Service Technical Guild Local 375 in New York City helped develop a training program to

⁴⁴ “EPA Scientists File Mass Petition For Action on Global Warming,” November 29, 2006, <http://www.cross-x.com/topic/22397-epa-scientists-file-mass-petition-for-action-on-global-warming/>. See also http://laborstrategies.blogs.com/global_labor_strategies/files/labor_and_global_warming_white_paper_doc.pdf.

help certify city engineers and architects in LEED standards for sustainable, eco-friendly structures.

Unions are also beginning to make climate protection an issue in collective bargaining. SEIU has traditionally bargained over effects of environmental hazards on its members and promoted labor-management committees on environmental and health and safety issues. As it has increasingly identified climate change as an issue, SEIU has sought to include carbon emissions as a collective bargaining issue. For example, the SEIU California Public Sector Local 1000 has included a “Joint Labor Management Committee on Waste Minimization” and “Joint Labor Management Committee on Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction” in its bargaining proposals. AFSCME has developed its own Sustainability Planning Toolkit to help cities and counties develop sustainability plans.⁴⁵

Unions have played a role in promoting less-polluting technologies not only in their workplaces but in the products they manufacture. Autoworkers provide a case in point. In the decade following World War II, the UAW pressured auto companies in the United States to produce smaller cars. But the union was consistently rebuffed by the companies, which jealously guarded their management prerogatives. Eventually the UAW abandoned its efforts to influence product development and instead joined the auto industry’s fight against mileage standards. As a result, when the American auto industry collapsed in part because few consumers wanted to purchase their gas-guzzlers, the UAW was widely perceived as part of the problem. When the Obama administration rescued the auto industry based on new fuel efficiency standards, the UAW reversed its position and supported them. UAW president Bob King later noted: “The drive to bring innovative fuel-saving technologies to market is transforming the auto industry in the United States and creating good jobs from the research lab to the factory floor.”

Unions have also sought to persuade employers to use sustainable practices that protect the climate and ensure a future for workers’ jobs. In the 1980s and 1990s the International Woodworkers Association, representing woodworking and forestry workers, fought a contentious battle with environmentalists over logging in the Pacific Northwest. But the union, now the Woodworkers Department of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers (IAM), today promotes forest preservation as a key element of sustainable jobs as well as climate protection.

Some unions are spearheading reorganizations of production that will serve both workers and environmental needs. At a local level, an alliance of unions, environmentalists, and community groups supported by the Teamsters successfully combatted severe pollution produced in the Port of Los Angeles. The alliance developed a plan to restructure work relations in the port to provide the self-employed, largely immigrant Latino truck drivers regular jobs with employers who would be responsible for providing low-emission trucks. Their plan for decasualizing the workforce was going forward until a court ruled that the workers were independent contractors and therefore not eligible for union representation. Workers have responded with a series of strikes and a subsequent court decision found the drivers are workers whose labor rights must be respected.

⁴⁵ <http://www.afscme.org/issues/environment/afscme-green-toolkit>

At the national and even international level, the Teamsters are pursuing a broad strategic program to reorganize the entire transportation system on a basis that will protect good jobs, the climate, and the environment. Sectoral competition for scarce funding among trucking, railroads, airlines, and shipping ports has repeatedly pitted Teamster union members against each other. To forestall such conflicts the Teamsters are casting themselves as a “supply chain union” representing workers in every link of the global supply chain from ports to distribution centers to rail to trucks to the final customer—thus countering the dynamics of an internal “separation of labor.” They are advocating intermodal systems that maximize efficiencies and thereby reduce greenhouse gas emissions. Teamsters believes that an efficient intermodal system could actually increase employment in sectors where the union has a presence, while reducing the non-union, low-wage, high-turnover jobs in the inefficient over-the-road long distance trucking sector.

Cross-union networks

Labor action on climate change has by no means been confined within individual unions. Trade unionists have also promoted climate protection across union lines. After the participation of unions in the 2014 People’s Climate March in San Diego, activists from the American Federation of Teachers, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the building trades, the nurses, and other unions formed an Environmental Caucus in the San Diego-Imperial Counties Labor Council. Their mission statement proposes to educate members and the public, build alliances with environmental and community groups, promote progressive labor/environmental legislation, and ensure that “labor’s agenda always includes an environmental focus” and that “labor’s issues are always present in larger discussions of environmental issues.” Such caucuses have now formed up and down the West Coast.



Trade unionists and allies have developed a variety of organizations and networks focused on climate change and related concerns. Many of them include not only unions but environmental and other groups as well. These boundary-crossing formations begin to express a climate solidarity that cuts across the boundaries of “separation of labor” unionism.

One inspiration for these actions was the “Battle of Seattle” when labor, environmental, religious, farm, and other organizations, along with nonviolent direct actionists, came together to protest the “Millennial Round” World Trade Organization (WTO) meetings scheduled for November 30, 1999. The emerging labor-environmental cooperation was captured in the slogan, “Teamsters and Turtles Together at Last.”

In the aftermath of the Battle of Seattle, labor and environmental organizations scheduled a major meeting to launch further cooperation for September 11, 2001. On that morning a group of leaders of environmental organizations were in the AFL-CIO building awaiting a meeting with AFL-CIO president John Sweeney to discuss ways to strengthen their relationship. As a result of the attacks on New York's World Trade Towers and the Pentagon, the meeting was canceled and never rescheduled.⁴⁶

In the absence of leadership from the AFL-CIO, two new labor-environmental alliances sprang up to continue the collaboration. The Apollo Alliance was founded in 2003 to advance energy independence and clean, more efficient energy alternatives. The Apollo Alliance brought together leaders from business and environmental organizations with over 30 labor unions. The goal of the alliance was to catalyze a clean energy revolution in America. Initially the words "climate change" and "global warming" were absent from its website and most other materials, even though the program it advocated would have significantly reduced greenhouse gas emissions. Over time it gradually came to include climate protection as an additional benefit of clean energy.

In 2006, the Sierra Club and United Steelworkers formed the BlueGreen Alliance focused on green jobs, clean energy, and worker rights. It eventually included four major environmental organizations and ten unions. It has played a major role in projecting the idea of green jobs into the political arena and at times into government policy. Initially it rarely mentioned global warming, but over time climate protection has become an important part of its program. It works to "design public policies, perform research, and run public education and advocacy campaigns to advocate for practical solutions; facilitate dialogue between environmentalists, union members and other stakeholders; and educate America's labor union members and environmentalists about the economic and environmental impacts of climate change and the job-creating opportunities of environmental protections."⁴⁷ In 2012, the Apollo Alliance and the BlueGreen Alliance merged.

The Labor Network for Sustainability (LNS) was founded in 2009 to encourage labor to become a leader in the movement for sustainability and climate protection. It advocates a full-spectrum sustainability that includes economic, social, and environmental dimensions. It has argued that climate change is not a threat in some remote future but is already harming workers, jobs, and unions. It has urged unions to support the GHG reduction targets recommended by climate scientists and to eschew "all of the above" energy policies that aggravate climate destruction. It has proposed economic strategies to meet those goals in a labor-friendly way that would provide millions of new jobs and provide a just transition for workers whose jobs may be threatened by climate protection policies. It has helped organize labor opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline. At the same time, it has encouraged environmentalists to understand the concerns of working people and to develop and advocate for good jobs and just transition programs.

⁴⁶ An earlier effort at greater cooperation had also petered out. In 1996 the AFL-CIO, Sierra Club, Union of Concerned Scientists, and others initiated Blue Green Working Group discussions designed to define common ground between the labor and environmental movements. AFL-CIO president John Sweeney brought in Jane Perkins, former head of Friends of the Earth and formerly with SEIU, to lead the project. A working group was formed but produced no concrete results.

⁴⁷ BlueGreen Alliance website, <http://www.bluegreenalliance.org/about>.

In January 2016, the Labor Network for Sustainability organized the first Labor Convergence on Climate, which brought together 75 labor leaders to forge a common strategy to change organized labor's approach to climate protection. The Convergence included invited representatives of state AFL-CIO unions, city central labor councils, and individual unions including building trade, manufacturing, public employee and service unions, and elected officers. The Convergence laid out one-year-, three-year, and five-year goals for the emerging labor climate movement. It developed strategies to address every level of organized labor. Among other projects it planned to promote resolutions in local unions, local central labor councils, state AFL-CIO and international unions, and ultimately the national AFL-CIO.

The Climate Justice Alliance grew out of the global Climate Justice Now! network that provided a critical voice in the UN climate change process for developing countries and marginalized communities around the globe.⁴⁸ It includes more than 40 organizations, many of them local grassroots groups in low-income communities which are often "frontline communities" directly affected by climate change and fossil fuel facilities. Its constituency includes poor and minority sectors of the working class often marginalized in organized labor, and it has also engaged unions at both local and national levels. It opposes extreme energy projects and emphasizes local grassroots initiatives as alternatives to large-scale market-based programs to counter climate change.⁴⁹

Labor climate networks extend downward to local and state formations. An example is the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, formed in 2012 as a partnership between the Connecticut AFL-CIO and the Interreligious Eco-Justice Network "to strengthen collaboration among Connecticut's labor, environmental, and religious groups in advocating for public policies that address urgent concerns about climate change while creating good-paying jobs right here in our state."⁵⁰ The Roundtable has campaigned around a number of issues where there is common ground among its constituents, including providing local employment through the Renewable Portfolio Standard; preserving the incentive for energy efficiency and solar energy by preventing electric companies from greatly increasing their fixed charges; and establishing a new Governor's Council on Climate Change to develop a new state Climate Action Plan. The Roundtable worked with the Labor Network for Sustainability to produce a report on "Connecticut's Clean Energy Future: Climate Goals and Employment Benefits."⁵¹ It has run a series of workshops on labor and climate change in union locals. More than a dozen unions and the state AFL-CIO helped organize Connecticut participation in the September 2014 People's Climate March in New York City, and more than a dozen unions have participated in other activities of the Roundtable. The Roundtable assumes that its constituencies will not always be in agreement, and has promoted open dialogue where they are not; for example, it organized a forum on natural gas infrastructure expansion that allowed both fracking opponents and unions that hoped to gain infrastructure jobs to lay out their interests and concerns. Similar organizations have now been formed in Maryland, North Carolina, and other states.

⁴⁸ Jeremy Brecher, *Climate Insurgency*, p. 30-35.

⁴⁹ <http://www.ourpowercampaign.org>

⁵⁰ <https://sites.google.com/site/ctroundtableonclimateandjobs/>

⁵¹ Labor Network for Sustainability, CT Roundtable on Climate and Jobs, Synapse Energy Economics, "Connecticut's Clean Energy Future." https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/ctclimatejobs/pages/26/attachments/original/1447469754/CTcleanenergy_fin_al_3.pdf?1447469754.

Labor climate networks also extend upward to the global level. In 1992, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) devoted its World Congress to environmental issues. Its successor, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), has been a strong advocate for climate protection and a just transition for workers. It has organized global labor participation in UN climate conferences.

A series of international gatherings began with the First Global Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment in Nairobi, Kenya, in January 2006. In April 2006, São Paulo hosted the first ever Trade Union Regional Conference on Labour and the Environment for unions in Latin America, and in July 2006 another Regional Conference took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. These events were co-hosted by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP), the International Trade Union Confederation, and the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC), and organized by the Sustainlabour Foundation.

The first North American Labor Assembly on Climate Crisis, organized by the Cornell University Global Labor Institute, met in New York City in May 2007. The meeting was sponsored by 10 international unions and attended by more than 200 trade unionists from the United States, Canada, Mexico, and the Caribbean region, as well as 50 trade unionists from other parts of the world. Representatives from environmental, community, and women's organizations also participated in the conference.⁵² It was followed by a series of annual labor climate conferences and retreats that brought together U.S. and international trade unionists, often in conjunction with UN climate events.

Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED), which includes 36 unions from 12 countries, aims to build “a global trade union community for energy democracy.” TUED is “a platform for trade unions from all sectors and countries to debate, develop and promote real solutions to the climate crisis, land grabs, energy poverty, and pollution generated by fossil fuels—solutions that can build unions, worker and community power, and advance social and environmental justice.” The organization is convened by the International Program for Labor, Climate and Environment of the Murphy Institute for Worker Education and Labor Studies at the City University of New York.⁵³

Workers in the same industry or occupation have also developed international networking around climate. For example, National Nurses United in the U.S. helped form Global Nurses United with climate change as one of its three leading issues.⁵⁴

Political action

Trade unionists have also acted to influence public policy, the political system, and the public on climate issues. Sometimes this has taken the form of lobbying and other efforts to use established channels for affecting public policy; sometimes it has involved protests and direct actions typically used by social movements and often used in the past by the labor movement itself. Lobbying and related ways of exerting political influence are a normal part of the repertoire of American unions. Unions have political influence because they are major political contributors; field large electoral operations; influence the votes of large numbers of members;

⁵² http://laborstrategies.blogs.com/global_labor_strategies/2007/05/post.html

⁵³ <http://unionsforenergydemocracy.org/about/about-the-initiative/>

⁵⁴ <http://www.nationalnursesunited.org/blog/entry/one-planet-one-people-global-nurses-united/>

regularly employ lobbyists and public relations specialists to influence government and the public; and are significant economic players who can influence the success or failure of public policies. Union lobbying is generally guided by convention resolutions and other official positions, although union leaders exercise considerable influence over what issues and positions are emphasized.

Many unions and the AFL-CIO lobbied U.S. Congress actively if ambiguously around the 2009 federal climate legislation. While many though not all unions ultimately supported the American Clean Energy and Security Act (known as the Waxman-Markey bill), many unions and the AFL-CIO lobbied to reduce the impact of the bill and provide sweeteners for coal and other fossil fuel companies. The bill passed the House but was blocked in the Senate.

Unions have frequently lobbied for legislation that could provide green jobs for their members and that also provide climate protection benefits. Building trade unions strongly supported the Obama administration's economic stimulus package, which provided extensive support for clean energy investment. Unions at local, state, and national levels have supported programs for energy efficient schools and other public buildings. The UAW has been a strong supporter of federal programs that encourage carbon-reducing technologies such as the Advanced Technology Vehicle Manufacturing Incentive Program. The AFSCME joined with the California Wind Energy Association, Sierra Club California, and the American Lung Association of California to support the passage of the SBX1-2 Senate bill, a law that requires that 33 percent of the state's energy come from renewable sources by 2020.

Labor has also participated in demonstrations and other forms of protest to support climate protection. The most dramatic instance was the large union participation in the People's Climate March in New York in September 2014. Under banners proclaiming "Healthy Planet and Good Jobs," thousands of trade unionists from 75 local and national unions, highly visible in their red, blue, green, and white union uniforms, marched in a leading contingent. At the labor rally before the march, AFSCME District Council 37 executive director Henry Garrido recalled that during Superstorm Sandy in 2012, "Our workers were at the forefront manning shelters, evacuating people, preparing hospital beds, and rescuing people every day." But Sandy was just a warning shot. "Labor must stand for more than working conditions," Garrido continued. "We must stand for more than contracts. We must stand for environmental justice—otherwise, we will become irrelevant." The issue of climate change, he concluded, is "the biggest threat to our humanity." We can no longer afford to put our heads in the sand: "Today is the day that the human race stood together and said, 'Enough!'"⁵⁵



⁵⁵ Jeremy Brecher, "How Climate Protection Has Become Today's Labor Solidarity," *The Nation*, May 25, 2015, <http://www.thenation.com/article/206553/climate-protection-todays-labor-solidarity>.

Workers are challenging climate alienation

Such actions represent a partial reversal of climate alienation unfolding. When workers act in our unions, communities, workplaces, and political systems to fight the causes of global warming, we turn our activity from climate destruction to climate protection. When we organize in networks that reach from our local communities around the world to fight for our common interest in protecting the climate, we move beyond narrow interests to global climate solidarity in defense of our mutual interests. When we use our organizations, our influence in the workplace, and our political power to encourage the transition to a climate-safe world, we challenge the power of governments and corporations that intend to continue climate destruction.

When workers demand effective global climate protection agreements, we challenge the right of states to act without concern for the wellbeing of the world's people and environment. When we pressure our employers to transition to climate-safe production, we invade the rights claimed by property owners. When we call for restrictions on the right of corporations to pollute, we challenge the absolute supremacy of a profit-driven market. When we join workers together to act on common interests, we challenge the separation of workers from each other and our domination by our employers. When we fight for a transition to clean, renewable energy, we begin to end the era of human dependence on fossil fuels. We thus challenge, in limited ways, the basic patterns of the world order of climate destruction. Transcending those limits requires drawing together these sprawling, largely unconnected elements into a concerted challenge to climate alienation.

Chapter 6: A climate-protecting workers' movement

If the American labor movement perpetuates and even foments climate alienation, what transformations in the labor movement are needed to overcome it? How do they relate to other transformations needed in the labor movement? How do they relate to other challenges to the alienation of labor? This chapter presents a "thought experiment" exploring how working people might go about constructing a new practice in response to climate change and global warming. It proposes that a labor movement for climate protection could be the leading edge of structural reform in the labor movement and of the de-alienation of labor. This and the next chapter move from interpreting the past to exploring possibilities for the future.

This thought experiment has certain likely, though not certain, presuppositions. The problems of working people in today's world order will neither evaporate nor be solved by the current practices of organized labor. We will face



increasingly devastating effects of climate change. Official climate protection processes will continue to fail or at least be inadequate. This will produce growing public concern, alarm, and determination to act. That in turn will produce a global climate insurgency prepared to challenge the legitimacy of current governments.

The necessary transformation of the labor movement will require overcoming current limits to solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority.⁵⁶ It will involve enforcing GHG reduction by extending climate solidarity, network organization, and worker power. This process is likely to be complex and nonlinear, with new principles transforming existing labor organizations and giving rise to new ones.

The universality of the climate change threat makes it a potential pivot for a new political and economic configuration and a new alignment of working class organization. It provides a basis for challenging a crucial weakness of organized labor: its organization along lines and issues that divide rather than unify the working class. Its universal threat creates a common global human interest. It creates an overlap—almost to the point of identity—between working class and universal human interests. It therefore creates a favorable terrain for collective struggle and action. It requires changes in the world order that are also required for many other forms of worker liberation and common preservation, and laying the basis for wider alliances around broad issues. It requires reducing the power of ruling and employing classes. And because of our social location and needs, workers must be central to the fix. For these reasons, climate solidarity potentially provides the basis for labor movement transformation.

Why is climate solidarity potentially the basis for a broader challenge to the alienation of labor? To redirect our activity as workers from destroying the climate to protecting the climate constitutes a partial de-alienation of labor. Starting with an initial focus on climate alienation, worker self-organization can take on the challenge of the alienation of labor in other spheres as well.

Such a transformation in the labor movement will take place within a context that is being changed by many other factors besides climate change. Globalization, neoliberalism, financialization, contingent work, the re-commodification of labor, the degradation of democracy, and the restriction of labor rights are transforming who is in the workforce, who is in the labor movement, their problems, possible sources of power, and solutions. The traditional labor movement has been greatly weakened by these factors, but new constituencies and organizations are emerging, particularly among the growing sector of low-wage workers. New technologies like 3D printing and self-driving cars are changing the material basis of production. As the proportion of industrial workers declines and the proportion of service workers increases—in the workforce and in unions—the base for organized labor's commitment to fossil fuels erodes.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ This analysis draws on Labor Network for Sustainability, "Historical Analysis of How Labor Changes on Key Issues," http://www.labor4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/pdf_11042014.pdf, and Jeremy Brecher, "How Climate Protection Has Become Today's Labor Solidarity," *The Nation*, May 25, 2015. <http://www.thenation.com/article/climate-protection-todays-labor-solidarity/>.

⁵⁷ Tamara Draut, *Sleeping Giant: How the New Working Class Will Transform America* (New York: Doubleday, 2016).

Labor climate solidarity

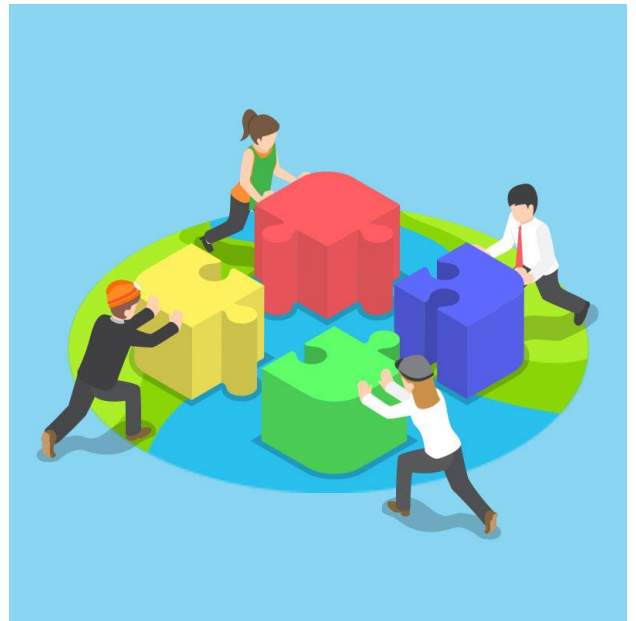
The labor movement's most essential value is solidarity. Summed up in the hallowed adage "an injury to one is an injury to all," it is the recognition that "looking out for number one" doesn't work, that workers will survive and prosper only if we look out for one another. Labor solidarity has been constructed over time through mutual interaction as a response to the position of workers in society.

The question of climate protection is a quintessential question of solidarity. Individually we are powerless but collectively we are powerful. Our individual actions will not benefit ourselves unless others also act.

Workers need each other all over the world to protect the climate. Therefore we have mutual duties. This is the classic form of solidarity: self- and common interests shift from being opposed to being the same.

Climate protection is the new solidarity: protecting our brothers and sisters as well as ourselves from destruction. That will require a shift in the way the labor movement defines solidarity.

American trade unions often define solidarity as the obligation to support the job interests of any group of organized workers. Even if the jobs in question are destructive to people and the planet, solidarity requires defending the jobs of those who hold them. But this is a restricted, even perverse definition of solidarity. Solidarity needs to go both ways. All must support the needs of individuals and particular groups. But they in turn must support the common interests of all—and pursue their own interests in a way that is congruent with the needs of all. Otherwise the result is a travesty of solidarity in which overall class and social needs are sacrificed to those of a special interest.



Labor climate organization

Climate alienation is embedded in organized labor's institutional structures. The tradition of individual unions devoted to the workplace interests of particular groups of workers, dating back to the AFL's Samuel Gompers in the 19th century, provides a "separation of labor" that puts limited interests ahead of broad class and social ones. Within unions, the top-down organization of power and disempowerment of the rank and file generate self-perpetuating fiefdoms that are largely impervious to democratic influence. The focus on collective bargaining with employers over wages and working conditions limits the willingness of unions to address broader issues. Within the AFL-CIO, the Gompers tradition dictates that the function of a labor federation is to support the individual interests of separate unions even when they

conflict with the collective interests of unions or working people as a whole. The dependence of unions and their members on the wellbeing and toleration of employers deters them from challenging socially destructive practices.

Let us envision a process that starts by linking the labor-based climate protection organizations and actions described in the previous chapter into a concerted workers' movement, which acts on its own and through the unions in which it is active; transforms the central institutions of organized labor into agents of climate protection; and challenges climate alienation in multiple arenas. Such a movement can also be a leading edge of a more general structural transformation of organized labor.

The initial cell units of such a movement could be labor climate action committees, committees for climate safety, climate protection clubs, or climate stewards in both unionized and non-unionized workplaces. They could be part of, networked into, or independent of unions. They could operate with or without employer approval. They could provide education and a vehicle for workers to participate in the wider climate protection movement.

In the workplace, such groups might play an expanding role in contesting employers' liberty to pollute. They could demand the "right to know" about their employers' GHG emissions. They could play an independent whistleblower role—like the "union checkweightmen" who once had the contractual right to independently inspect loading scales to prevent coal operators from cheating miners. They could help unions negotiate climate protection agreements with their employers. Ultimately their role might be legitimated in collective bargaining agreements or climate legislation.

Such groups could reach out to each other to create labor climate protection networks within and beyond individual unions. In many instances this is already happening. As noted in the previous chapter, AFSCME has an Environmental Stewardship Employees Network and an AFSCME Green Environmental Caucus. Local labor councils in cities such as San Diego have developed their own climate caucuses. Groups like the Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs bring together workers from a variety of unions for climate action. Groups like the BlueGreen Alliance, Labor Network for Sustainability, and the Labor Convergence on Climate can help promote this networking process.

Such a labor climate protection network can be both an organization acting in its own right for climate protection and a vehicle for transforming organized labor. It can project and partially



embody a vision of a new worker movement based on broad worker participation in pursuing worker and social interests.⁵⁸

As we saw in Chapter 3, the fundamental model that shapes the American labor movement is based on the idea that each national union is a power unto itself—the residue of Gompers’ concept of “craft autonomy.” While originally based on the idea that each craft would have its own union, then the idea that each industry would have its own union, today many unions are “general unions” that include members from widely diverse occupations and industries, while those who work in the same workplace, company, industry, occupation, or locality are often divided from each other by fiercely defended union boundaries.

Within individual unions, the top officials generally hold the principal levers of power—for example, control over a large paid staff—providing the basis for a top-down rule by a self-perpetuating leadership group. The leadership often discourages direct communication and cooperation among workers within and between unions as a means to protect their own power. Most though not all national unions are members of the AFL-CIO. However, the AFL-CIO often pursues the common interest of unions and working people less than the particular interests of its most powerful member unions. And it serves as a vehicle to protect the interests of established labor leaders and leadership groups. In the case of climate issues, a small group of unions in fossil fuel-related industries shape the policies of the AFL-CIO and try to impose them on the rest of organized labor.

Not only could an emerging labor climate movement challenge climate alienation, it could also advance the structural reorganization of organized labor. A labor climate protection movement could take the form of a network, promoting overlapping direct connections among workers by workplace, company, industry, occupation, and locality. It could thereby serve as a model for a networked labor movement and start connecting the links through which the network could begin to permeate and transform the existing union structure. Such a network could shift power within unions from leadership domination to worker self-organization.⁵⁹

Within the AFL-CIO, this could include breaking the stranglehold of energy, manufacturing, and construction unions over climate policy. This would involve forcing the AFL-CIO to open its climate policy determination to a far wider group of unions. (The Communications Workers of America has pushed to be represented in the AFL-CIO’s Energy Committee, in part to provide a more outspoken voice on climate protection.) That could take place in part through a “coalition of the willing” among unions that understand the need to transform labor’s climate policy. They could also ally with the very large unions with strong positions on climate protection that are currently outside the AFL-CIO, such as the SEIU and the National Education Association (NEA).

Such a transformation of the labor movement to a network form should not be limited to the organizational structures that currently exist. New forms of working class organization, exemplified in the United States for example by Occupy Wall Street, Black Lives Matter, and

⁵⁸ For one approach to structural transformation of organized labor, now somewhat dated, see Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, “Labor and the Challenge of the ‘Disintegrated’ Corporation,” *Z*, March 12, 1998, <http://www.jeremybrecher.org/labor/14-labor-and-the-challenge-of-the-dis-integrated-corporation/>.

⁵⁹ Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, “Labor and the Challenge of the ‘Disintegrated’ Corporation,” *Z*, March 12, 1998.

the Fight for Fifteen, are emerging and can be expected to continue to emerge.⁶⁰ These movements often organize and act across industry and employer boundaries rather than primarily seeking recognition and collective bargaining with specific employers. These movements are unlikely to fit in comfortably with the existing structures of the labor movement. A transformed, networked labor movement in contrast would be well structured to serve as a “catchment vehicle” for future waves of worker revolt. It can draw people in based on geographic, ethnic, gender, industrial, occupational, and other affinities and then link them to other workers with whom they share common concerns.

Labor climate challenge to authority

Challenge to authority is a normal response to the subordinate position of workers within the workplace, society, and world order. On-the-job actions, strikes, bargaining demands, civil disobedience, mass strikes, political action, and other forms of resistance have frequently accompanied the emergence of worker solidarity and self-organization. But workers are not in continuous revolt. There is a continuum between such resistance and an acquiescence or even cooperation with the powerful that accepts limits imposed by capital, state, and other authority. Organized labor as a whole has generally accepted or even endorsed the right of employers, governments, and other authorities to destroy the Earth’s climate and command workers to participate in that destruction.



The labor climate protection movement represents the beginnings of a challenge to the right of such authorities to destroy the Earth’s climate. As we saw in Chapter 5, workers are already acting in unions, workplaces, cross-union networks, and political arenas to reduce GHGs and promote climate protection policies. These actions generally go beyond merely endorsing and implementing the current intentions of unions, employers, institutions, and public policy makers. They involve challenging those in authority who are complicit in maintaining climate alienation. That challenge involves moving into spheres that have been controlled by others. The objective of such a challenge might be to win cooperation from those in authority for measures such as climate protection which are in everyone’s mutual interest. But it nonetheless involves exercising a degree of independent power and a matching of forces.

The climate protection caucuses, networks, and organizations that have developed within the labor movement foster connections among workers that do not necessarily run through official

⁶⁰ For analysis of the “mini-revolts of the 21st century” see Jeremy Brecher, *Strike! Revised, Expanded, and Updated Edition* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014), “Chapter 10: Beyond One-Sided Class War.”

channels. They challenge current union policies and practices. And they often involve forms of democratization that run counter to top-down union structures.⁶¹

In the workplace, whistleblowing that reveals climate-destroying policies, plans, and practices can play a crucial role in climate protection. Workers can be in effect the eyes and ears of the climate protection movement and the broader community. Workers can insist that employers operate within the limits of public policy and law on climate protection; for example, we can establish “climate bans” that shut down GHG emitters such as the “green bans” that Australian construction workers used to halt work on projects destructive to the natural and built environment.⁶² Such climate protection measures ultimately require limiting and countering “management’s right to manage.”

Workers and unions can negotiate with their employers over current practices and future production and investment plans for the workplace and the company as a whole. While current labor law does not provide a voice for workers in such matters, the dependence of employers on their workers provides a basis for leverage, especially when there are also external allies who can affect employers’ wellbeing.

Networks that cut across union and community boundaries can challenge policies, practices, and institutions that go beyond individual companies or governments. They have the potential to develop a working class climate policy and practice that can operate in many arenas. A cross-union network, for example, organized labor participation in the September 2014 People’s Climate March and continues as a “labor table” in the People’s Climate Movement. The Connecticut Roundtable on Climate and Jobs has lobbied the state AFL-CIO and won support for climate protection policies. It has also run educational workshops in unions, unified interests among different unions and clean energy companies, lobbied for legislation and administrative policies, developed research for alternative policies, and participated in protests—all on the basis of the common interest in climate and jobs. Nationally, cross-union networks like the Labor Network for Sustainability and the BlueGreen Alliance have pressured the AFL-CIO to develop its own green jobs programs and promote and lobby for a broad green jobs agenda. Such action will ultimately require a challenge to the AFL-CIO structures that perpetuate climate alienation.

Finally, although organized labor as a whole has often promoted the political objectives of the fossil fuel industry and its allies by advocating for an “all of the above” energy policy that in practice promotes fossil fuel emissions, some unions have promoted public policy that challenges fossil fuel domination. This has involved demonstrations, protests, and direct action blockades as well as use of unions’ political clout to lobby for climate protection policies. It has also involved working out and proposing alternative policies that represent a labor strategy for climate protection, focused on both jobs and the common interests and needs of working people. Such approaches go beyond the limits of neoliberal ideology and fossil fuel dependence. Implementing them will ultimately require a broad coalition and a democratization of the political process.

⁶¹ See Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, “Reforming Labor Law, Reforming Labor,” Z, 1989, <http://www.jeremybrecher.org/reforming-labor-law-reforming-labor/>.

⁶² Meredith Burgmann and Verity Burgmann, *Green Bans, Red Union: Environmental Activism and the New South Wales Builders Labourers Federation*, (Kensington, NSW: New South Wales University Press, 1998).

Unfortunately, the forces perpetuating climate destruction are deeply entrenched within the world order. They dominate the world's political systems, which are increasingly subject to plutocratic control. While climate action within the shrinking limits of democratic control is necessary, it is not sufficient. That is why the climate protection movement has increasingly turned to civil disobedience.

Working class movements have long had to contend with systematic denial of labor and democratic rights. They have had to rely on their own collective power, even when exercising it has required disobedience to those who claim to represent legitimate authority. Worker movements have often presented such disobedience as a fight for labor and human rights that established authorities unjustly and even illegally deny.

Historically, worker movements have often not only resisted the policies and practices of employers, government, and other authorities, but have also challenged their legitimacy to rule. The American labor movement, for example, long maintained that workers have a right to strike based on the fundamental human right embodied in the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution which prohibits "involuntary servitude." Both conservative and radical unions long instructed their members to refuse to obey court injunctions ordering them to work against their will.

Such resistance constitutes what legal historian James Gray Pope has called a "constitutional insurgency." A constitutional insurgency is a social movement that rejects current constitutional doctrine, but "rather than repudiating the Constitution altogether, draws on it for inspiration and justification." Such an insurgency "unabashedly confronts official legal institutions with an outsider perspective that is either absent from or marginalized in official constitutional discourse." On the basis of its own interpretation of the Constitution, such an insurgency "goes outside the formally recognized channels of representative politics to exercise direct popular power," for example through extralegal assemblies, mass protests, strikes, and boycotts. It may hold such actions legal, even though the established courts condemn and punish them.⁶³

Since the 1935 Wagner Act and the subsequent institutionalization of labor rights, American trade unions have increasingly accepted the limits imposed by labor law. Those limits have grown narrower and narrower, however. Today there is little protection for the right to strike and even the rights to organize a union and bargain collectively with employers are more often denied than protected. Trade union representation has been reduced to a small fraction of the workforce and the ability of unions to pursue their members' interests has been greatly curtailed. The ability of workers to assert any rights at all beyond the right to sell our labor may well require a return to the defiance of authority embodied in labor's history of constitutional insurgency.

Overcoming climate alienation may similarly require such constitutional insurgency. In *Climate Insurgency*, I argued for a global non-violent constitutional insurgency to protect the basic common rights of people and communities threatened by climate destruction from the emission of GHGs.

⁶³ Brecher, *Climate Insurgency*, p. 76.

Such an insurgency could be greatly strengthened by the participation of workers as workers. Working class direct action for climate protection, such as strikes, green bans, and monitoring workplaces for GHG emissions, could be an effective form of insurgency. And it could be a direct form of labor de-alienation, of workers taking control of our own labor.

A labor climate insurgency may be the best starting point for workers to achieve our own liberation from the domination we suffer in the current world order. Effective labor climate action involves asserting labor rights. Therefore labor climate insurgency can serve as a growing point for a broader labor rights insurgency. Climate protection is a key place to reassert the role of organized workers in shaping our lives on Earth.

Such an insurgency involves disobeying and defying those who claim legitimate authority. It requires going beyond the limits that have been placed on forms of worker self-organization, forms of action, and subjects of contestation. By doing so it links climate insurgency to the historical legacy of worker self-organization and its resistance to repression, containment, and fragmentation. It synthesizes climate protection and labor rights.

Labor climate insurgency is only likely to succeed if it is part of a wider climate insurgency. Climate change is like apartheid or colonialism: all require unified struggle among a very wide set of forces. As with anti-apartheid and anti-colonial struggles, democratization campaigns, and the 1980s Polish Solidarity movement, other forces are likely to support workers' power largely as a means to realize shared social ends—in this case climate protection. Organizing at the workplace can be one aspect of a broader movement for social and worker self-defense.

Labor climate insurgency does not require abandoning non-insurgent forms of action. Indeed, a key strategic objective should be to make direct action on the job, collective bargaining, legislation, and international agreements synergistic. While this may sound paradoxical, historically social movements have often utilized an inside-outside strategy in which actions within and beyond legal limits have worked together to bring about change that neither could have achieved alone. Indeed, as James Gray Pope has shown, the decision of the Supreme Court to uphold the Wagner Act and guarantee for the first time the right of workers to organize and bargain collectively can only be explained as a response to the fact that as the justices deliberated American auto workers were occupying their factories.⁶⁴

Ultimately climate de-alienation will require the institutionalization of worker power in workplaces and society through legislation and direct action. It must become legitimate for workers to blow the whistle on GHG emissions, enforce climate protection rules, negotiate over climate protection, and participate in employer planning for GHG reduction.

Chapter 7: A Worker Climate Action Plan

How can workers ensure that our labor protects the climate rather than destroying it? The previous chapter laid out the possible formation of a labor climate movement based on climate solidarity, network organization, and a challenge to authority utilizing both the

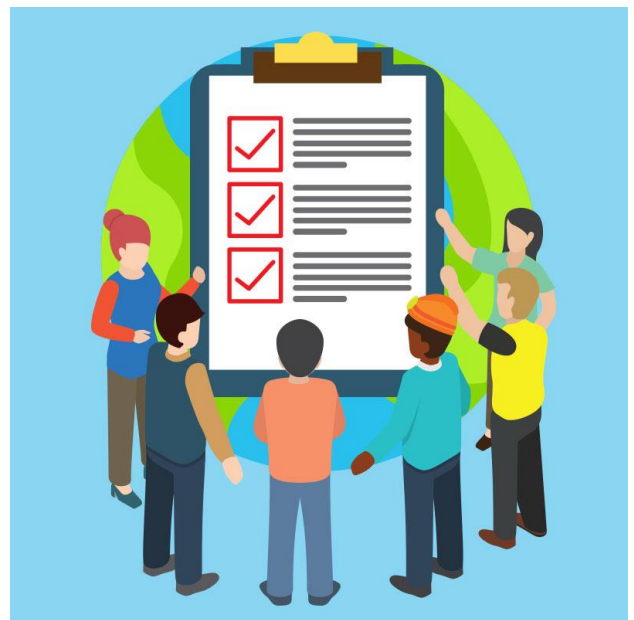
⁶⁴ James Gray Pope, "Worker Lawmaking, Sit-Down Strikes, and the Shaping of American Industrial Relations, 1935-1958," *Law and History Review*, 2006.

institutional power of workers and a labor climate insurgency. What changes in society would such a movement need to make to realize its goals? This chapter presents a program for the emerging workers' climate action movement.

Our challenge is to overcome climate alienation. This entails redirecting the activity of workers to eliminating the burning of fossil fuels. Abolishing climate alienation ultimately means eliminating GHG-producing labor.

In some ways, halting climate-destroying labor is simple. If all workers who produce and use fossil fuels simply refused to perform operations that produce or use them, GHG emissions would cease. But because GHG emissions are deeply enmeshed in a complex world order with many dependencies that militate against such an action, overcoming climate alienation requires a much more complex strategy.

Eliminating GHG-producing labor will cause some unintended consequences that will need to be overcome. It will eliminate most currently available energy, which will need to be replaced with a new energy system. It will lead to job loss for many fossil fuel producing and using workers and potentially to economic devastation of their communities. Forestalling such devastation will require a just transition that provides for the livelihoods of affected workers and communities. Both the energy and labor transitions hold the potential for broad economic disruption that could aggravate the economic problems already faced by workers and others. That possibility must be forestalled by macroeconomic policies that ensure prosperity. A strategy for overcoming climate alienation must both eliminate the burning of fossil fuels and provide solutions to the problems that their elimination may cause.



Halting climate alienation will require transforming not only the energy system, but also labor markets, workers' roles, social control of the economy, and global coordination. Our worker climate action program includes five key elements.

First is a transition to an economy that does not produce GHGs. That requires a rapid phased elimination of fossil fuels and the labor that produces and uses them. It also requires their replacement by fossil fuel-free energy and energy efficiency.

All workers have a common long-term interest in climate protection. But many also have immediate or short-term interests that climate protection may threaten. The second element of a worker program is to design climate protection strategies so that they create a unified working class interest in climate protection. This means creating large numbers of jobs that are secure, well paid, and in line with labor and other human rights. It means protecting the wellbeing of workers and communities who may be threatened by climate protection measures. It means guaranteeing economic security and jobs for all who want them. And it

means ensuring that climate protection strategies reduce inequality and injustice so that those who have been marginalized and discriminated against in the past are not excluded from the short-term benefits of climate protection measures.

Because workers have been largely excluded from power in the economy and the political system, our ability to combat climate destruction and implement alternatives has been limited. A third element of our program is to empower workers to protect Earth's climate. This requires the workers' climate movement to develop and fight for climate action plans that represent workers' short- and long-term climate interests in every sphere of society. Workers must both pressure and cooperate with employers to impose worker-friendly climate action plans in their workplaces. We must cooperate with and help lead other groups in climate protection in our local communities. We must negotiate with and pressure the corporations we work for. We must help redesign entire industries such as electricity, transportation, and finance to function on a climate-safe basis. Finally, we must work with other climate protection advocates to reshape public policy at every level. This will require both utilizing organized labor's clout within the political system and a worker climate insurgency that uses direct action and people power to force change.

Global warming has rightly been called history's greatest market failure. Correcting it cannot be left to the market. Thus, a fourth element of our program is to expand the power of public policy to protect the climate in ways that are in accord with workers' interests. It requires government institutions specifically designed to implement the transition to climate protection. It will need bold economic planning, industrial policies, and public investment to guide and facilitate the process. It will need full-employment macroeconomic policies that prevent unemployment, assure prosperity, and encourage full use of economic resources during the transition. And it will need public mobilization and redirection of human and material resources that are required for the transition.

Finally, global warming requires global cooperation. Governments must work together to create a global framework that supports climate-friendly jobs and development—what has been called a “Global Green New Deal.” Workers must cooperate globally to pressure their own and each others' governments and corporations to make the transition to climate safety. A global climate protection investment fund is necessary on a scale that mobilizes all under-utilized human and material resources worldwide. Rather than fighting each other for climate-protecting jobs, unions in different countries should support national policies and international agreements that encourage countries to cooperate in sharing green technologies and expanding production for climate protection. Legally binding international agreements must phase out and ban the use of fossil fuels worldwide.

There is precedent for such a rapid economic transformation in labor's response to the threat of World War II. As Nazi armies spread devastation across Europe in 1940, United Automobile Workers Union president Walter Reuther proposed a startling plan to retool the Depression-ravaged auto industry to build 500 warplanes a year. The auto magnates scoffed, but soon a massive mobilization put tens of millions of unemployed and underemployed workers to work producing what the war effort required, while shutting down wasteful and unnecessary

production that would impede it. While there are many differences, climate protection is an emergency that can call forth a comparable effort today.⁶⁵

Overcoming climate alienation is only one small part of creating a healthy and sustainable life for all. But it can be a critical starting point. The impact of climate change is universally devastating, creating an urgent global common interest to take action now. However, the dependence of the working class on fossil fuel energy and on gaining a livelihood through employment is a critical deterrent to effective climate action. Therefore this chapter proposes a program to overcome climate alienation by eliminating GHG emissions in a way that also significantly reduces workers' dependence on employers and fossil fuels.

Transition to 100% fossil-free energy

Burning fossil fuel is currently disrupting the Earth's climate system and if continued will eliminate the conditions that have been essential for human civilization. Fossil fuel energy, however, is an intrinsic feature of the modern world order, on which nearly all aspects of modern life depend. It is also essential for most of the jobs on which workers depend.

For these reasons, the American labor movement has accepted and implicitly advocated the continuation of fossil fuel burning, perhaps modestly reduced by cautious climate policies guaranteed not to interfere with jobs and economic growth. A program to end climate alienation and save humanity starts, in contrast, from the commitment to rapidly reduce and ultimately eliminate the burning of fossil fuels—while protecting against possible adverse consequences of doing so.



Rapidly eliminate fossil fuels

Climate scientists have identified the GHG reductions necessary for the survival of human civilization. The IPCC famously calls for a minimum reduction of 80 percent by 2050 in order to keep global warming below a 2° Celsius increase. Climate scientist James Hansen has identified any level of atmospheric GHGs over 350 ppm as incompatible with human life as we have known it. According to Hansen, to reach 350 ppm by the end of the century, starting from 2012 as a baseline, will require a global reduction of 6 percent per year in fossil fuel emissions, combined with the extraction of 100 gigatons of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.⁶⁶ Global

⁶⁵ Jeremy Brecher, Joe Uehlein, and Ron Blackwell, "If Not Now, When: A Labor Movement Plan to Address Climate Change," *New Labor Forum*, Fall 2014, http://www.labor4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/NLF541793_REV1.pdf.

⁶⁶ James Hansen et al. "The Case for Young People and Nature: The Path to a Healthy, Natural, Prosperous Future," available at http://science.the-environmentalist.org/2011/05/case-for-young-people-and-nature-path_05.html.

carbon emissions will need to be near zero by around 2050.⁶⁷ The fair share of GHG reduction would be substantially higher for wealthy countries like the United States which have contributed large amounts of GHGs in the past.

Most climate action plans are not designed to reach these scientific targets. They may list various desirable (and often politically expedient) policies or short-term goals but put off the heavy lifting to the future. The U.S. federal climate action plan, for example, does not even purport to lay out a pathway to reducing GHG emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

A worker climate action plan for a fossil-free economy should include frequent interim targets that require steady year-on-year reductions rather than postponing more difficult reductions to the future.⁶⁸ It should provide for a phased development that takes advantage of early opportunities but also lays the groundwork for later programs. And it should provide for course correction along the way. This labor climate action plan is based on a phase-out of fossil fuel energy rapid enough to meet scientific goals, with a comparably rapid expansion of clean energy.



Rapidly expand energy efficiency and fossil-free energy

Simply halting the burning of fossil fuels would lead to immediate national and global catastrophe. The dependence of modern civilization on fossil fuel energy means that the proverbial “freezing to death in the dark” would be the immediate fate of millions or perhaps billions of people. The fossil fuel industry takes advantage of this basic dependence, as well as its own immense wealth and power, to discourage the implementation of alternative energy sources. Government climate action plans so far do not lay out a program for a transition to a fossil-free energy system. Markets have significantly failed to invest adequately in energy efficiency and renewable energy, even where it would have been profitable to do so.⁶⁹



The American labor movement argues that abundant and cheap energy is economically essential, and it endorses an “all of the above” energy policy that is based largely on nuclear energy, hypothetical “clean coal” technology, and expansion of natural gas. It does not have a

⁶⁷ There is no cure for climate change as long as we continue putting GHGs into the air. But once we approach zero emissions, the expansion of forests and other carbon sinks can begin to draw carbon out of the atmosphere and restore climate balance. This is a huge global task which will require the labor of people around the world.

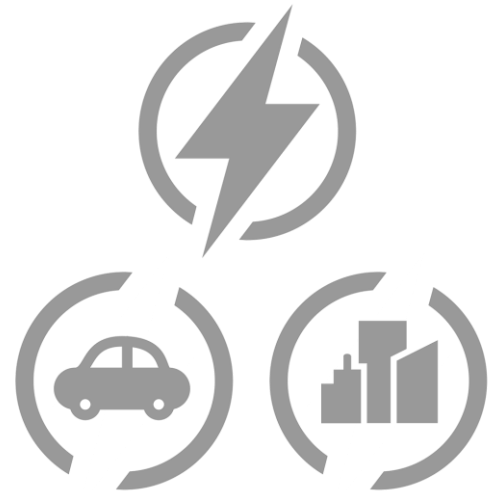
⁶⁸ For an analysis of the “equity curve” required to balance reductions over time see John Humphries, “GHG Emissions Reduction Trajectories,” *CT Roundtable on Climate and Jobs*, July 15, 2015, http://www.ct.gov/deep/lib/deep/climatechange/gc3/member_communications/humphries_2015_0717b.pdf.

⁶⁹ “The Clean Energy Future: Protecting the Climate, Creating Jobs, Saving Money,” Labor Network for Sustainability, 350.org, and Synapse Energy Economics, “c. Why Is This Affordable?” <http://climatejobs.labor4sustainability.org/national-report/>.

plan to compensate for a reduction of fossil fuel use and it has done little to develop one or to encourage others to do so.

Studies show that replacement of fossil fuel energy by renewable energy and energy efficiency is technically feasible, and suggest various pathways to achieve it.⁷⁰ It can be accomplished based on commercially available technologies, but rapid expansion of research and markets will likely lead to very rapid improvement in technology along the way. The transition can be based on renewable energy technologies that cut the GHGs released by production, and energy efficiency measures that reduce the amount of energy needed. It will not require nuclear energy, large-scale modifications of earth systems through geo-engineering, or carbon capture and storage, each of which is likely to be far slower, more costly, and more environmentally dangerous than rapid conversion to renewable energies and energy efficiency. There will be only a small need for natural gas as a transitional fuel.

The most important areas for transition are electricity, transportation, and buildings. Electricity produced by fossil fuels, the largest single emitter of GHGs, can be replaced by wind, solar, and hydro energy sources, smart grids, new energy storage technologies, and increased efficiency. Petroleum-based private transportation can be replaced with cars, trucks, trains, and public transit powered by renewable electricity. Freight transportation can be converted to rail transport and electric vehicles. Virtually all buildings can be made much more efficient through insulation, weatherization, cogeneration, and solar and geothermal heating, cooling, and hot water. Many other strategies, ranging from industrial redesign to “smart growth” integration of urban and transportation planning, and from expanding forests to reducing fossil fuel use and applying carbon-sequestering techniques in farming, will also contribute. Every workplace, industry, and community will have a role in building a climate-safe economy.



Numerous studies have detailed how this transition can be made. The Labor Network for Sustainability’s report, “The Clean Energy Future: Protecting the Climate, Creating Jobs, and Saving Money,” for example, shows that the United States can reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80 percent by 2050 while adding half a million jobs per year and saving Americans billions of dollars on their electrical, heating, and transportation costs.⁷¹

⁷⁰ For a review of such studies see Laurence L. Delina and Mark Diesendorf, “Is wartime mobilization a suitable policy model for rapid national climate mitigation?” *Energy Policy*, July 2013, section 2. Available at <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0301421513002103>. See also Robert Pollin, Heidi Garrett-Peltier, and James Heintz, *Green Growth: A Program for Controlling Climate Change and Expanding U.S. Job Opportunities* (Washington, DC: Center for American Progress, September, 2014), <http://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/PERI.pdf>. See also Labor Network for Sustainability, “The Clean Energy Future.”

⁷¹ Labor Network for Sustainability, http://www.labor4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/cleanenergy_10212015_main.pdf.

Ensure that climate protection benefits all workers

Working people have complex and contradictory interests in relation to climate protection. All workers, like everyone, have a common interest in climate protection. Many workers will find jobs helping protect the climate. If climate policy produces enough jobs to reduce unemployment, it will benefit nearly all workers. But if fossil fuel use is eliminated, specific groups of workers who extract, process, transport, and use fossil fuels are likely to lose their jobs. If eliminating fossil fuels leads to unemployment and economic disruption, all workers are likely to suffer. If established patterns of unequal access to good jobs remain unchanged, workers who are subject to discrimination and exclusion will receive little benefit from climate protection measures. If the new climate-safe economy replaces good jobs with poor ones, workers who get those jobs will receive little benefit and the conditions of other workers will be subject to downward pressures as well. Therefore, a worker program for climate protection must integrate common needs and the needs of specific groups into a unifying strategy that realizes them all.



World War II mobilization provides one model, though an imperfect one, for transforming the labor market to meet the needs of climate transition. The government recruited workers previously outside the workforce, led the training effort, steered the location of employers and workers, and created labor rights and standards that led to what well may have been the greatest gains in wages, job security, and union representation in American history. The number of Americans employed outside the military rose by 7.7 million between 1939 and 1944, even while millions more left the civilian labor force for the military. Government boards redirected workers to military production, sometimes by threatening to draft them otherwise. Women entered the industrial workforce on an unprecedented scale and government provided training for millions of workers. The National War Labor Board set wages and required employers to bargain collectively with their employees' unions. Government built housing and provided healthcare and childcare for war workers.⁷² War labor policies were often biased toward business and were frequently challenged by organized labor and wildcat strikes,⁷³ but there is little question that overall they provided a historic improvement in the power and living standards of American workers.

A worker climate action plan requires changes on the scale of World War II economic mobilization, but rather different specific policies. These policies are in line with traditional labor movement objectives such as full employment, high minimum standards for wages and

⁷² Brecher, *Climate Insurgency*, "Chapter 8: Making a country climate-safe."

⁷³ Jeremy Brecher, *Strike! Revised, Expanded, and Updated Edition* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014), "Chapter 6: The War and Post-War Strike Wave," p. 209ff.

working conditions, a skilled and educated workforce, protection for those who lose their jobs, and provision for those for whom work is not appropriate.

Protect workers and communities who may be threatened by climate policies

Workers largely depend for their livelihoods on jobs that produce and use fossil fuel energy. While climate protection will produce far more jobs than it eliminates, it may also threaten the jobs of some workers in fossil fuel producing and using industries. It is unjust that any worker should suffer through no fault of their own because of a policy that is necessary to protect society. A worker program must create alternative jobs and/or livelihoods or face mass unemployment—and a resulting rebellion against climate protection.



Adequate climate action plans must provide a just transition for workers and communities that may otherwise be negatively affected. This must include requirements that employers retrain and find jobs for those affected; give them priority for new jobs; provide economic benefits that allow not only a decent livelihood but a start on a new life; ensure decent retirement benefits for those who choose it; and invest in local communities to provide them a future beyond fossil fuels.⁷⁴

Workers harmed by climate protection policies should receive full wages and benefits for at least four years; up to four years of education or training, including tuition and living expenses; and decent pensions with healthcare for those ready to retire.⁷⁵

Workers and communities need not wait for public policy to pursue such protections. For example, when the Healthy Connecticut Alliance campaigned to close the Bridgeport Station coal-fired power plant, it included in its demands a series of protections for those who worked in the plant:⁷⁶

- Negotiate a jobs agreement with unions representing affected workers.
- Find jobs for affected workers who want them.
- Ensure job retraining for those who need it to fill new jobs.
- Provide decent pensions with healthcare for workers who are not provided other jobs and who do not opt for retraining.
- Create jobs restoring the site.
- Reutilize facilities to replace losses in the tax base.

⁷⁴ Arjun Makhijani, "Beyond a Band-Aid: A Discussion Paper on Protecting Workers and Communities in the Great Energy Transition," Institute for Energy and Environmental Research and Labor Network for Sustainability, http://labor4sustainability.org/files/pdf_06142016_final.pdf.

⁷⁵ For a fuller account of just transition policies, see Jeremy Brecher, "A Superfund for Workers: How to Promote a Just Transition and Break Out of the Jobs vs. Environment Trap," Dollars and Sense November/December 2015, <http://www.labor4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/1115brecher.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Healthy CT Alliance, "Worker Protection Demands for Coal Retirement Campaigns," <http://www.healthyclalliance.org>.

- Fund job-creating community economic development.

While programs such as the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) have often been inadequate at best, there are examples of transition programs that work. From 1994 to 2004, for instance, the U.S. Department of Energy conducted a Worker and Community Transition Program that provided grants and other assistance for communities affected by shutdown of nuclear facilities. A nuclear test site in Nevada, for example, was repurposed to demonstrate concentrated solar power technologies.⁷⁷

Alternative jobs can be provided not only in clean energy but also in other work the public needs; they should be provided not only where existing jobs are lost but where potential fossil fuel jobs are not created because of climate protection policies. For example, the Labor Network for Sustainability study, “The Keystone Pipeline Debate: An Alternative Job Creation Strategy,” laid out how more jobs could be created by renewing water and other pipeline infrastructure than by building the Keystone XL pipeline for tar sands oil.⁷⁸

Guarantee economic security and jobs for all who want them

Climate protection will create millions of new jobs. It will also require the recruitment, training, and deployment of tens of thousands of workers. A worker climate action plan should be designed to provide the maximum number of good, secure, permanent jobs with education, training, and advancement.

Studies such as the Labor Network for Sustainability’s “The Clean Energy Future” show that renewable energy and energy efficiency can potentially produce substantially more jobs than fossil fuels. They could contribute to job growth in manufacturing, construction, operations, and maintenance. Nonetheless, climate protection is unlikely in itself to fully eliminate unemployment.

To counter the insecurity of working class life in general and the specific fear that climate protection may lead to job loss, climate protection policies need to incorporate the principle of a job for everyone who wants one. The frontline of establishing full employment can be the expansion of jobs that support climate protection. Keynesian macroeconomic full employment policies are necessary both to ensure jobs for all who want them, and to mobilize the productive capacity needed to build a climate-safe society. Where other policies have not led to full employment, government should serve as the employer of last resort for all who want to work, putting them to work on climate protection and other socially needed activities. Such a program should be combined with a “Nordic-style” welfare system that provides financial



⁷⁷ *Green Growth*, p. 310.

⁷⁸ http://www.labor4sustainability.org/files/_kxl_main3_11052013.pdf

support for the unemployed close to that of employed workers, combined with job training, regional economic development, and other strong support for re-employment.⁷⁹

Use climate transition to remedy inequality and injustice

The power of those affected by climate alienation is weakened because working people and society are divided by inequalities and division along race, ethnic, gender, and other lines. Therefore challenging such unjust divisions is not only right in itself, it is necessary for developing workers' power to overcome climate alienation.

Most climate action plans take for granted existing injustices and inequalities. Climate protection can serve as a means to counter inequality and social injustice, but it will require deliberate policies to do so. A worker climate action plan serves as a vehicle to move toward a more just and equal society.



Full employment and good, stable jobs that protect the climate provide part of the basis for this transition. However, specific policies are needed to provide a jobs pipeline for those individuals and groups who have been denied equal access to good jobs. And climate action plans need to be designed to remedy the concentration of pollution in marginalized and low-income communities, the lack of transportation, education, health, and other facilities in poor neighborhoods, and all other results of past discrimination.

Not only are jobs and unemployment distributed very unevenly to different groups and localities, so are job skills and experience. Climate protection jobs require a wide range of skills, from the most highly technical to just having the ability to show up for the job and follow instructions. While this makes it possible to provide jobs for a wide range of workers, it also has the danger of providing only low quality dead-end jobs for those who are already most economically deprived.

Recruitment needs to include strong racial, gender, age, and locational affirmative action to counter our current employment inequalities. Climate protection needs to make use of workers' existing skills while at the same time developing new ones that reduce these inequalities. Programs need to provide job ladders within and across employers lest those who currently face only dead-end jobs continue to face only dead-end jobs in the climate protection economy.

⁷⁹ For Nordic welfare systems see Jeremy Brecher, "Labor, Sustainability, and Justice," Labor Network for Sustainability, August 17, 2011, <http://www.labor4sustainability.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/labor-sustainability-and-justice.pdf>.

Ensure quality of climate protection jobs

Climate protection will inevitably provide jobs. But can it provide good jobs?

For several decades, the tendency of the U.S. economy has been toward insecure, contingent work, often with low wages and few health insurance, pension, or other benefits. “Green jobs” can similarly be marked by low wages, health and safety hazards, and gross violation of labor rights. Climate protection will therefore require deliberate policies to raise wages and increase job security, especially for those at the lower end of the labor market, to counter that tendency.

A worker climate action plan should be designed for sustained, orderly development of the work sectors where climate protection jobs are concentrated.⁸⁰ This requires planning for technical and physical development and for financing. It needs to include pay and benefit standards that provide a decent standard of life and future for working families. It needs to support “high road” employers, prevailing wage provisions like those required by the Davis-Bacon Act, and project labor agreements negotiated between unions and employers to ensure that climate protection jobs elevate rather than depress wages and working conditions.⁸¹

The deterioration in quality of jobs is directly related to the reduction in the size and bargaining power of labor unions. Reinforcing the rights of workers to express themselves freely, organize, bargain collectively, and engage in concerted action on the job should be an explicit part of public policy for the climate protection sector, as it was for war industries during mobilization for World War II. Workers should be the ones to decide whether or not they want union representation; employers in the climate sector should be required to sign and abide by neutrality agreements.

Empower workers to protect the climate

While climate protection is a responsibility of the whole of society, we workers have our own collective role to play in it. Because of our position within the economy and our capacity for solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority, we can provide a direct counterpower to employers and fossil fuel corporations. Because of our established role as an organized force within the political arena and our capacity for direct action we can, in cooperation with other



⁸⁰ While in most instances public policy should aim to provide stable long-term employment, in the case of construction workers who normally work on relatively short-term jobs, it should include mechanisms to provide steady employment as workers move from project to project.

⁸¹ Good Jobs First, “High Road or Low Road? Job Quality in the New Green Economy,” February 3, 2009, recommends among other things that “green jobs” specify wage requirements for subsidies, <http://www.goodjobsfirst.org/sites/default/files/docs/pdf/gjfgreenjobsrpt.pdf>; wage standards and prevailing wage requirements for contractors; and web-based disclosure of company compliance.

forces, reshape public policy on climate protection. Such a role involves workers moving into spheres of decision-making from which we have largely been excluded.⁸²

Promote worker climate action plans

The U.S. federal government, many cities and states, and many corporations, universities, and other institutions have climate action plans, some of them in place for decades. But so far they rarely lay out a pathway to a fossil fuel-free energy system. Often targets are inadequate; they don't include policies that will actually meet those targets; they don't provide good or steady jobs; they conform to prevailing patterns of inequality and injustice; and they function as window-dressing rather than the actual basis of public policy. Workers need to present our own climate action plans that eliminate fossil fuels—and climate alienation.



Where organized labor has supported climate protection policy at all, it has generally simply echoed corporate and government “market-based” policies. The AFL-CIO Energy Task Force, for example, sharply criticized the cap-and-trade provisions that were the centerpiece of the Waxman-Markey bill, but instead of proposing alternative approaches to climate protection, they insisted that such a program should be made even weaker by protections for fossil fuel industries and pauses if the measures proved too effective. A labor climate action program must seek instead effective means to rapidly reduce and ultimately eliminate GHG emissions. The elements that should be incorporated into worker climate action policies are outlined throughout this chapter.

Many climate action plans are not really intended to be implemented—as revealed by their lack of concrete programs to implement goals, the infrequency of serious efforts to implement them, and the massive resistance that arises when serious efforts are made to implement them. Climate protection policies are regularly overridden by other official policies and concerns, such as fiscal needs, energy policies, and transportation objectives. They are also overridden by the ability of private interests to disregard them—or to shape public policy in their own interest. Rather than window dressing, worker climate action plans must become the bedrock of public policy, around which other policies are shaped to achieve the many objectives that society pursues for its betterment.

Empower workers on the job

Many workplaces already have their own climate action plans. Where they do not, workers can demand that they be established. Where that demand is resisted, workers can draft our own

⁸² Worker and public participation in workplace and corporate decisionmaking is essential via climate action plan formulation, implementation, and review. This provides a vehicle for incorporating the public interest without requiring continuous state supervision. This approach draws on ideas from Peter Dorman, “The Publicly Controlled Economy: Crisis and Renewal,” *Legal Studies Forum*, 21/1 (1997).

climate action plans, demand negotiations over them, and start implementing them on our own where we can.

Workers are the eyes and ears of their communities, the country, and humanity inside the workplace. We have a right to know about the carbon pollution produced by our workplaces and the materials they use and produce; the right to monitor implementation of climate action plans; and the right to blow the whistle on environmental abuses. Where workers are not accorded these rights, we have an obligation to protect the public through whistleblowing and direct action, for example through “green bans” that authorize workers not to engage in climate-destroying labor.



Ultimately, public policy should mandate climate action plans for every workplace with a role for workers in designing and implementing them. It should authorize workers to serve as an independent check on what is really going on inside their workplace.

Such a role requires workers to act on behalf of society as a whole, rather than exclusively for the narrow interests of particular groups—indeed, this is justification for providing workers such authority. It challenges “management’s right to manage”—a doctrine currently asserted by the courts and generally accepted by unions. It inserts workers into the planning process that determines the purposes and methods of production and investment. It thereby challenges the bundle of property rights as currently defined.

Empower workers in their communities

Workers and workplaces do not exist as a separate sphere; they are embedded in communities and more broadly in the institutions of civil society. Workers are already organized in central labor councils based in cities, regions, and states. We can help form broad coalitions to enforce climate protection in communities, with leadership and support from civil society institutions such as schools and churches.



Through these coalitions, we can establish climate action plans at the community level and ensure that they are adequate to achieve scientific targets and friendly to worker and allied constituencies. We can pressure local governments and institutions to shape such plans in ways that counter inequality and provide pathways to justice and employment for marginalized and discriminated-against groups. Where there is resistance to the necessary reduction in fossil fuel emissions and the infrastructure that supports it, workers and our allies should if necessary engage in direct action and civil disobedience designed to mobilize public action to force compliance.

Today, a large swath of community-based, local, and regional programs are already engaged in promoting the transition to a climate-safe economy and society. Even in a government-led

transition, they can on their own initiative implement community-based renewable energies such as rooftop solar collectors, energy use reduction measures such as residential weatherization, financial mobilization through community investment funds, and new patterns of consumption such as shared bicycles. Perhaps most importantly, they can provide both popular participation in the transition to climate protection and a means to hold the institutions of transition accountable.

Climate protection programs can counter inequalities and vulnerabilities in local economies. They can require contractors to hire from the local community.⁸³ They can also use climate protection policies to encourage broad-based local ownership through locally owned small businesses, cooperatives, and public enterprises. Such enterprises can provide needed jobs and services while helping stabilize community economies, and protect them from the unpredictable fluctuations of uncontrollable outside forces.

Empower workers in corporations

The strategic decisions affecting GHG emissions are generally made not in the local workplace but at the level of the corporation. Most large corporations already have some kind of climate action plan for the corporation as a whole—and those that don't can be pushed to establish them. Currently, such plans vary from serious efforts to reduce emissions to fig-leaf programs whose purpose is not climate protection but public relations. Workers can demand that corporate climate action plans achieve science-based targets. We can demand that workers be protected from adverse side effects of corporate climate action, for example through contract clauses that ensure that climate policy will not be used as an excuse to lay off workers or increase their workload. We can demand the right to monitor implementation of workplace climate action plans and to blow the whistle on environmental abuses.



At the same time, workers can participate constructively in employer climate protection efforts. Unions can negotiate over climate action plans and their implementation. In many instances, this will require new negotiating structures that involve the many different unions that typically represent workers in any corporation, as well the large proportion of workers who lack union representation. In the case of international corporations, some form of “international framework agreement” may be the appropriate vehicle for negotiations.⁸⁴ Workers can promote new climate protection goods and services or even present an alternative vision for their company’s future.

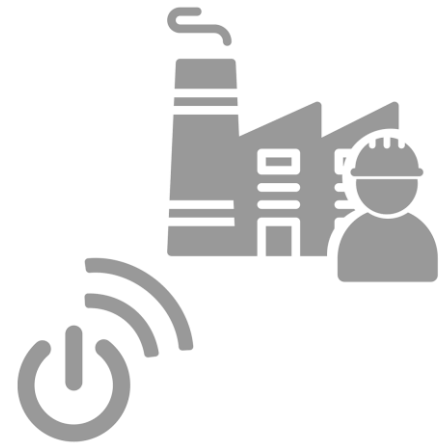
⁸³ “Just Energy Policies: Reducing Pollution and Creating Jobs,” NAACP, February, 2014, presents such requirements as a vehicle for racial and economic justice, <http://action.naacp.org/page/-/Climate/JustEnergyPolicies%20Compendium%20EXECUTIVE%20SUMMARY%20FINAL%20FEBRUARY%202014.pdf>.

⁸⁴ SustainLabor, “Occupational Health and Safety and Environmental Clauses in International Framework Agreements,” http://www.sustainlabour.org/documentos/en335_2010.pdf.

As with workplace initiatives, such actions challenge labor acquiescence to “management’s right to manage.” They can provide a starting point for participating in company planning more generally. They can also help initiate new systems of corporate governance, accountability, and reporting that are necessary to represent the interests of a wider range of stakeholders and to require corporations to act in line with environmental, economic, and social sustainability.⁸⁵

Empower workers in industries

A fossil-free economy will require transformation not just of individual workplaces and companies, nor just of the economy as a whole, but of specific industries and economic sectors. Industry-wide planning is necessary to capture synergies and economies of scale, establish level playing fields, and ensure that different parts of an emerging climate protection system work together—large-scale, long-term necessities that cannot be provided by the market. Here, public climate action policies, industry-wide collective bargaining, and cooperation among businesses in the same industry need to go hand in hand.



A prime example of such cooperation was the reconstruction of the U.S. auto industry under President Obama’s economic recovery plan. Auto corporations and the UAW agreed to a large long-term increase in energy efficiency to cut carbon emissions. This involved cooperative planning for retooling the industry, large-scale federal support for developing new technology, and substantial public investment in modernizing the industry on a low-carbon basis. The result was a steady decrease in carbon pollution, an increase of jobs for auto workers, and an end to the crisis that threatened to nearly eliminate auto production in the United States.

Electricity provides another case where industry-wide coordination is necessary for successful GHG emission reduction. Energy production and distribution is an integrated system tied together by power lines and other infrastructure into the electric grid. Moving to 80 percent or more renewable energy requires a far more sophisticated and decentralized energy system that can integrate everything from rooftop solar installations to massive wind farms. It therefore requires long-term planning and investment; the public sector must provide these if the private sector is unable or unwilling to do so. Unions can be leaders in bringing together the players for such a transformation if they are willing to put the universally shared need to protect the climate front and center in the design of the new energy system.

Transportation similarly requires integrated transformation that includes massive expansion of public transit; reorganization of freight transportation to reduce emissions; conversion to electric, fuel cell, and other low-emissions vehicles; and practical access to walking and biking routes. This requires not just switching from one kind of vehicle to another, but restructuring of metropolitan areas, great expansion of renewable energies, and redesign of freight systems.

⁸⁵ See Labor Network for Sustainability, “Labor, Sustainability and Justice: A review essay on ‘Exiting from the Crisis: A Model for More Equitable and Sustainable Growth.’”

The Teamsters union has taken a great leap forward here, advocating for a new intermodal transportation system and trying to draw the other public and private sector players into cooperation around it.

Finance is a principal means by which resources are allocated to future uses. Financialization has meant that a huge and growing proportion of wealth is invested not to produce needed goods and services, but rather to pursue speculative gains based purely on the fluctuations of markets, especially financial markets themselves. Downsizing the financial sector and returning it to the role of servant rather than master of the real economy is necessary to provide the resources for climate protection and other social needs and to stop magnifying the economic gyrations driven by a highly speculative economy. This can be achieved by such means as financial reregulation, the imposition of a “Robin Hood” tax on financial transactions, and expansion of public purpose finance.

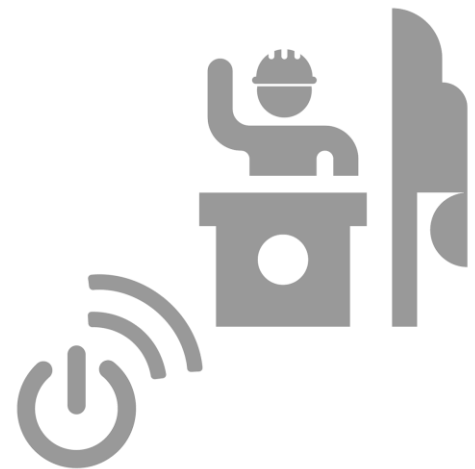
Similar programs are necessary for agriculture, forestry, manufacturing, waste management, and many other industries.⁸⁶

Empower workers in the political arena

Organized labor is represented in the political process in the federal government, every state, and every large county and municipality. It participates in political parties, elections, and lobbying. While it rarely has power to govern on its own, it exercises influence over public policy by participating in coalitions and by exercising a leadership role.

Organized labor and the broader working class movement can help write party platforms and select and support candidates who back the worker climate protection agenda. We can lobby legislators and the executive branch to establish and/or improve—and implement—climate action plans. We can mobilize the public for legislation that implements climate protection. We can participate in lawsuits to force implementation of climate protection policies on public trust, human rights, and other grounds.

Government employees can play a special role. They have access to information that they can provide the public either officially or in a whistleblower role. Those involved in climate protection-related activities and policies have a special legitimacy for speaking out to the public—as the union representing US Environmental Protection Agency employees did so powerfully against the Bush administration’s gag orders on EPA scientists. They are in a position to develop and present plans for more effective climate protection policies. They can influence elected government officials. And through their collective bargaining with their



⁸⁶ For an example of a plan for worker friendly industry-wide transition see Jeremy Brecher, “Fixing Bad Chemistry: Workers, Jobs, Toxics and the Future of the Chemical Industry, A Discussion Paper for Chemical Industry Workers and Allies,” Labor Network for Sustainability, 2014, http://labor4sustainability.org/files/pdf_badchemistry.pdf.

employers, they can promote worker climate protection policies—and create an avenue for their enforcement.

Despite these channels for worker influence, the unfortunate reality is that the dominant power over government is currently exercised by corporations and the wealthiest 1%. So an effective challenge to climate alienation must involve more than just action within the established framework of power. It must include a process of democratization that makes it possible for all people to participate on a level political playing field in which the common interests of the majority can determine public policy. And it must include worker participation in a climate insurgency that asserts the illegitimacy of existing governments as long as they are complicit in the destruction of the climate on which people and planet depend.

Empower the public to protect the climate

Replacing fossil fuel energy with clean energy requires enormous changes in the economy and society. Effective measures have been blocked by the power of the fossil fuel industry; the inhibitions produced by neoliberal ideology and policy; the weakness and corruption of democratic institutions; and the imperatives of a market that, if it is regulated at all, is regulated in the interest of the fossil fuel industry. Where they are unable to block climate protection entirely, the fossil fuel industry and its allies have advocated dubious programs such as cap-and-trade and carbon offsets that, with modest exceptions, have failed to reduce GHG emissions.

There are three main approaches to GHG reduction. The first, which has dominated climate legislation and treaty negotiation, consists of “putting a price on carbon emissions” to discourage GHGs through taxation, fees, cap-and-trade systems with markets for emission quotas, or similar means. The second, which is widely discussed and frequently implemented on a small scale, consists of local, often community-based initiatives designed to produce renewable energy and reduce energy consumption on a decentralized basis. The third, perhaps less often delineated by proponents than excoriated by opponents, consists of a government-led approach based on economic planning, public investment, resource mobilization, and direct government intervention in economic decisions. While rapid reduction of GHG emissions will undoubtedly require all three, labor should lead the breakout from neoliberalism and propose a government-led plan—drawing on the example of economic mobilization for World War II—to put people to work converting to a climate-safe economy.



Establish governmental agencies to implement the transition

Mobilization for climate protection is an emergency that, like mobilization for World War II, requires powerful governmental agencies dedicated to the purpose that can plan and implement the transition to a climate-safe economy. This will require transcending the shibboleths of neoliberalism.

Such institutions will need to establish financial incentives and disincentives; raise capital; implement labor force strategies; organize funding for infrastructure such as transmission lines, railways, and pipelines; fund research and development; set and monitor energy efficiency standards for buildings, appliances, and equipment; train and retrain workers and professionals; and set industrial location policies. Further, they will need to coordinate the multifaceted activities of federal agencies, state and municipal governments, corporations, and civil society groups.



Such coordination, as during World War II, will require a central governmental authority. However, because of the extended period of transition, measures are necessary to prevent such an authority from pursuing its own aggrandizement or that of other social forces. We don't need another body like the Pentagon or National Security Agency provided with vast powers and resources but no genuine accountability.

One proposed solution is to create two independent agencies.⁸⁷ The first, following the general model of the War Production Board, would have overall responsibility for GHG reduction. Such a climate mobilization authority would conduct technical requirement studies, set and enforce production goals, institute efficient contracting procedures, cut through inertia and bureaucratic red tape, and serve as the coordinating agency for all transition activities. The second agency, independent of the executive branch and above the climate mobilization authority, would report to Congress and the public. It would define GHG reduction targets and timetables, lay out a national climate action plan, ensure transparency in the climate mobilization authority, identify problems and failures, and initiate course corrections.

Use economic planning, industrial policy, and macroeconomics to guide the transition

The British government's *Stern Report* in 2006 called climate change the "greatest market failure in history." While market mechanisms should be used where they have proven effective, where they haven't, public authority, planning, and investment are necessary. A worker climate action program will rely on public planning and investment to provide a planned, orderly, sustainable transition to a climate-safe economy.

If America's economic mobilization for World War II had been left to the market, it is doubtful that Detroit's auto production would have been shut down to allow more production of

⁸⁷ This approach is based on the papers by Delina and Diesendorf.

airplanes or that a company like Hamilton Propellers would have increased production to 60 times over pre-war levels. While markets were not eliminated during the war, war production required that public authorities take responsibility for critical decisions previously left to the market. If today's climate emergency is to be effectively met, where the market cannot or will not do the job, government and citizens must similarly step in to ensure that the job gets done.

Climate protection requires the capacity to make long-range plans that affect many aspects of life. Governing climate protection is in some ways similar to governing the nation's transportation system. It requires making decisions, such as whether to build highways or railways, that will shape the life of the country for decades to come. It requires the technical capacity to design and engineer such complex systems. It requires taking into account a wide range of economic, environmental, and social factors—and maximizing beneficial side effects and minimizing undesirable ones.



Government will need to map out what is needed to realize climate action plans; lay out the sequence of economic development; find sources of funding; find and eliminate bottlenecks; help develop public or private enterprises that will do what is needed; keep the pipeline full to provide stable demand and employment; and step in to meet needs that the private economy is not addressing. Some of this can be done by expanding the role of existing agencies; some may require new, non-market institutions such as public purpose non-profit developers, part of whose mission is to provide stable jobs for local workers and communities.

Planning will be necessary to see that climate protection produces not just a flurry of economic activity, but also a stable growing sector that provides steady jobs and advancement for hundreds of thousands of workers. It must involve planning for the transition to climate protection as a whole, not just a collection of separate programs. For example, expansion of energy efficiency and fossil fuel -free energy are interdependent and must go hand in hand, with planned sequencing of the entire transition. Similarly, expansion of manufacturing for climate protection will need to be coordinated with the installation of the products.

The Obama administration's Clean Power Plan, despite its inadequacies and ambiguities, requires states and corporations to make defined GHG emission reductions on a legally enforceable schedule. While it gives them great flexibility in how to do so, it does not allow them to evade targets by simply providing incentives that may or may not lead to GHG reduction in the real world. It requires them to plan, invest, and disinvest to meet a compulsory emission reduction schedule. Auto companies were led to cooperate with the Obama administration's plan for reconstruction of the auto industry on the basis of GHG reduction because their survival depended on the plan's massive public investment in the auto industry. Where necessary, such compulsory planning and implementation should be included in all climate action plans.

While neoliberalism has condemned Keynesian macroeconomic policies designed to provide full employment, the abandonment of such regulation of the economy as a whole has led to the deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression and an ongoing aftermath of income polarization and impoverishment for working people. In such a context, rapid transition to

climate safety carries the risk of broad economic disruption. That possibility must be forestalled by macroeconomic policies that ensure full employment. Such policies, implemented in the context of the transition to climate protection, will reduce the fear that climate protection may threaten prosperity, and give working people a greater stake in the transition.

Acquire the resources for climate transition

The principal elements of a new, climate-safe economy are energy efficiency, demand reduction, and low-GHG renewable energy. All of these are cost-efficient—in the long run, they will be cheaper and provide more benefits than burning fossil fuels. The Labor Network for Sustainability report, “The Clean Energy Future,” shows a pathway for meeting climate protection goals that will simultaneously create more jobs and save money, and reduce the cost of electricity, heating, and transportation by \$78 billion compared to current projections from now through 2050. In the long run, climate protection pays for itself.

Climate protection will inevitably have some start-up costs, however, so investments have to be made in order to realize the benefits. The payback period is far shorter than many other investments, providing a high rate of return on investment. Nonetheless, private markets have failed to make adequate investment in renewable energies and increased energy efficiency, even where it would have been profitable to do so.⁸⁸ If the market won't pay for climate protection, how can it be paid for?

Today, as at the outset of World War II, the U.S. economy, along with the global economy, is mired in the aftermath of a severe economic decline with vast quantities of underutilized resources. Macroeconomic policies aiming for full employment would produce hundreds of billions of dollars a year more than today, generating the resources needed to convert to renewable energy and provide a just transition for workers, communities, and carbon-dependent regions.

Public borrowing through bond sales can provide substantial and inexpensive funds due to the ability of the Federal Reserve to buy public infrastructure bonds at low rates. Public purpose banks, credit unions, and investment and loan funds can provide more decentralized financial resources, especially for smaller-scale and community-based projects. If need be, the Federal



⁸⁸ Private investment in fossil fuel reducing activities has not been forthcoming even in many cases where such investments would have paid for themselves or even made a profit. A 2007 study by the McKinsey consulting firm found that the U.S. could rapidly cut 28 percent of its greenhouse gases at fairly modest cost and with only small technological innovations. According to study director Jack Stephenson, “These types of savings have been around for 20 years.” But according to another research team member, “There is a lot of inertia, and a lot of barriers.” To give but one example, if tenants pay for their heating, landlords have no incentive to buy any but the cheapest, least energy efficient furnaces. Matthew L. Wald, “Study Details How U.S. Could Cut 28% of Greenhouse Gases,” *New York Times*, November 30, 2007, <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/11/30/business/30green.html>. These findings raise doubts that policies that rely on charges for carbon emissions will in fact promote massive investment in climate protection activities.

Reserve could simply buy infrastructure bonds, just as it did with Treasury securities in 1940 to finance the war effort.

During World War II, 85 million Americans bought \$185 billion in war bonds and similar securities—the equivalent of more than \$2 trillion in 2010 dollars. They did so both because it was a good investment and because it was perceived as a patriotic duty. Today, the federal government should establish a program of climate bonds for the public. These should be a good investment for individuals, particularly as an alternative to today's gutted pension plans and unattractive retirement investments. And they should be promoted as a way that individuals and institutions can participate in the mobilization for climate protection. If we are to provide tax credits for energy investments, they should go first and foremost not to the 1% but to ordinary citizens who can use them to increase their economic security and retirement savings.

A tax on GHG emissions or “cap-and-dividend” programs can provide market incentives that complement more direct climate protection measures. Progressive taxation, particularly on carbon-wasting luxury goods such as private jets, can counteract any negative effects on income equality. Such devices as energy pricing incentives, user fees, and on-bill financing (which allows energy consumers to pay for energy-saving investments out of the resulting savings on their energy bills) can also play a role.

Thousands of individuals and institutions are currently joining the fossil fuel “divest-invest” movement, modeled on the highly successful movement to disinvest from Apartheid South Africa. Religious organizations, unions, municipalities, foundations, and many other institutions are withdrawing their investments from fossil fuel companies; divestment pledges are now in the trillions of dollars. But strategies to invest the freed-up money in climate protection have only just begun. Federal and state governments should take the lead by divesting from all fossil fuel investments and creating revolving funds for the transition to a climate-safe economy. They should then lead a campaign for all individuals, institutions, and businesses to divest from fossil fuels and invest the proceeds in the revolving funds.

Municipal governments and institutions such as universities, museums, churches, and schools are important economic actors. They should make investment in reducing their GHG emissions their first investment priority. They can invest in fossil fuel reduction programs in their neighborhoods and communities and share and invest the resulting savings in their individual climate protection initiatives. They can serve as “anchor institutions” for the transformation of their surrounding communities, using their purchasing power to support and encourage local economic development.

Another potential source for funding the transition to climate safety could be legal damages and fines collected from corporations for environmentally harmful practices. Governments may take legal action to recover “natural resource damages”—as seen in the settlements for the 1989 Exxon Valdez and 2010 BP oil spills, for example. The Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) enacted in 1980, known as the “Superfund” law, provides broad federal authority to clean up hazardous substance releases and authorizes the US Environmental Protection Agency to compel the parties responsible to pay for the cleanup—even if the releases happened long before the legislation was passed. Comparable

legislation could hold major fossil fuel producers and emitters responsible for their colossal damage to the atmosphere—and the colossal cost of remediating it.⁸⁹

Protect the climate and promote jobs globally

Overcoming climate alienation is a global task. It requires eliminating GHG emissions and providing secure livelihoods for all. This ultimately requires binding international agreements that outlaw GHG emissions and provide the international basis for a just global economic system. Worker climate protection need not wait for such agreements, however. International cooperation can start on an ad hoc basis long before it is institutionalized in international agreements. And international agreements will be far more meaningful in the context of effective local and national climate protection measures.

While existing international institutions are inadequate for these purposes and provide little opportunity for influence by workers, the labor movement is playing a global role nonetheless. Unions around the world have lobbied their governments for worker-friendly climate policies. The International Trade Union Confederation has mobilized workers worldwide to provide a worker voice in global climate negotiations.

American unions have played an ambiguous role in this process. While a few have supported binding international agreements embodying scientific targets and timetables for GHG reduction, most have not. The AFL-CIO has not done so either. Few have campaigned for the global labor program endorsed by the ITUC and most unions in the rest of the world. American unions have tended instead to regard international cooperation on climate protection as a potential threat to American workers' jobs. A worker climate action movement, in contrast, will forge international labor cooperation around a program that represents the common interests of the workers and citizens of the world.

A workers program can use global climate protection as the starting point for challenging other disastrous consequences of neoliberalism and unregulated globalization. It can promote an alternative model for the global economy that replaces growing inequality and the downward leveling of labor and environmental conditions with one that protects the Earth's



⁸⁹ See Mary Christina Wood, *Nature's Trust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), "Recouping Natural Resource Damages," p. 185ff. For a proposal on recouping natural resource damages at a global level, see Julie-Anne Richards and Keely Boom, *Carbon Majors Funding Loss and Damage*, (Berlin: Heinrich Boll Foundation, 2014), http://www.boell.de/sites/default/files/carbon_majors_funding_loss_and_damage_kommentierbar.pdf.

climate while creating jobs and improving livelihoods for workers and the poor.⁹⁰ It can replace trade wars over climate-protecting goods and services with cooperative, mutually managed trade whose purpose is to rapidly increase production of GHG-reducing goods and services and create jobs.

Unions can promote the formation of a “coalition of the willing” among governments that are prepared to act seriously on climate protection. They can also play a direct global role through negotiations with global corporations and industries. They can push for the inclusion of a worker climate agenda in International Framework Agreements where they exist. And they can participate in a global climate insurgency that challenges the legitimacy of all governments and corporations unless and until they undertake necessary climate protection policies and measures.

Develop a “Global Green New Deal”

A solution to both the climate and jobs crises requires that the world abandon neoliberalism and adopt a new strategy that puts the world’s human resources to work meeting the world’s desperate need for economic transformation that radically reduces GHG emissions. Such a global regime has often been referred to as a “Global Green New Deal.”⁹¹

In the depths of the Great Depression, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt launched the New Deal—a set of government programs to provide employment and social security, reform tax policies and business practices, and stimulate the economy, as well as establish environmental programs such as reforestation and soil conservation. It included the building of homes, hospitals, school, roads, dams, and electrical grids. The New Deal put millions of people to work and created a new policy framework for American democracy.



In response to the Great Recession and the climate crisis, unions from around the world, represented by the International Trade Union Confederation, partnered with the United Nations Environment Program to promote a global green new deal as a solution to both crises.⁹² UNEP said the objectives of a global green new deal should be to create jobs and restore the financial system and global economy to health, to put the post-crisis economy on a sustainable path that deals with ecological scarcity and climate instability, and to end extreme poverty.

⁹⁰ Jeremy Brecher and Tim Costello, “Outsource This? American Workers, the Jobs Deficit, and the Fair Globalization Solution,” North American Alliance for Fair Employment, April 2004, <http://web.mit.edu/outsourcing/class5/OutsourceThis.pdf>.

⁹¹ Both climate protection and economic cooperation ultimately require demilitarization and policies of global common security.

⁹² United Nations Environment Program, “Green Jobs: Toward Decent Work in a Sustainable, Low-Carbon World,” 2008, http://www.unep.org/PDF/UNEPGreenjobs_report08.pdf, and International Trade Union Confederation, “Trade Unions and Climate Change,” 2009, http://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/climat_EN_Final.pdf. See also Jeremy Brecher, “Green Jobs in a Global Green New Deal,” <http://www.jeremybrecher.org/green-jobs-in-a-global-green-new-deal/>.

UNEP executive director Achim Steiner said the financial, fuel, and food crises result in part from “speculation and a failure of governments to intelligently manage and focus markets.” Enormous economic, social, and environmental benefits are likely to arise from “combatting climate change and re-investing in natural infrastructures—benefits ranging from new green jobs in clean tech and clean energy businesses up to ones in sustainable agriculture and conservation-based enterprises.” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said the financial crisis required massive global stimulus, and called for “an investment that fights climate change, creates millions of green jobs and spurs green growth.” What the world needs, in short, is a “Global Green New Deal.”

The imagery of the New Deal evoked opposition to laissez-faire capitalism and a call for government leadership and investment. As the ITUC’s statement to the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Change Conference put it: “Economic transformation cannot be left to the ‘invisible hand’ of the market. Government-driven investments, innovation and skills development, social protection and consultation with social partners (unions and employers) are essential.” We cannot trust “failed market mechanisms” to “steer out of this crisis.” The problem has to be solved through “regulation, democratically decided and implemented public policies and most importantly political leadership.” Indeed, as an ITUC resolution said, “A full-scale transformation of global production systems and consumption patterns is required in order to safeguard societies and workplaces, while protecting and promoting decent work for all. Trade unions must play a central role in that unprecedented transformation.”

For a brief period, many countries in fact launched initiatives that resembled a green new deal. In the United States, for example, the Obama administration initiated a recovery program based on massive public spending for job creation, much of it contributing to climate protection.⁹³ The U.S. government invested heavily in the auto industry and used the authority gained thereby to redesign the entire industry on the basis of GHG reduction. Many other countries instituted similar programs. Meanwhile, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) called for trillions of dollars of deficit spending, and governments around the world did in fact provide trillions of dollars of budgetary economic stimulus, although much of it went for bailouts to banks and financial institutions rather than job creation or climate protection.

Once the most acute phase of the financial crisis was over, however, global economic policy rapidly shifted to extreme austerity and, in the aftermath of the Copenhagen summit, largely abandoned climate protection programs. The result has been unending mass unemployment, burgeoning inequality, unending debt crises, and ever-mounting GHG emissions.

The idea of a global green new deal epitomizes the interests of working people worldwide for full employment through climate protection. It represents a program that can unify climate protection and anti-austerity forces in all countries and provide an alternative to the failures of neoliberalism.

⁹³ For an evaluation of these programs see Robert Pollin et al, *Green Growth*.

Establish a global fund to mobilize under-utilized resources for climate protection

According to the International Labor Organization (ILO), 200 million workers were unemployed worldwide in 2013. Unspent cash in the accounts of large enterprises reached \$5 trillion. A worker climate action plan should include a global trust fund designed to mobilize global human, financial, and material resources for job-creating climate protection.⁹⁴

How large should such a fund be? At least large enough to mobilize all unused and underused human and material resources that can help the transition to a climate-safe world. A study sponsored by the World Economic Forum evaluated how much global investment is needed for “clean-energy infrastructure, sustainable and low-carbon transport, energy efficiency in buildings and industry, and for forestry” to limit the global average temperature increase to 2° Celsius above pre-industrial levels.⁹⁵ It found that at least \$0.7 trillion needs to be invested annually beyond current levels. Therefore, between 1 and 2 percent per year of global GDP needs to be invested effectively in climate protection worldwide.



Where can the money come from? As with funding for national programs, global funding can come from taxing, borrowing, recovery of damages, and mobilizing unused resources through global fiscal policies. Taxes should include a tax on carbon emissions and a “Robin Hood” tax on financial transactions. Global fiscal policy should include the use of IMF Special Drawing Rights or other forms of “paper gold.”⁹⁶

Such a fund can be the starting point for global macroeconomic policies designed to counter inadequate and fluctuating global economic demand and the “race to the bottom” of unregulated global competition. If such an approach represents a breach with the dominant neoliberal ideology, so much the better.

Mutually manage trade in climate-protecting goods and services

Globalization, neoliberalism, and trade agreements like the World Trade Organization have pitted the workers of the world against each other in a fight for climate-protecting jobs. For example, China is allocating massive public resources to developing a “green energy economy.” In the context of global competition, this is harming the solar and wind power industries in the United States. In response, U.S. labor and others have advocated punishing China under WTO rules—for encouraging climate protection.

⁹⁴ For a fuller discussion of a global trust fund see *Climate Insurgency*, Chapter 9, “A Global Trust Fund for the Global Public Trust.” For an interesting historical precursor, see also Brecher, Costello, and Smith, “Global Labor’s Forgotten Plan to Fight the Great Depression,” *History News Network*, March 22, 2009, <http://historynewsnetwork.org/article/69169>.

⁹⁵ *Climate Insurgency*, p. 103.

⁹⁶ See *Climate Insurgency*, p. 104-7, for the use of Special Drawing Rights—“paper gold”—for a global climate protection fund.

A labor climate movement cannot support a policy that pits workers against workers and discourages the growth of climate-protecting industries and jobs. It should oppose both escalating trade wars and the free trade utopia of neoliberalism. Instead, it should advocate a strategy of mutually managed trade that encourages all countries to develop their climate protection industries and technologies as rapidly as possible, while allowing the benefits to be shared in a way that protects workers in both developing countries and developed countries—not to mention the planet as a whole. Far from discouraging government subsidies for climate protection jobs, labor should encourage all countries to compete to see who can provide the most effective subsidies for climate protection.

Unions should cooperate globally to propose their own agreements for trade in climate-protecting goods and services that will provide an alternative to both free trade and protectionism. The purpose of such agreements is to create jobs for all by accelerating production of climate-protecting goods and services. Such an agreement could also promote technology sharing, to help reduce the cost and expand the market for climate-protecting goods and services. Such agreements could revise, trump, or carve out an exception to WTO rules for climate-protecting trade. Cooperation could start on a bilateral basis—for example, between the U.S. and China—but should expand into a global regime for promoting the climate protection economy. Such agreements could be the beginning of an alternative to WTO-style unregulated globalization.



Legally ban fossil fuels worldwide

Humanity will not be safe until binding, enforceable global agreements require rapid reduction of GHG emissions to zero. Global climate negotiations have failed to reach such an agreement. Such an agreement is unlikely to be achieved until it embodies changes that already have been fought for, won public support, and been at least partially realized at the local and national levels. The struggle to eliminate fossil fuels locally and nationally can lay the basis for doing so globally.

The abolition of slavery—perhaps the greatest struggle for labor and human rights of all time—took more than a century. It was conducted simultaneously by an international abolitionist movement and local and national movements within each country. It was pursued by both legal and extra-constitutional means. Slavery was abolished country by country and empire by empire. It was ultimately outlawed globally in 1948 by Article 4 of the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The abolition of climate alienation is a task of a similar magnitude—and similarly one that is difficult though not impossible. But it must be accomplished in half the time.



Chapter 8: Climate Solidarity vs. the Alienation of Labor

Our labor is alienated when we work not for our own individual and collective ends, but rather for others who control our labor. The great labor anthem “Solidarity Forever” paints a vivid portrait of the alienation of labor a century ago:

It is we who plowed the prairies; built
the cities where they trade;
Dug the mines and built the
workshops, endless miles of railroad
laid;
Now we stand outcast and starving
midst the wonders we have made.

Today there is no greater expression of the alienation of labor than climate alienation—our forced participation in the destruction of the Earth’s climate on which we and future generations depend. It is we who are mining the coal, burning the oil, processing the bank loans, issuing the permits, and guarding the power plants whose emissions are destroying our security and our children’s futures. We do so not because we want to, or even because we do not care, but because the world order—the prevailing pattern of governments, property, markets, wage labor, and dependence on fossil fuel energy—makes our livelihoods depend on our doing so.

Individually, workers are powerless in the face of those who hire us and order us to destroy the climate. But as “Solidarity Forever” pointed out a century ago, we are not powerless when we act together:

They have taken untold millions that they never toiled to earn,
But without our brain and muscle not a single wheel can turn.
We can break their haughty power, gain our freedom when we learn
That the union makes us strong.

Workers’ power is based on solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority. Workers have used these means over and over again to meet our needs and overcome those who would impoverish and enslave us.

But often we instead have retreated into division, disorganization, and acquiescence. When we do, we pay a terrible price—as working people are paying in so many ways today. And no part of that price is higher than the one we will pay for acquiescing in climate change.



The alternative is climate solidarity—the recognition that we as workers need to protect each other from the ravages of climate destruction. This requires a broader solidarity, one that acts on the common interests of working people and indeed of humanity as a whole. It requires a broadened form of self-organization, a networking that links together all workers who share common interests and who need each other's support. It requires a willingness to challenge authority when those in authority are destroying our wellbeing and our future.

A labor climate action movement can be the starting point for rebuilding organized labor on the basis of expanded solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority. Indeed, it can be the starting point for a new labor movement, one able to attract tens of millions of workers now outside the house of labor because it expresses their most crucial common interests and demonstrates how to fight for them. Such a movement can begin to restore organized labor's historic role as the vehicle for overcoming the alienation of labor and establishing workers' human rights on and off the job.

Using the powers of solidarity, self-organization, and challenge to authority, a labor climate action movement can begin to impose the transition to climate-safe, 100 percent fossil-free energy. It can ensure that the transition to climate safety and protection benefits all workers. It can empower workers and the public to protect the Earth's climate in ways that also meet the needs of working people and communities. And it can join in solidarity with working people around the world to create a global economy that protects both the world's climate and the world's workers.

In the face of the horrifying realities of climate change and the devastating effects on the wellbeing of workers and humanity, climate solidarity can be our best defense. And for challenging a world order based on the alienation of labor, climate solidarity may be our best offence as well.