

MEMBER UPDATE

What is a Just Transition? AUPE's Environmental Committee has a plan

Committee submitted an outline to federal consultation, hopes to participate more

When world leaders met in Glasgow last week, they were deciding amongst themselves how to chart a path out of the ongoing climate crisis. Alongside those world leaders were a large contingent of lobbyists from the fossil fuel industry, which comprised the largest bloc of participants at the Conference.

Outside the conference, and inside at various “just transition” themed events, workers and environmentalists held demanded that COP26 insiders include workers in their plans. There can be no climate transition, they said, without workers. Any transition must be a just transition, or it is doomed to fail.

What is a just transition, anyway? It's a term developed by trade unionists, an effort to bridge the gap between labour and the environmental movement. The general idea is simple enough—in an economy where so many workers depend, directly or indirectly, on fossil fuels, transition planning needs to focus on communities that will be most impacted. Fossil fuel workers will need re-training, communities will need new investment, and no worker should be left behind.

When we start getting more specific about what a just transition looks like in a specific place, the details start to become more complicated. That's why AUPE's environmental committee is working to develop plans.

Federal consultation on the just transition

In July 2021, federal natural resources minister Seamus O'Reagan declared that the Canadian government would be holding a public consultation on the just transition. The goal of the consultation, he said, was to create a Just Transition Advisory Body.

AUPE's environmental committee responded to the call and created a document which outlines how we believe that the Just Transition Advisory Body should be structured.

As we wrote in our submission, a just transition is just as much a process as a result. How we get there is as important as where we're going. And that process should have a few key points, if it's going to be effective:

- **A permanent structure:** Any Just Transition Advisory Body should be a permanent structure, with input from all affected stakeholders.

That body should weigh in on all decisions made regarding Canada's decarbonization. It should be broken down into regional and sectoral sections.

- **A geographic focus:** Specific areas in Canada—and especially in Alberta—rely very heavily on the fossil fuel industry for their local economy. As such, any Just Transition Advisory Body must be focused on helping those communities stay strong through the transition.
- **Social protections and supports:** Displaced workers and communities will need a wide array of supports, from free up-skilling programs to work in new industries to financial supports during the transition phase. These needs will change over time, and vary according to place. For a just transition to live up to its name, these supports will need to be front and center.

What's next

Around two thirds of fossil fuel workers in Canada believe that the country needs to do more to address climate change and should head towards net-zero. Around the same amount would be interested in pivoting their careers in a net-zero economy.

In order to get there, we need a plan. And in order for a plan to be effective, then workers need to play an important part in drawing it up.

AUPE's environmental committee is proud to have outlined these principals to the federal government, and hopes that they are taken seriously. We are willing and able to participate further, and help build the structures that will shape Canada's climate transition.

Climate change is here, and it is already having an impact on our work, our communities, and our lives. A change will happen, whether we want it to or not. It's up to us, as working people, to take the reins of that change and shape it. We don't need to choose between fighting climate change and good jobs—we can have both. In order for either of them to be possible, we need both.

Want to get involved? Contact AUPE's environmental committee! Applications are currently open until December 31st to become a member. You can apply by clicking here.