

LABOUR FOR A GREEN NEW DEAL 2022 CONFERENCE: CHALLENGES FOR JUST TRANSITIONS

Introduction:

Climate breakdown is an existential crisis in need of timely interventions. Throughout our discussions LGND have collected some of the challenges, as described by unions, networks and organisations, facing trade unionists organising for climate demands.

Worker-Level:

By definition, a just transition involves the democratic input of workers. However, across many sectors, there is a significant lack of worker engagement, exacerbated in carbon-heavy sectors where tackling climate issues is perceived as contradictory to preserving jobs. In their work on educating and upskilling workers, the GJA discuss how a grassroots approach can be limited because of this, whereas top-down intervention by local authorities and government could be more effective. Another reason cited for the lack of worker engagement is the belief that climate issues are distinct from labour issues like pay and working conditions. To raise awareness on how these issues are connected, the ITF, GLI and YHTUC are providing training and workshops on linking climate issues with labour and other social injustices. A lack of worker engagement in just transition discussions is also due to time and capacity constraints faced by all and fears over career stability and progression. With some initiatives to engage grassroots members on climate issues, such as Stay Grounded's worker assemblies, taking place in evenings, many workers are unable to attend and, of those who can, some are reluctant to put names to proposals for fear of being perceived as 'unprofessional' or having their careers limited.

Industry and Union Level:

With a general mainstream consensus shifting to environmental sympathy, one of the most common challenges faced is greenwashing. Stay Grounded have used videos on online media channels, such as YouTube, to combat against greenwashing in the aviation sector specifically, where notions of green flight from aviation companies are used to curtail discussions on decreasing air travel and preventing airport expansion. Those at the Rolls Royce Combine have found that companies are often resistant to implementing transition planning led by the workers who actually know their industry, instead relying on their own limited corporate designed climate plans. This tentativeness around working with organisations on climate issues is widespread with FOES discussing how oil and gas workers involved in transition projects or speaking out about industrial issues face blacklisting and how time consuming the process of building trust with workers is under these conditions. Other challenges facing unions include limited union resources (BWAUFU) and pre-existing workloads making it difficult for reps to engage with the climate process (JTP).

