

JUST TRANSITION AND BEYOND JUST TRANSITION: CANADA IN ACTION



Roundtable Summary Report

August 27, 2018

Ottawa

Prepared by Christopher Flynn



ACW | Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces
to Respond to Climate Change

Background

Just Transition is an elusive concept. First developed by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) at the turn of the 21st century, it has suffered from neglect for much of the last 20 years. Workshops, symposia and half-day conferences proliferated in the EU and other countries, but the meetings have duplicated each other's work, and to date there had been no common definition or sharing of information about what works and what has not worked in just transition experiences.

With this in mind, and mindful of Canada's historic leadership, the Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces to Respond to Climate Change project (ACW) brought together 6 groups active in the field to form an organizing committee. The committee invited the broadest range of Canadian groups involved in Just Transition to a daylong roundtable with three main goals:

1. Share experiences among Canadian groups about the work each is doing to transition to a low carbon economy: what has worked, what has failed, and why?
2. Think forward about how we can broaden Just Transition beyond its current focus.
3. Share next steps that each group will be taking.

THE ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Drawing from labour, climate, and policy groups, the organizing committee was comprised of representatives from six groups:

- Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces to Respond to Climate Change: Canada in International Perspective (a SSHRC partnership project based at York University)
- British Columbia Insulators Local 118 – BC Building Trades Council
- Canadian Labour Congress
- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- Climate Action Network
- National Union of Public and General Employees

The Roundtable

The roundtable was held at the Public Service Alliance Canada building in Ottawa on Monday, August 27th, 2018. It was conducted bilingually with English/French interpretation. Sessions were taped and notes were taken. Participants came from across Canada: 5 provinces, and 1 territory. They came from 13 unions, 7 labour federations/coalitions, 6 environmental groups, 3 policy groups, 2 community groups, and 3 universities. Three of the representatives were also part of the Federal Taskforce on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities.

Attendees¹:

Total Attendees	Unions	Federations or Coalitions	Environment Groups	Policy Groups	Universities	Community Groups	Provinces	Territories
38	13	7	6	3	3	2	5*	1**

* B.C., Alberta, Saskatchewan, Ontario, Québec

** Yukon

Introduction

Co-Chair: Carla Lipsig-Mummé, Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces

Co-Chair: Donald Lafleur, Canadian Labour Congress

The chairs welcomed the participants and introductions were made. They then reiterated the motivation for organizing the roundtable and its three main goals before opening the floor to the first session.

Session 1

PANEL AND DISCUSSION ON JUST TRANSITION EXPERIENCES

Chair: Lee Loftus, BC Insulators 118

SPEAKERS

1. **George MacPherson, B.C.** Shipyard General Workers' Federation
The importance of worker involvement in transition, and the limitations of retraining as a policy response.
2. **Stéphane Bousquet, Québec.** Gentilly Nuclear Power Generator
Consultation and communication between the employer and employees.
3. **Luc Martel, Québec.** Syndicat Québécois des Employées et Employés de Service
How the union obtained green certification and the implications for collective bargaining.
4. **Robert Blakely, Ottawa.** Coalition of Canadian Building Trades Unions
What are the jobs during and after transition; there will be choices to make in planning.
5. **Tara Peel, Ottawa.** Canadian Labour Congress and Federal Taskforce on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities.
Experiences and expectations regarding the Federal taskforce.

¹ See Appendix 1 for list of organizations and individuals attending.

DISCUSSION POINTS²:

The Effects of Transition

“Transitioning away from a job that you once had is an emotional thing. Depending on someone else to make a decision on your livelihood is troubling and leaves you wandering around for days and months and sometimes years, and I speak from experience.”

The Need for Continued Pressure on the Government

“We should take [the government] at face value, but we should hold their feet to the fire... [the Federal Taskforce] is an opportunity that hasn't presented itself before.”

Trust in Government and Protecting Against Right-wing Populism

“Those workers who don't see a place for themselves in the low carbon economy... have no faith that the government is actually going to be able to develop programs that are adequate for them to transition into a good job and a low carbon economy.”

Green Collective Bargaining and Union Initiatives

“Government has an enormous role to play, but I think [unions] have a role to play ourselves... if we negotiated things into our collective agreements which provided a pool of money for retraining... maybe there is some ways that we can [offer training] as well”

Session 2

SHARING THE WORK OF OUR RESPECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS: SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

Chair: Donald Lafleur, Canadian Labour Congress

Each organization responded to the following two questions:

1. What is the number one reason your organization works on Just Transition?

Organizations agreed that their motivations comes from the fact that Just Transition is the best way forward for their membership and community.

“To have good jobs on a living planet, and that we secure the future and livelihoods of our members and their communities.”

² See Appendix 2 for more on the discussion.

2. **What are the three main or most recent pieces of work your organization does/has done on Just Transition?**

Work varied based on expertise and membership.

Organizations have worked on educational material and programs; transition plans and economic projections; primary and secondary research; bargaining green clauses into collective agreements; and political organizing and lobbying.

Recap of the morning proceedings

HIGHLIGHTING KEY POINTS

Speaker: Gauri Sreenivasan, Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives

SUMMARY

- Just Transition falls short as a tool on the ground
- The narrative of Just Transition needs to be thought out
- The conversation should be diversified beyond fossil fuels
- Labour needs to play an active leadership role in Just Transition
- Success depends on solidarity and tackling labour, climate, and inequality issues together

Session 3

MOVING JUST TRANSITION FORWARD: DISCUSSION³

Chair: Catherine Abreu, Climate Action Network

DISCUSSION TOPICS

Follow-up on the Federal Taskforce on Just Transition

"It would be valuable for [labour and climate organizations] to re-enforce that it is a positive thing that the government did and created, and that they should actually listen to what they have heard from actual people who are going to be affected by this policy."

Elections and Good Government

"When the Right wins we can't even talk about [climate change]. Look south of the border, climate action has come to a grinding halt at the national level in the United States."

³ See Appendix 3 for development of the discussion topics

Communication and Coordination

"This job of having dialogue across our sectors and across movements is going to be profoundly important."

Developing an Effective Narrative

"It wasn't the narrative about Just Transition that brought [coal workers] across...it was the resignation and inevitability."

"We should actually start working on messaging around on how to deal with this... what would be useful to everyone would be to do some polling and public opinion research."

Planning the Transition

"Transition needs a plan, not having a plan puts us at risk."

"If you have a vision and you have a plan, people are willing to grasp that. But if you go there with a concept saying 'I think we have to do something', you're going to end up with the same [climate vs jobs] conversation."

Session 4

SHARING OUR INDIVIDUAL ORGANIZATIONS' NEXT STEPS

Chair: Steven Staples, Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces

Each organization was asked to answer the following two questions:

1. **What are the pieces of work related to Just Transition that your organization has planned for the next year?**

Once again, work varied based on expertise and membership, but the number of provincial/federal elections coming in the end of 2018 and through 2019 shifted the conversation as compared to Session 2.

2. **Is there anything you've heard today that may inspire your organization to take on new or adjust existing plans for Just Transition work in the next year?**

The pan-Canadian, multi-disciplinary, multi-lingual approach to the roundtable was greatly appreciated and considered a valuable approach.

Emphasis was placed on continuing to communicate, co-ordinate, and share information with one another.

[translated] One thing I will bring back to the FTQ is the pan-Canadian exchange that we had today. It is very useful."

Summary

Sharing experiences as well as past, present and future work allowed the attendees to test the definition of Just Transition. It was agreed that Just Transition means taking good work and a green economy together, refusing to sacrifice one for the other.

Just Transition includes all workers. From coal workers to first responders, and from manufacturing to retail, all workers will be affected and so should be involved. With this comes the recognition that transition plans need to reflect the differing needs of people in different regions and industries, as well as age, gender, and race.

Just Transition is something that we will need to fight for. While the federal taskforce is a good sign, unions and environmental groups have always needed to apply constant pressure to the government to have a meaningful voice and a seat at the table. The diversity of the groups working on Just Transition is a strength, and continued collaboration and communication between groups will fortify both the political power of the movement and the inclusiveness of transition plans.

Just Transition, though, has limited political power and should not be seen as a solution for precarious work or austerity. Rather, it serves as a check against the expansion of such neoliberal principles. It may also serve as a template for future transitions, such as those that might come from job loss as a result of rapid technological change and artificial intelligence.

Our hope is that the content of this roundtable has helped to add depth and breadth to the term Just Transition, as well as offering inspiration and concrete actions to those in the expanding network of people working towards Just Transition.

Final Words

ACW would like to thank the members of the organizing committee - Carla Lipsig-Mummé, Steve Staples, Catherine Abreu, Donald Lafleur, Lee Loftus, Larry Brown, and Gauri Sreenivasan for their work. We would also like to thank the Public Service Alliance Canada for the use of their building and translation services. Shanice Badior and Christopher Flynn transcribed the day's work, and the report was written by Christopher Flynn.

While the roundtable gathered an exceptionally diverse group of unions and climate groups, we are aware that representation from First Nations, Inuit and Métis groups, as well as Atlantic and Arctic organizations was lacking. We hope to see future conversations on Just Transition enriched by these voices.

Appendix 1: Attendees

Alberta Federation of Labour, Federal Taskforce	Gil McGowan
Atkinson Foundation	Colette Murphy
BC Federation of Labour	Irene Lanzinger
BC Federation of Labour	Lynn Bueckert
BC Insulators Local 118	Lee Loftus
Blue Green Canada	Jamie Kirkpatrick
Canada's Building Trades Union	Robert Blakely
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives	Gauri Sreenivasan
Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives	Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood
Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions	Sebastian Ronderos-Morgan
Canadian Labour Congress	Donald Lafleur
Canadian Labour Congress, Federal Task Force	Tara Peel
Climate Action Network	Catherine Abreu
Climate Justice Saskatoon	Hayley Carlson (via phone)
Climate Justice Saskatoon	Mark Bigland-Pritchard
Coalition of Black Trade Unionists – Ontario Chapter	Christopher Wilson
Fédération des travailleurs et travailleuses du Québec (FTQ)	Wilfried Cordeau
Insulators Local 95	David Gardner
Labour Education Centre	Steven Shallhorn
National Union of Public and General Employees	Larry Brown
National Union of Public and General Employees	Nadia Ibrahim
Oil Change International	Adam Scott
Public Service Alliance of Canada	Magali Picard
Public Service Alliance of Canada	Howie West
Queen's University	John Holmes
Reclaiming Alberta's Future Today	Regan Boychuk
Shipyards General Workers' Federation	George MacPherson
Simon Fraser University	John Calvert
Smart Prosperity Institute	Marena Winstanley
Syndicat canadien de la fonction publique	Stéphane Bousquet
Syndicat québécois des employées et employés de service, sectionne locale 298 (FTQ)	Luc Martel
Unifor	Joie Warnock
United Steelworkers Canada, Federal Taskforce	Mark Rowlinson
York University, ACW Principal Investigator	Carla Lipsig-Mummé
York University, ACW Staff	Christopher Flynn
York University, ACW Staff	Shanice Badior
York University, ACW Staff	Steven Staples
Yukon Employees Union	Lynne Pajot (via phone)

Appendix 2: Session 1 - Discussion

The Effects of Transition

Transitions are an emotional experience for workers, as their livelihood is left in the hands of another person. Large closures affect the economy of whole provinces and communities, as well as the lives of families and individuals.

The Need for Continued Pressure on the Government

The Federal Taskforce on Just Transition for Coal Power Workers and Communities shows that the government has interest in including Labour in the transition planning process, but it must be remembered that Labour fought to be included and has always had to fight for a seat at the table.

Trust in Government and Protecting Against Right Wing Populism

There is a lack of trust in the government's ability to plan a transition that includes workers and communities. This lack of confidence means that when right-wing populist parties promise no change, they are more easily believed than progressive parties. Labour having a strong seat at the table can help to keep government in check, and encourage workers to trust in a progressive vision.

Green Collective Bargaining and Union Initiatives

There is also work unions can do without government. Attendees discussed bargaining green initiatives into collective agreements as well as how some unions have planned transitions and sought out green markets for their members.

Appendix 3: Session 3 - Moving Forward

Follow-up on the Federal Taskforce on Just Transition

With an eye towards actionable goals, the attendees emphasized the need to follow up on the taskforce, especially with a response to their recommendations.

Elections and Good Government

With elections looming in 2019, there was also considerable talk about the need for getting good governments elected, and how regional differences influence politics as well as the way Just Transition is talked about.

Communication and Coordination

Continued communication and coordination among the many groups working on Just Transition was emphasized. Sharing resources and research amongst one another, as well as continuing to

organize group discussions similar to the roundtable are concrete examples.

Developing an Effective Narrative

There is also a need to work with communities and members at a grass roots level, having a clear and open dialogue on getting to the next economy. The language that has been used, and the narrative surrounding Just Transition has not been effective here and it is important to understand why and how it can improve.

Planning the Transition

Lastly, the need to begin working on transition plans is of significant importance. Clear plans help to show workers that they have a place in the next economy, and serve as a reference to hold government accountable.

About the Author

Christopher Flynn is a Work and Labour Studies student at York University and a Research Assistant at Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces to Respond to Climate Change: Canada in International Perspective (ACW).



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