

# ***One Million Climate Jobs!***

## **--- GEN Campaign Narrative**

In the Fall of 2009, a diverse collection of civil society organizations and social movements --- labour unions, environmental associations, indigenous peoples, youth networks, faith-based and social justice groups --- came together to form what later became identified as the Green Economy Network [GEN]. What appeared to unite us was a common recognition that we are living today in one of those critical moments of history, a moment characterized by what we then called a triple 'e' crises --- the compounding crises of the environment, the economy and energy which pose a direct threat to the future of the planet as well as humanity itself. What's more, we saw these three crises as both structural and interdependent to the point where one cannot be resolved without resolving the others. As GEN members went to work on developing solutions and strategies for action, however, it became increasingly clear that these crises were intensifying while public concern was waning.

### **Climate Crisis**

Take climate change. When the UN climate summit took place in Copenhagen in 2009, the world's leading climate scientists had reached a consensus, warning that a more than 2 degree Celsius increase in global temperatures throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> century could have catastrophic consequences. Less than four years later, the World Bank <sup>1</sup> was projecting a 4 degree rise in global temperature if current levels of greenhouse gas emissions continue while the International Energy Agency, a body originally established to ensure oil supplies for industrialized countries, went so far as to calculate the planet could well be on its way to a 5.3 degree increase over the course of this century.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the most recent comprehensive assessment of the International Panel on Climate Change largely confirms this trend line in its latest report, predicting that land surface temperatures will likely rise between 2.6 and 4.8 degrees by the last two decades of this century, when most of today's children are still alive.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, according to most public opinion polls, climate change gradually dropped in peoples' list of priorities, not only in this country but elsewhere as well, signaling some gains for climate skeptics who argue it's all a hoax. Yet, far from being a plausible threat in a distant future, climate change is real and is happening all around us now. As greenhouse gas emissions are continuously spewed into the atmosphere, we are seeing an unprecedented array

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank. *Turn Down the Heat*. Washington: World Bank. June 2013. Executive Summary, p. 1 and also p. 11.

<sup>2</sup> International Energy Agency. *Redrawing the Energy-Climate Map*. Executive Summary. Paris: International Energy Agency. June 2013. P.9

<sup>3</sup> Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. *Summary for Policy-makers of Working Group One Contribution to the IPCC Fifth Assessment Report: Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*. Stockholm. September 27, 2013. P.15.

of flash floods, heat waves, hurricanes, tornadoes, wild fires, and droughts which, in turn, cause crop failures, rising food prices, forced migration, pollution and asthma. Just ask people in Calgary what climate change looks like now in the wake of last summer's unprecedented flood damage. In turn, the Arctic is melting at an alarming rate, posing a heightened threat to coastal cities and island countries, thereby prompting one the world's leading climate scientists, Dr. James Hansen of NASA, to proclaim "a planetary emergency."<sup>4</sup>

### **Austerity Trap**

Yet, climate change is by no means just another issue. Instead, it's a powerful force and driver that will have untold impacts on planet earth and human civilization as we know it. For these reasons, the solutions cannot be left alone to markets and the private sector. After all, many industrial corporations have largely fueled the crisis and continue to profit from it. What is urgently needed are comprehensive plans of action taken at the level of governments --- nationally, sub-nationally and internationally. As demonstrated almost three quarters of a century ago during the Great Depression and World War II, it is really active governments, through public policy aimed at improving the social good, that can effectively marshal the resources and coordinate the actions required on a mass scale in response to the planet's expanding climate crisis.

The problem we face now, however, is the capacities of governments and the public sector have been severely weakened by neo-liberalism and its relentless austerity measures. After some forty years of neo-liberalism, the role of governments to intervene in and shape their economies on behalf of both people and the environment, have been largely stripped away. In the name of austerity, decades of cuts to public services have made us more vulnerable to climate disasters --- underpaid and understaffed fire crews fighting back raging wild fires; the buckling of bridges and tunnels under increasingly extreme weather patterns; raw sewage pouring into lakes after heavy rainfall from super storms have broken decaying levees. The list goes on and on.

Moreover, this austerity agenda has made workers more vulnerable by maintaining high levels of unemployment and increasing worker insecurity. In Canada, cutbacks in social and income supports like welfare and unemployment insurance, along with new trade regimes and deregulation have further empowered corporations. Not only have these measures benefitted the wealthy and increased social inequality, but it has also created heightened vulnerability for almost all workers. Insecurity has been enhanced (particularly for young workers) through the

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<sup>4</sup> See, for example, a new study by James Hansen and colleagues from the Earth Institute at Columbia University and the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies warning that continuing to burn fossil fuels at the current rate will render most of our planet uninhabitable. *Climate sensitivity, sea level and atmospheric carbon dioxide*. Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society. September. 2013.

rapid growth of contingent and precarious work and through the persistent threat of layoffs and shutdowns. In addition to the negative impact on wages and working conditions (for most), this increased sense of vulnerability makes workers subject to economic blackmail --- such as jobs vs. trashing the planet or even risking one's own and one's families' lives.

### **Root Causes**

The more we wrestled with these realities in the GEN the more we came to the conclusion that the root causes of these crises lie deep within our current economic model, namely, global capitalism. Whichever way we look at it, our economic system is exploitive. It is waging war on both people and nature at the same time. The system that creates wealth and prosperity for affluent sectors of society is the same system that plunders the earth's remaining natural resources, spewing millions of tons of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and thereby accelerating climate change while destroying the life support conditions of the planet itself. By the same token, this is the same system that continuously attacks workers, the poor, and their communities through austerity measures such as cutting public services and weakening social safety nets while lowering corporate taxes.

As the slogan goes, what's urgently needed today is 'system change' not 'climate change.' As a society, we can no longer afford an economic model that treats the natural environment and human beings as disposable goods. Instead we must start to collectively build a new economy, one based on much more sustainable modes of production and consumption while transforming the economic and social inequalities that plague and overburden society. Indeed, transforming our economic and social realities is consistent and necessary if we hope to fundamentally alter the way we extract natural resources, produce products and generate energy. In order to effectively address climate change we need to confront the economic realities that drive the global economy to attack nature. In order to rethink the way we transport people, move goods, create waste, fuel industries, and heat our homes and businesses --- we need system change.

### **Climate Jobs**

In our work at GEN, we took up this challenge by focusing our attention on what it would mean to change various sectors of our economy to create 'climate jobs.' By climate jobs we mean jobs that directly contribute to preventing climate change and global warming. More specifically, we are talking about the need to organize and fight for a new economy. One way to do that is to put a priority on developing and implementing new economic policies and strategies for the creation of decent paying and secure jobs that contribute directly to the reduction of carbon and greenhouse gas emissions which cause the heating of the planet. In doing so, we emphasized that these climate jobs provide more secure forms of employment that would ensure greater social equity for marginalized peoples such as the unemployed and working poor, including Indigenous peoples and people of colour.

In our common platform, *Making the Shift to a Green Economy*, we outlined three strategic priorities that could be undertaken to begin restructuring our economy for the creation of climate jobs now:

- #1...substantially increasing public investments in, and community ownership of, renewable energy development --- wind, solar, geothermal --- thereby greatly facilitating the necessary transition from our societal dependence on fossil fuels;
- #2 ...developing a green buildings strategy aimed at substantially reducing energy waste by retrofitting our residential, public and commercial building stock for energy efficiency, especially given this country's rather unique conditions of extreme heat and cold;
- #3 ...promoting public transportation strategies designed to improve and expand public transit within cities and high speed rail between cities in urban corridors, thereby substantially reducing urban traffic congestion, pollution and stress.

### **Transition Impacts**

Although far from being a panacea for the climate challenges we face, the strategies we've developed could begin to trigger the development of a new economy that is more just, sustainable and participatory. If the action plan we've outlined in *Making the Shift ...* was fully enacted over a ten year period, Canada would be in the position of having created several hundred thousand new full-time permanent and secure jobs over the decade.<sup>5</sup> By the end of this ten year period, Canada's total greenhouse gas emissions would be reduced by over 100 million tonnes a year, which represents roughly 15 percent of this country's annual contribution to global warming. Moreover, these economic strategies would enhance social equity in terms of both race and class through a combination of affirmative action for youth and low income communities, targeted government subsidies and agreements with First Nations regarding use of their lands and benefits for their communities.

That said, the big question is how and who pays for all this. As outlined in our common platform, this plan would cost approximately \$14 billion a year in new government expenditures over a ten year period --- less than 6 percent of the annual federal budget. While Canadians are repeatedly being told the public purse is empty, we maintain that the money for this and related climate change initiatives could be had if the political will was there to make it so. By putting a national price on industrial greenhouse gas emissions [starting at \$50 per tonne and progressively increasing to \$200 per tonne over the ten years] a solid financial base could be established for these public investments.<sup>6</sup> Additional revenues could be raised by --- putting a surcharge on the

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<sup>5</sup> Our calculation is that, taken together, these economic strategies would generate over four million fulltime jobs for a year [person job years] which translates into more than 400,000 permanent full time jobs [i.e. direct, indirect, and induced employment]. For details, see *Making the Shift to a Green Economy*, pp. 1 & 19 [summary], plus pp. 5-6, 12, 16. For methodology used, see footnote viii.

<sup>6</sup> See carbon pricing plan outlined by M.K. Jaccard & Associates Inc. in *Climate Leadership, Economic Prosperity --- a 2009 study commissioned by the Pembina Institute and the David Suzuki Foundation, 2009.*

super profits of the petroleum industry and the banks which finance the development of the bitumen sands; increasing the royalty rates on oil and gas production to the federal government and producing provinces; and terminating the federal subsidies that go to the fossil fuel industry every year. Moreover, initiatives like the green buildings strategy could be largely self-financed by individuals through pay-as-you-save plans.<sup>7</sup>

### **Community Campaigns**

At GEN, however, we realize that publicly advocating a platform of new policies or strategies is not likely to generate the needed political will to act. Unless there is a groundswell of grassroots demand for action, little if anything will change. After all, much of the impetus for creating climate jobs is going to come from local and regional economies where people live and work in closer relationship with their environment. In other words, we need to build community-based campaigns for climate jobs wherever possible across the country. These campaigns can be geared to make specific community demands such as --- improving and/or expanding public transit in particular cities and towns or building high speed rail linking cities and communities in urban corridors; developing community-owned wind, solar and geothermal power projects plus a smart electrical grid for renewable energy that serves both urban and rural communities; and retrofitting the residential building stock of neighbourhoods, towns and cities for zero energy waste. Moreover, through such community based campaigns, people can begin to counter the individualism and disconnectedness which has also been a by-product of neo-liberalism.

In short, only if communities begin to rise-up and demand action for “climate jobs now” can we hope to see a change in the political will of governments --- municipal, provincial, and federal. These community-based campaigns, in turn, constitute the core of what we are calling our One Million Climate Jobs Campaign. There is nothing especially magic about the ‘one million’ climate jobs figure. But it does have strategic value not only in setting an achievable target but also in cultivating a sense of public confidence that we can, as a society, collectively make the shift to building a new economy in this country. Moreover, the various projects we propose --- high speed rail, smart electrical grids for renewable energy, and green home buildings --- could be promoted as real “nation building” initiatives in contrast to multiple energy pipeline schemes designed to transport carbon polluting oil from the bitumen sands to our west, east or northern coasts primarily for export to overseas markets .

### **A New Solidarity**

Above all, we maintain that this climate jobs strategy contains the ingredients of new solidarities between labour, environment and social justice aspirations. The very notion of climate jobs unites workers and environmentalists around a common purpose. For workers, the jobs being created enhance the value and dignity of work because the work being done contributes to

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<sup>7</sup> For details, see *Making the Shift to a Green Economy*, pp. 2-3, plus pp. 5, 11, 16 and 19.

reduction of carbon or greenhouse gases that cause climate change and global warming. For environmentalists, the promotion and creation of new climate jobs serves to generate a greater public consciousness and commitment to combating the climate crises through changes in the economy. It also opens new doors of opportunity for both Indigenous peoples and youth presently saddled by high unemployment and poverty. Indeed, by putting a priority on social equity, this climate jobs strategy could help advance the struggle against race and class inequalities in this country.

At the same time, a climate jobs strategy like this provides real options for a just transition on two fronts --- for workers displaced by carbon polluting industries that will eventually be compelled to shut down due to the intensifying climate crisis and also for communities struggling to transition away from carbon polluting industries that generate unhealthy living conditions in their neighbourhoods. What's more, these new solidarity ingredients embody strategic implications. The struggle against climate change is now inextricably linked to the struggle against the austerity agenda and neo-liberalism. If environmentalists are going to have any hope of preventing climate catastrophe in the near future, then fundamental changes in the system of capitalism are imperative. Like it or not, this will require both collective action by people combined with positive governmental action. In turn, this will require recalibrating governments themselves with new tools and powers such as, if necessary, public ownership and control in key sectors to ensure the building of a new economy that is sustainable, equitable and participatory.

Indeed, this means that the fight against the austerity agenda is more important than ever. It also means that the combating austerity strategies cannot be won without fully embracing the struggle against climate change, which greatly strengthens the imperative to revitalize the role of government and make meeting social needs the priority of society. The two must go hand-in-hand. In other words, the environmental movement needs to actively support labour and social justice movements in their resistance against further cutbacks in social services and the dismantling of the public sector just as the labour and social justice movements must become more pro-active in supporting environmental movements in combating the climate crisis, including mega projects like the further expansion of the bitumen sands. What's more, clean and secure employment must be restored as a public good, not a public evil as it is too often portrayed in government and corporate circles.

In short, this is the common struggle of our times that unites us today!