

HAVE INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS EVOLVED IN KEEPING WITH AN INTEGRAL ECOLOGY?

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Converting an idea into a reality is never an easy task. In fact, it is extremely difficult. But without immediate drastic action on all our parts our prospects are poor.

The trade union movement is among those who are calling for an urgent and radical shift to keep the planet habitable. “There are no jobs on a dead planet” has been our rallying call for collective action. It recognises that what the trade unions have been fighting for since their first existence – social justice – will become impossible if we don’t stop the greed-capitalism which is destroying the planet.

We need action on the environment, but we must also tackle how the economy itself has become unsustainable. It’s time to join up the dots between our economic failures and the climate crisis.

That’s why trade unions are calling for a “Just Transition”. With this we are seeking to convey the idea that the coming transition will have a deep-felt effect on workers, their families and communities and that the right policies are required to share the costs and spread the benefits and ensure that no worker or community is left behind.

We know that the challenges we face requires quick and massive transformations. These will impact on workers in many ways. For some regions and some sectors, moving to a zero emission and clean economy, represents an unprecedented endeavour through which employment and the economy but also the entire way of life of communities will be radically changed. For some, already struggling with the daily consequences of austerity and precariousness, green goods are unaffordable and new taxes might exacerbate the already severe deprivation they are exposed to. Having in mind the risk of seeing entire regions laid aside and the risk of unfair policy instruments increasing inequalities, the trade unions want to promote a transition that offers decent work and leaves no one behind.

A “just transition”, the green and zero emission economy must be seen as a desirable prospect for all. Otherwise, the resistance to the necessary change will be so intense, that they will become impossible to achieve in a democratic way.

Laudato si’, insisted on the intimate relationship between the poor and the fragility of the planet, the conviction that everything in the world is connected, the critique of new paradigms and the forms of power derived from technology, the call to seek other ways of understanding the economy and progress, the value proper to each creature, the need for a human centred approach, forthright and honest debate, the serious responsibility of international and local policy, the throwaway culture and the proposal of a new lifestyle.

Trade unions are working to deliver plans that will deliver decent work creation and poverty reduction in the transition towards a green economy. Our belief, our experience is that the transition from brown to green work can be better delivered through industrial relations systems that promote effective collective bargaining and social dialogue, including a tripartite approach. Yet it is still a struggle to get policy makers and many employers to recognise the value of involving working people, those directly affected in the development of solutions.

Workers need to be involved to ensure that the jobs that they are expected to transition to reflect the reality of people's contexts, existing collective agreements and pensions. Although the number of collective agreements containing green and just transition clauses is still limited, they are growing. Emerging examples indicate that workers organised in their trade unions and employers, through social dialogue, have identified areas where the environmental impact could be mitigated without reducing or negatively affecting employment or working conditions:

- a) **International framework agreements** (IFAs) are voluntary agreements between multinational enterprises and global union federations. A significant number of agreements include environmental provisions on such issues as respect for the environment as a corporate responsibility and waste management measures, particularly in the manufacturing, energy, mining and automotive industries.
- b) **Just Transition Agreements:** a good example is the national agreement in mining which covers Spain's privately owned pits – it provides a model just transition agreement. It mixes early retirement schemes for miners over 48, with environmental restoration work in pit communities and re-skilling schemes for cutting-edge green industries.
- c) **A Tripartite Approach:** the German Commission recently agreed to phase out coal by 2038. This is a good example of broad participation that strengthens ownership. Verdi, IG BCE and DGB were part of the Commission for trade unions but there were also employers, local authorities, scientists, NGOs, relevant government ministries. Their focus was not only on the phase out date, but they also addressed investment, employment and economic diversification.
- d) **Public Sector:** the public sector can take the lead, for example the Joint Environment and Climate Change Agreement (JECCA) negotiated between UK public service union UNISON and Stockport Council. The Agreement aims among other green targets to reduce its carbon footprint through quantified and transparent annual targets. Similar examples RISE in Belgium, that Agreement's main goal is to support environmental actions in firms through reps' commitment. Financially supported by the Walloon government since 1996, RISE assists employee reps on environmental questions and on mobility. The issues addressed by the network include waste, energy saving, food and mobility and alternative means of transport. RISE also offers training for union reps and practical support for its members.
- e) **Agreement on the Right to Retraining:** The Industrial sector union IG Metall has called on companies and Government to take appropriate measures in order to avoid job losses and it has also proposed introducing a new type of

partial unemployment for workers impacted by transformation (called 'Transformationskurzarbeitergeld'), along the lines of the measure Germany successfully implemented during the global financial crisis to prevent job losses.

- f) **Green Pay Agreements:** in Italy, there are a number of examples including Renner Italia where employees share in the savings made by reducing energy costs - 'green pay' agreements pay
- g) **Brown to Green jobs:** in Denmark, shipyard in Denmark transformed into a windmills plant with workers (welders, mechanics, electricians) going through a retraining program. Lindo Offshore Renewables Center (LORC) is now both an R&D and training center where technologies associated with renewables can be tested. DK trade unions are involved in the management of the centre.
- h) **Health and Safety in the recycling sector:** In Recycling, workers have to deal with all kinds of materials that can pose a danger to their health, and in the treatment process (toxic) substances may be present or be released depending on the type of material (heavy metals, asbestos, dioxin or other gases). The number of accidents is relatively high, too, the ETUC has highlighted that jobs in the Green economy are not automatically decent and have put action to secure health and safety as a key priority.
- i) **4 Day Week:** Scale matters, that's why the growing demand for a four day week, working fewer hours, without losing pay – such as a four-day/ 32 hour week – should be a central part of climate plans. Cutting the number of commutes would lower work-related energy use, carbon emissions, and the range of pollutants associated with driving. There are a number of measures that can ensure the rollout of a shorter working week, without a reduction of pay or other unintended impacts such as the creation of shift work. Such steps include extra public holidays, the common day off and the protection of the work free Sunday, such as supported by UNIEuropa in the European Sunday Alliance. Additional legal measures can be anticipated such a limit on the maximum of weekly hours worked and the right for those working too few hours to work more, these could ensure that the approach is worker centred.
- j) **Fare free public transport:** There are significant opportunities to scale up action on public transport which will help address the emissions gap and drive economic growth and improve life for working people. Agreements with employers that make public transport fare free can play an important role in that strategy.

In conclusion the integral ecology approach turns the drive towards environmental sustainability into a significant avenue for development, with more and better jobs, social inclusion and poverty reduction. Positive outcomes are eminently possible; however, these require active support from all sections, for workers to organise into trade unions and to bargain for agreements and policies that seize the opportunities and address the challenges identified by integrating environmental, social and decent work elements and ensuring a smooth and just transition to sustainable economies.