


Unions and the climate justice movement

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An IWW supporter discusses how can radical activists and environmentalists work with conservative workers and unions.

Climate & Capitalism encourages open and comradely discussion of the views expressed in this important article.



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Where does the union movement stand on the issue of climate justice? The answer to that question is not entirely simple. First of all, it's important to understand the differences between revolutionary unions (most of which are syndicalist—such as the CNT, FAI, SAC—or Marxist—such as NUMSA—in their orientation, or some hybrid inclusive of both and more—such as the IWW) and mainstream reformist unions, such as the AFL-CIO. For most revolutionary unions, climate justice is an inherent part of the struggle to overthrow capitalism, abolish wage slavery, and create a new society within the shell of the old. For example, the IWW has organized an environmental unionism caucus that dedicates itself to climate justice and other ecological issues. The

South African union, NUMSA, is a supporter of Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) and has issued a statement calling for the end to the “Mineral Industrial Complex” (even though they represent mine workers) in favor of renewable energy.[1]

Where the reformist unions (sometimes called “business unions” or “class collaborationist” unions by their detractors) stand varies widely, and to be accurate, some of these “reformist” unions have more (or less) “revolutionary” orientation within the spectrum of the mainstream labor movement. While many still believe that capitalism can be reformed, the evolving realities of capitalism—which is becoming extremely repressive as it imposes increasingly crushing austerity upon the working class—the ever heightening urgency of addressing capitalist induced global warming, and the increasingly impossible-to-ignore realities of police violence, movements like Black Lives Matter, and other social issues are driving many unions to question their adherence to it, beyond the mere rank and file militants within each of them.

One would expect the Building Trades and most heavy industry based unions in the United States, many of which are still largely dominated by white male workers, to be least supportive of climate justice (or even likely to swallow the rhetoric of climate denialism) and conversely expect the service unions, many of which are predominantly composed of women and People of Color to be most supportive of it, and in some cases that’s true, but not always! The actual “geography” of where unions stand on climate justice is actually quite complex, inconsistent, and in some instances contradictory.[2] Sorting it out completely is well beyond the scope of this article, but it is illustrative to cover some general ground and cite a few interesting examples.

Keystone XL

For example, National Nurses United, which includes the California Nurses Association, has taken a stand against the Keystone XL Pipeline (and NNU is a partner in Trade Unions for Energy Democracy), and has taken strong stances on climate justice in general. By contrast, the Laborers Union supports Keystone XL, opining:

The reasonable thing is to build the pipeline, create jobs here and reduce our dependence on oil from hostile regimes, instead of caving to fringe extremists and seeing that oil go to China.[3]

LIUNA is joined by most of the AFL-CIO Building Trades unions in supporting Keystone XL as well as many other similar projects, ostensibly because such projects would “create jobs” (claims that have proven to be false). In actual fact,

Labor Network for Sustainability has shown that far more skilled, union jobs would be created by repairing existing pipeline infrastructure, but so far the Building Trades have not acknowledged this in any meaningful fashion.

Ironically, LIUNA was once an affiliate of the Blue-Green Alliance—a coalition of unions (including the United Steel Workers), politicians, and environmental NGOs (including the Sierra Club) that purportedly seeks to unite labor and environmental movements—but quit in 2009, because some of that alliances affiliates—notably the Sierra Club—oppose Keystone, although the Blue-Green Alliance itself has not taken an official position on the issue, and USW international president, Leo Gerard has declared he supports Keystone X-L, even though the USW opposes unrefined crude oil exports.[4]

Community Choice Aggregation

One of the affiliate unions in the Blue Green Alliance, the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW), is described by Labor Network for Sustainability as being a big supporter of renewable energy, and for the most part that's true and makes sense, because, in many cases, this means that IBEW members do the work. One of the methods by which communities deploy more renewable energy, particularly wind and solar generated electricity, is through Community Choice Aggregation (CCA).

However, in northern California, one of the biggest opponents to CCA is IBEW Local 1245. In fact, Local 1245 has tried to get resolutions passed against CCAs in virtually every Central Labor Council in the state, and supports a capitalist utility backed ballot initiative which would virtually outlaw CCAs. Local 1245 defends their position on the basis of “protecting union jobs”, but critics claim that the leadership of IBEW Local 1245, in particular Hunter Stern, is actually carrying the water for Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), with whom they have a contract.

Several other mainstream Bay Area unions, including (but not limited to) the California Nurses Association, ILWU Local 6, LIUNA Local 21, SEIU 1021, UNITE-HERE Local 2850, and USW Local 5 have expressed interest in supporting CCAs (as long as they're staffed by union workers, a justified demand, and one suggested by TUED).

The IBEW isn't monolithic in its opposition to CCA's however, because San Diego based IBEW Local 569 supports a plan for CCA there, in spite of opposition from other IBEW locals, including those that represent workers at the San Diego Gas & Electric (and its parent company, Sempra Energy), the private utility whose profits would be threatened by its creation.

California SB350

Ironically, though the United Steelworkers support CCAs, are an affiliate of the Blue Green Alliance, have reached out to environmentalists over common concerns about oil refinery safety in the San Francisco Bay Area's refinery corridor, and even went as far as conducting a joint direct action with Occupy activists in Torrance in which they dumped manure at the refinery gates in protest of unsafe practices, they recently opposed an environmentalist backed California Senate bill, SB350, which—if passed unamended would have required California to double the energy efficiency of its older buildings, generate half of its electricity from renewable sources and cut its petroleum use in half by the year 2030.⁵

It's not as though the measure went opposed by unions in particular. Indeed, most of the Building Trades, including the California State Building Trade & Construction Trades Council, Bricklayers, Boilermakers, Elevator Constructors, IBEW, Operating Engineers, Painters, Plumbers and Pipefitters, Roofers, Sheet Metal Workers, and Structural workers, as well as the California Labor Federation, Teamsters, SEIU, and UFCW publicly supported SB350, but not the Steelworkers.^[6]

During the week leading up to the California State Senate vote on the proposed bill, the USW sent out the following appeal:

Support USW Refinery Workers, Local Communities and the Environment! Make Your Calls to California Legislators Today!

Refinery workers deserve to have their jobs protected.

California legislators should protect local workers and their families! While seeking to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, lawmakers are trying to pass a bill, SB 350, that could do quite the opposite. SB 350 could cause our safe and environmentally responsible refining processes to be forced out of California into less environmentally secure states and countries. This allows for more carbon pollution, not less, across the entire US! At the same time, thousands of USW refinery workers in California may be forced out of their jobs, left without the ability to provide for their families and devastating the communities in which they live and work. A responsible law should be implemented that protect workers and their families, the environment, local economies and neighborhood services. But SB 350 is not the responsible bill we seek!

- SB 350 puts thousands of family sustaining jobs at risk.
- It undermines environmental protections by forcing CA refineries out of the state or country, thereby jeopardizing our safety and health by shifting refining to less or no environmentally conscious entities.
- Places at risk local neighborhood jobs and tax bases, negatively impacting local refining communities.
- Exposes our jobs, families and local economy to deprivation and hardship.

Our workers and local communities deserve to be protected! We have amendments to offer to the bill that will safeguard our workers and preserve jobs, the environment and local neighborhoods. But we need critical action from you today to make this happen. Beginning on Monday, the California Assembly will be taking up SB 350 for action. We know SB 350 poses a real threat to family and economic survival for refinery workers. Call these key Assembly Members today and tell them to OPPOSE SB 350 unless critical amendments are made.

Take quick action now! Call these Assembly Members today! Tell them to oppose SB 350 as written!

None of these claims are accurate, but they match, pretty closely the talking points issued by the Western States Petroleum Association, an umbrella group that includes the refinery employers. SB350 ultimately passed, but only after lawmakers stripped the portion of the bill that mandated a 50% reduction in statewide petroleum usage. With the help of the USW, the WSPA was able to help fossil fuel capitalist interests water down or block almost a dozen measures addressing climate and energy usage.

Coal Free Oakland

A struggle is exploding in the Bay Area city of Oakland, California, where plans

to construct a private bulk exports terminal on the former Oakland Army Base by developer Phil Tagami, have drawn criticism from local residents, environmentalists, local businesses, and union members, because evidence has surfaced that the developer has plans to include coal (mined by non-union miners in Utah) in the stream of export commodities. When originally planned, the developer claimed that coal exports would not be handled by the facility, but in April 2015, the Deseret News, Utah second-largest newspaper, broke the story that four counties in Utah—Carbon, Sevier, Sanpete, and Emery—were offering \$53 million to ensure that approximately half of the Oakland Bulk and Oversized Terminal's (OBOT) facilities would be dedicated to exports of Utah coal. Reportedly, Tagami's company initially lobbied Utah coal interests to invest in the bulk cargo facility. Tagami then cut a deal to turn over the operation to a newly formed company, Terminal Logistics Solutions (TLS), for a lease to operate OBOT after it is built by CCIIG.

These coal exports would be shipped to Oakland from Utah by rail, primarily along the Union Pacific mainline that follows the old Transcontinental Rail route over the Sierra Nevada Mountains at Donner Pass, through Sacramento, the Central Valley, Martinez, and the northeast Bay Area. The community opposes coal exports because they pose health risks to both residents along the rail line and the workers loading and unloading the coal. Coal exports are also likely to further enable the continued burning of fossil fuels and retard the pace of transitioning to cleaner, renewable energy sources, particularly in southeast Asia and China, where the exports are likely to end up. The opposition (for the most part), however, supports the construction of the OBOT facility, and supports the creation of well-paying, union jobs, as long as the commodities to be exported do not include coal or other fossil fuels.

Union support for the campaign against coal exports includes the Alameda Central Labor Council, which passed a resolution against coal exports on September 18, 2015, and various Bay Area ILWU Locals (including ILWU Locals 6, 10, and 34).[7] However, Teamsters Joint Council 7 and the Alameda County Building Trades have mobilized support in favor of coal exports, arguing that opposition to them could threaten the project and the potential creation of union jobs. These unions have not been entirely honest in their campaigning for Tagami and coal exports, because—like Tagami and his associates—they have claimed that those opposing coal exports oppose the entire project (false) and that the project could collapse without coal exports (unlikely).[8]

Among the unions supposedly supporting coal exports, however, the rank and file membership does not show monolithic support for their leadership. Teamsters Joint Council 7 President Rome Aloise (a Hoffa Jr. supporter) is opposed on this and many other issues by rank and file opposition aligned with Teamsters for a Democratic Union. Meanwhile, while the Laborers' Union

mobilized a number of its rank and filers to appear—and many of their employers paid for them to be there—and display affiliation with the pro-exports camp at a specially scheduled Oakland City Council meeting on September 21, most of the workers ceded their time to the developers, many of them were not entirely clear on why they'd been paid to appear (and some were threatened with termination if they refused to appear), and at least one worker, Oscar Madrigao, openly informed the media that he was offended in being used thusly and others even expressed sympathy for those opposing exports.[9]

Climate Justice in Oregon and Washington

The position of unions on climate justice in the Pacific Northwest is no less confusing or seemingly contradictory. For example, ILWU Local 4 has opposed the construction of a crude-by-rail export terminal in the Port of Longview and has even participated in demonstrations against it organized by Portland Rising Tide. However, ILWU Local 19 in Seattle has expressed opposition to the “Kayaktavists” and St John’s Bridge banner hangers who attempted to blockade the Shell arctic drilling fleet in the Spring and Summer of 2015, even though many other unions supported them. The unions’ positions on the so-called “Thin Green Line” developing in opposition to fossil fuel export terminals throughout the region has been varied and confusing to say the least. Meanwhile, grassroots environmentalists and climate justice activists have been fighting hard to gather signatures to place I-732, a carbon tax measure on the November 2015 Washington ballot, only to have their efforts undermined by a competing Cap-and-Trade measure campaigned led by Environmental NGOs and some unions. The competing initiative efforts have divided the environmental movement there, and some fear that this will result in the status quo prevailing on election day.

Contradictions or Confusion of Motives?

How does one interpret all of the seemingly contradictory positions being taken by the business unions on the matter of climate justice? How is it that the Building Trades can be in support of clean energy (other than CCAs), but in favor of coal exports, while the Steelworkers—like the climate justice movement—opposes crude oil exports but supports the WSPA in opposition to reducing the use of petroleum-based fuels domestically? How is it that the ILWU can be in favor of coal and crude export bans but support Shell’s offshore oil drilling in the Arctic? Don’t these unions know that all of these issues are related? What the frack is going on here?

Actually the situation is not as confusing and contradictory as it may first appear, but one needs to understand a few basic truths before wading further into this mess:

The labor movement is not monolithic: This much is readily obvious already, given the accounts above, but more than that it's to be expected. Different unions within the AFL-CIO (and other reformist union federations) have different cultures, different alliances, varying levels of commitment to rank and file democracy. Most unions are "democratic" on paper, but the actual culture of democracy within the union has atrophied or eroded over time through bureaucratization. Some unions are literally corrupt, and some even do have ties to the Mafia or other crime syndicates. Most are tied closely with the interests of capitalism, which limits the union's effectiveness at being a truly revolutionary, fighting workers organization. The historical process by which the labor movement evolved to its current state is long and far too complex to explain here.

Within some unions, the rank and file membership is often not organized and demobilized (except when the union officialdom is motivated to activate their membership for their own purposes), and so the leadership can easily create the illusion of consent through rank and file apathy. In their book, *Democracy is Power*, rank and file union activists, Mike Parker and Martha Gruelle, likened this to turning on (or off) a water tap. The officials turn on the faucet when an active rank and file membership serves them and off when it doesn't. The officials don't always act this way out of malevolence; it's entirely appropriate to mobilize rank and file union members to protect their interests, but it begs the question of why the rank and file permanently activated thusly (the simple answer is that doing so would ultimately challenge the union's compliant relationship to capital, a no-no in reformist unionism).

Such bureaucratization and demobilization also isn't necessarily a case of corrupt or autocratic union officials. Very often it's simply a matter of the union's structure or culture. Additionally, external factors also play a huge role in the bureaucratization of unions, such as the systemic repression and depoliticization of the working class in general by capitalism. However, there are cases when union officials are blatantly undemocratic, and challenging the incumbent union leadership through the union's legitimate democratic process (such as it is) can result in repression (or even murder). Fighting against such bureaucratization and corruption almost requires organizing a union within the union. Several rank and file organizations (or publications, at least) exist to organize and build countervailing rank and file power within the unions, including Association for Union Democracy, Labor Notes, Railroad Workers United, Teamsters for a Democratic Union, and many more.[10] To some extent, Labor Network for Sustainability and Trade Unions for Energy Democracy serve this role with a primary focus on environmentalism and climate activism.

Getting to know each individual union, its leadership, and its culture can go a long way in building alliances around environmental and climate justice issues, but more than that, cultivating relationships with individual rank and file members, particularly those with some influence or respect among the membership can also go a long way to gaining union support for climate justice initiatives.

Sometimes the unions are justifiably and genuinely concerned about the well-being of their members: Reformist unions, for all of their faults, exist to provide mutual aid and protection for their members within capitalist economic relations (if they directly challenged capitalism, they'd be revolutionary unions). One cannot expect unions representing refinery workers, miners, oil patch workers, and the like to actively campaign for policies that would result in the loss of jobs for their members.

Of course, very often, in fact almost always, the capitalists understand this and will spin any climate justice or environmentalist initiative, be it legislation, popular ballot initiatives, new regulations, or even direct action “blockadia” campaigns as a threat to “jobs” (when, in reality, it’s really their profits that are being challenged). The irony, of course, is that these same capitalists think nothing of eliminating these same jobs to advance their own economic interests, or cutting corners with the health and safety of the workers they claim to care about (and this is a wedge that environmentalists and climate justice activists can and sometimes have used to great effect to build alliances with these affected workers).[11]

For the most part, claims of job loss are lies, told by the employer, but not always. Sometimes the threat of job losses are real, though usually the lost jobs are primarily due to capitalist market processes rather than any initiatives brought about by climate justice or environmental activists.[12] Nevertheless, the employers spin these developments as the result of state interference in business activity or the effect pesky environmentalists, who are often painted as unconcerned outsiders (“unwashed-out-of-town-jobless-hippies-on-drugs”, etc.). All too often, the union officials accept the employers’ rhetoric as if it were truth.

Sometimes environmentalists do discount the concerns of the working class: Unfortunately, environmentalists and climate justice activists often unwittingly make the capitalists’ efforts to spread misinformation and turn workers against the former easier for the latter. For example, in the case of California SB 350, even though the claims made by the WSPA (including especially those regarding job losses) are false, enough uncertainty exists that unions may be inclined to support to their members’ employers.

Further exacerbating the problem is the failure of climate justice activists and environmentalists to sometimes understand the workers' concerns about job security and job quality as opposed to the quantity of jobs. In the case of SB 350, while the reduction in fossil fuel usage in California would necessitate the replacement of that power source with renewable energy, and the number of jobs created by that substitution would easily outnumber any jobs lost in the fossil fuel sector,[13] SB350 included no guarantees that these new jobs would be filled by the affected fossil fuel sector workers, that these workers would be retrained to fill these new positions (many of which require training for new skills), that these jobs would offer comparable pay and benefits, that the benefits the affected workers had already accrued (such as pension and vacation time) would be transferable, or that these jobs would be union jobs. [14]

The renewable energy industry is no less capitalistic than the fossil fuel industry, and capitalists, regardless of how "green" they may be (whether by choice or by circumstance) are still capitalists. They seek to maximize their profits through reduction in operating and capital costs, and that means paying labor as cheaply as possible, and unions represent a potential check against that. While it's true that some "green" capitalists, including many renewable energy capitalists sometimes try to be "more enlightened" than their peers, these tend to represent the exception, rather than the rule, and generally, unless the individual capitalist can eke out a role as a niche operator, most capitalist businesses seek to grow and dominate the market (else they face the possibility being eliminated or bought out by their competitors). Therefore its understandable that workers and unions representing them might be skeptical or hostile towards environmental measures that might even benefit them in the long-term.

Part of the problem stems from the fact that the environmental and climate justice movement(s) lack class coherence. While the environmental movement is no more monolithic than the unions, the unions, at least, can justifiably claim that they're charged with representing the working class (whether they actually do this, in practice, is another matter); this is not the case with the environmental movement. There's a great deal of class stratification within the movement and even within some organizations.

While it's certainly true that the vast majority of environmentalists and climate justice activists belong to the (for lack of a better term) "99%", some of them are, (again for the lack of a better term) petit bourgeois, having capitalistic perspectives and outlooks. Many of them have privileged backgrounds and have never worked in a heavy industry job or have any union experience. The latter may assume that it's perfectly justifiable for a refinery worker to experience unemployment, because "that's life," or "other workers lose their

jobs," etc., under market conditions, as if this were somehow ethically or morally acceptable. In some cases, members of the 1% (the upper echelons of the capitalist class) even belong to these organizations for various reasons (usually out of a desire to set aside portions of wilderness areas, ostensibly for conservation and protection of biodiversity, but often, in reality, to create private wilderness playgrounds for themselves to the exclusion of all others).

Additionally, there are differing varieties of environmental organizations, and the structure of these types often predetermines (to a large extent) their orientation to either capitalism or the working class. Environmental Non-government Organizations (ENGOs), usually constituted as 501c3 nonprofits, tend to be much more capitalistically oriented, because nonprofit law was intended to facilitate that. 501c3s are set up to accept tax-deductible donations (as well as membership contributions), and the majority of these would naturally come from those with more disposable income, i.e. the capitalists and petit bourgeois, and that will influence policy decisions.

On top of that, such organizations tend to receive a good deal of funding through foundation grants, which are third-party organizations specifically established to allow wealthy individuals to lessen their tax burdens through charitable donations. To make matters worse, the administration and directorship of such organizations tends to be predominantly composed of professional, college educated individuals, which again favors the more wealthy and capitalistically oriented. The working class members of such organizations tend to be the majority, but they lack access to the positions of power in such organizations (often simply because they lack the time, energy, and resources necessary to build working class blocs within them).

That's not to suggest that ENGOs don't still do a power of good for environmentalist or climate justice causes, or even workers affected by them, but the likelihood is that they'll tend towards reformism, simply because of their structure. Addressing workers' needs has historically been a secondary consideration for these organizations, because it has been so for the majority of those individuals with power within them. There is, of course, a range of attentiveness to workers' concerns among the ENGOs (as well as the concerns of indigenous peoples, people of color, women, etc.). While it's probably not universally true, the likelihood is that the larger the organization's treasury, the more it's oriented towards capitalism.

The situation is somewhat different for grassroots coalitions, local groups, or radical environmental movements, because many of them lack the funding from or direct influence of the capitalist class. The majority of the membership tend to be rank and file, mostly working class individuals who're genuinely concerned about the environment, and these organizations are staffed almost exclusively by volunteers who've no career aspirations in taking on such

positions. Still, these organizations are not universally composed of working class people (some of the members are small business owners), and within the membership, class privilege will assert itself organically, usually unconsciously, if unchecked.

It's a simple reality that working class people have greater and more time-consuming survival needs, often leaving those with less the freedom to take on positions of responsibility of leadership and power within them. Add to that, most of the 99%, especially working class people, have been depoliticized by at least three generations of capitalist repression (and the lack of class struggle unionism), and lack class consciousness as a result, so that even they might not directly consider the needs and concerns of the workers in polluting industries that their organizations challenge.

One might think that radical environmental organizations (or, to be more accurate, movements, since such groupings tend to lack formal structure), such as Earth First!, Rising Tide North America, and others would have a more class conscious perspective than small grassroots groups or ENGOs, and that's somewhat true, but not always. Radical environmentalism incorporates some class struggle perspectives, but it can (but doesn't always) include a variable mixture of Malthusians, primitivists, misanthropes, deep ecologists, insurrectionist anarchists, back-to-the-land types, and nihilists.[15] All of the latter tend to overlook, ignore, or misidentify the source of ecological destruction and climate change (capitalism), preferring instead to blame other factors such as "excess human population," "technology and/or civilization," "humans in general," "anthropocentrism," or "structuralism."

Such groups also tend to focus their efforts primarily on tactics (primarily direct action blockades and occupations, which serve a potentially useful purpose, but can be misdirected or poorly applied) rather than strategy. Further, such groups often count among their members a good deal of the so-called "precariat" (working class people with no stable job or income, and very unstable living arrangements) as well as jobless and homeless individuals, and for them, identifying with workers in more stable jobs and living situations can sometimes trigger resentment.

The unions' position on climate justice issues may not actually be directly related to climate justice: There's an old adage: the enemy of my enemy is my friend, but anyone with an ounce of common sense knows that this isn't always the case. There's another old saying: a broken clock is right twice per day. In the case of some unions, their stance on climate issues may simply be a happy coincidence. For example, the various California building trades unions' stance on SB350 might seem like overwhelming political support for climate justice and full-blown green unionism, but the evidence strongly suggests that this simply represents a case of opportunism. Consider that the capitalist utilities,

PG&E, SDG&E, and Southern California Edison also supported SB350. These are the employers of many IBEW members and the building trades tend to stick together. Had the employers opposed SB350, it's not unlikely that the Building Trades would have done so also.

Considering that the record of the building trades has generally been opposed to climate justice measures, such as Community Choice Aggregation, supporting coal export bans, favoring Keystone XL and so forth, it's a pretty safe bet that the Building Trades were acting out of self-interest (they'd likely get the new jobs).

Even when one of the building trades, such as IBEW Local 569, go against the flow (as was the case with Community Choice Aggregation in San Diego, it's still primarily a case of self-interest. The Building Trades unions, including IBEW locals that opposed CCA in San Diego are all largely representatives of workers employed by the utilities with whom CCA seeks to enter into competition. Local 569 isn't, and instead represents primarily workers who would get the jobs created by the CCA.

In other cases, unions may also be motivated by animosity towards other unions. For example, in the Port of Oakland, there's no love lost between the Teamsters and the ILWU. The decision by the ILWU to support the coal export ban and the Teamsters to oppose it was probably not primarily driven by the two unions political opposition to each other on past issues, but it no doubt crossed the minds of some of those influential leaders who factored into the decision, and that may have hardened each union's position on the matter.

That's not to suggest that the unions are bastions of naked greedy self-interest or utterly unreachable in matters of climate justice or green unionism. Some, such as National Nurses United, are much more consistently steadfast in their support for climate justice and their opposition to fossil fuel extractivism. Others, like the ILWU and USW, tend to be supportive of climate justice, except when they believe (rightly or wrongly) their interests are directly threatened by the climate justice initiative. Others, like the Building trades, tend to only support climate justice initiatives if they directly benefit from them.

To some extent, it's also sometimes (but not always) true that the unions that tend to take more progressive (or even revolutionary) stances on climate justice (and other) issues tend to have memberships that are predominantly composed of women, nonwhite males, queer, and trans people, and primarily represent workers in the service and public transportation sectors. Those that don't tend to represent predominantly white, heterosexual, cis-gendered males working in what are traditionally considered "macho" jobs, and building construction often conforms to this stereotype.[16] This is not entirely coincidental.

The right wing of the capitalist class has, for half a century, effectively divided the US working class by appealing to and stoking reactionary fears among its white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, male members, including appealing to machismo and painting progressive and revolutionary ideas as being “effete”. Climate justice and environmentalism are no exceptions to that rule.

This landscape seems to be finally changing, slightly, and the more that renewable energy supplants traditional fossil fuels and nuclear fission as energy sources, and the more jobs are gained in the former and lost in the latter, the more likely the unions are to organize among the newer jobs, and the more unions are likely to shift in their positions on climate justice issues (if the inherent dangers posed by climate change aren't enough), but this is still a largely reactive stance. It, alone, won't drive the change that is needed to accelerate the process of transitioning to a non-fossil-fuel based, energy democracy economy, because in order to accomplish the latter, the shift must be driven by the working class at the point of production. Such a shift would ultimately benefit the workers of the world the most, but, as has been shown, above, the unions don't consistently take that position. The big question is, why not?

Sometimes the unions are being disingenuous and are carrying the water for the employers: The USW's opposition to SB350 partly stemmed from very real fears—stoked by the WSPA and their employers, certainly—that if passed unamended, the new regulations would have threatened their jobs. While it can be shown, with some effort, that this is a lie, and the USW's fears are mostly unfounded, the reasons for the USW's position are (as explained above), frustrating, if understandable. However, in the case of IBEW 1245's opposition to Clean Power SF or the Teamsters support for coal exports through the proposed OBOT, there's simply no excuse. Ample evidence exists to demonstrate that in either case, there is simply no credible threat to the jobs of either union's members.

Illustrating the point further, in the case of the Teamsters' Joint Council 7 support for coal exports through the OBOT, council President, Rome Aloise claims that District 7 represents “74,000 railroad workers.” In this figure he likely includes the entire nationwide membership of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen (BLET), which totals “55,000 workers and growing” and perhaps also the nationwide membership of the Brotherhood of Maintenance of Way (BMWED), which numbers “under than 40,000,” both of whom are Teamster affiliates, but are hardly entirely all under his sole jurisdiction.

Yet, those who oppose coal exports have no opposition whatsoever to the export of other commodities, such as grain, and most of them agree that the least fossil fuel intensive mode of transportation of those goods would be by

rail, handled by those same “74,000” (or whatever) workers Aloise claims to represent.

Furthermore, while the BLET and BMWED supported California SB730, which made it California law that all freight transported within the state of California by rail would require a minimum of two crew members on each train (a measure that the coalition opposing coal exports also unanimously supported), a measure that would protect railroad workers’ jobs and the safety of all, neither the Teamsters, their rail union affiliates, nor Rome Aloise have actively supported the Railroad Workers United led campaigns to address railroad worker fatigue, to improve track maintenance, or to oppose long and heavy trains.[17] Such measures, if enacted, would almost definitely increase the number of railroad jobs, and those jobs would mostly be represented by the unions under Aloise’s jurisdiction!

Clearly, Aloise isn’t as concerned with jobs as much as he is with maintaining District Council 7’s favorable relationship with Phil Tagami.¹⁸ This is an all too common occurrence. In many cases, especially involving the Teamsters and Building Trades (but, by no means exclusively), the union leadership envisions the unions as junior partners with the businesses by whom their members are employed, and are unwilling to buck that relationship.

Furthermore, very often the union officialdom, especially the international officers (but often also the local officials) have close ties to Democratic Party (and sometimes even Republican Party) politicians and have quid pro quo relationships with the latter. Likewise, since both the Republicans and Democrats serve in a capitalist state, they almost unflinchingly serve the interests of capital (and have close ties with powerful capitalist interests who finance their election campaign war chests). Thus, either directly or by proxy, the unions are unwilling to bite the hand they perceive to be feeding them, and in that lies the crux of the problem.

The Problem is Capitalism

We find that the centering of the management of industries into fewer and fewer hands makes the trade unions unable to cope with the ever-growing power of the employing class. The trade unions foster a state of affairs which allows one set of workers to be pitted against another set of workers in the same industry, thereby helping defeat one another in wage wars. Moreover, the trade unions aid the employing class to mislead the workers into the belief that the working class have interests in common with their employers.

These conditions can be changed and the interest of the working class upheld only by an organization formed in such a way that all its members in any one industry, or in all industries if necessary, cease work whenever a strike or

lockout is on in any department thereof, thus making an injury to one an injury to all.

Instead of the conservative motto, “A fair day’s wage for a fair day’s work,” we must inscribe on our banner the revolutionary watchword, “Abolition of the wage system.” —excerpt from the Preamble to the IWW Constitution.

One compromise made by a white-collar Sierra Club professional can destroy more trees than a logger can cut in a lifetime.—Judi Bari, 1994

Ultimately the source of the unions’ hesitancy in fully supporting climate justice efforts (and, in no small part, the environmentalists’ failure to gain the unions’ support) can be traced to the same source: a lack of willingness on the part of the union officialdom (and the environmentalist leadership) to directly challenge capitalism. Capitalism is inherently anti-ecological. It cannot be reformed. Yet, both the reformist unions and the leadership of many mainstream “Big Green” NGOs have tried, unsuccessfully, to reform it, or—failing that—partner with it. The ultimate result of such efforts is compromise and failure, at least if the goal is achieving advances for the working class or ecological sustainability.

Yet, it’s becoming quite obvious that the only way to stave off certain ecological destruction, whether through frying the Earth’s biosphere by global warming, or the loss of biodiversity by growth-for-growth’s sake economics (what Edward Abbey rightfully called “the ideology of a cancer cell”), is to overthrow capitalism.

Clearly this will not happen through the leadership of most reformist unions (even those that occasionally take the right side in the climate justice fight) or the NGOs. It is true that both have occasionally done a power of good, but usually that’s the result of rank and file grassroots pushing from below, and ultimately that’s where the transformative power needed to survive and flourish lies.

The transition will no doubt require the collectivization and/or nationalization of workplaces and industries, but that is a long-term process that requires time and substantially more organization than currently exists (though this goal should be pursued, regardless). It’s tempting to propose blanket solutions to this problem, such as forming a mass (explicitly socialist) workers’ party or organizing a revolutionary (often syndicalist) union to oppose the reformism of the business unions and NGOs in response to capitalism.

Both approaches may be (at least) part of the overall solution, but part of the process of doing so must also include engaging workers at the point of production, including those already represented by existing, reformist unions,

especially because the urgency of addressing climate change will tolerate no delays.

Some Potential Solutions

Climate justice activists, radical environmentalists, and revolutionary activists alike agree that deep transformative change is required, and that requires that they play “the long game”, but in the short term, tactical steps must be taken to achieve the ultimate goals. Some of the following steps can help bring that about.

It is important to remember the following caveat before attempting any of the following strategies: Climate Justice and environmental campaigns will take on a variety of targets and forms. In some cases, the campaign may be an attempt to pass a law, enact a new regulation, win a public ballot initiative, replace a regulator with one less favorable to rubber stamping business as usual, or oppose expansion at a specific facility.

In most of these cases, unless there is independent rank and file organization among the workers already, and—in cases where they have a union—the union is controlled by its rank and file, the tendency of the workers will likely turn towards supporting the employer. This is an expected outcome under capitalist driven workplace dynamics.

It's much easier to convince unions and union workers not directly affected by the climate justice or environmental campaign to support it than those who are affected by it. Simply convincing the workers to publicly remain neutral can often be counted as a victory. Actually convincing the rank and file, let alone the union officialdom, to actively oppose their employers in such disputes is very difficult, unless the campaign happens to coincide with periods when the union is engaged in contract disputes with that same employer. Outside of those times, for the union to take a more oppositional stance requires a much more organized, adversarial union movement (and, it should be obvious by now that a more powerful climate justice and environmental movement would greatly benefit from a much more organized and adversarial union movement).

Know the enemy: Any climate justice or environmental initiative (as well as any union organizing effort or battle in the class struggle) will draw opposition from those that will be most challenged by it. Fossil fuel capitalists will not willingly tolerate any risk to their short (or long) term profits. Ecological measures and unionization both represent such a challenge, and will inevitably be opposed by the capitalists, so any strategy to achieve ecological sustainability or gains for the working class must be prepared to address that opposition. Failure to do so will result in partial or complete failure of the

campaign. It's crucial to know and understand the adversaries' weak points, politically and economically. Since the workers at the point of production and all along the supply chain represent choke points, gaining their support is essential (though often very difficult).

Due to the lack of a well-organized, revolutionary union movement (or mass based workers' party, if one prefers), rank and file workers are often distrustful of those who would challenge the status quo, especially if it affects their means of well-being (and the employers know this and exacerbate such fears). In the case of fossil fuel infrastructure and supply chains, those employed in such operations perceive attempts to more strongly regulate, limit, or replace them as direct threats, especially when those making the challenge offer no credible alternative.

It's essential to understand that the employer is using the workers as pawns in their game, and in order to manufacture consent, the carrot is the promise of jobs and prosperity and the stick the threat of losing them. Effectively winning the workers' support necessitates addressing both the carrot and stick, and it also requires that climate justice and environmental activists show compassion towards the workers employed by the capitalists being challenged, even if the workers take the latter's side. The workers are generally not the enemy, even if they sympathize with and sometimes enable the enemy.[19]

Treat each campaign like a union organizing effort: Winning the workers' support in a climate justice campaign is not much different from winning a fellow worker's support in a union organizing effort. It requires playing a successful "ground game", including developing a strategy, compiling a list of individual workers, social mapping, one-on-one meetings, door-knocking house visits, training, developing leaders, etc.[20] Admittedly, this is difficult in climate justice campaigns when approaching a workplace that may be affected by the campaign from the outside. In some cases, it may simply not be possible, but where it is, it should be attempted, both for short and long term advantage.

The IWW, in its organizer training, describes the process of AEIOU (Agitation, Education, Inoculation, Organization, and Unionization). In the case of a climate justice or environmental campaign, how that might look in the case of workers as well as everybody else like this:

- A = Agitation: The climate justice campaign would visibly begin challenge the status quo with literature, rallies, social media, appearances at hearings, etc;
- E = Education: The campaign organizers would hold trainings and information sessions to raise awareness and information about why the campaign is important;

- I = Inoculation: The campaign organizers would anticipate the response from the targeted interests, including talking points and propaganda and prepare a rebuttal. Potential supporters would be given a small dose of these potential countermeasures in order to prepare them for the real ones;
- O = Organization: The campaign must develop leaders and spokes people among the constituencies organizing against the targeted industrial targets to spread, grow, and build the campaign;
- U = Unionization: In the case of a climate justice campaign, the campaign organizers aren't forming a "union" in the traditional sense, but rather an organized body that is capable of long term opposition to the capitalist industry (and others) in the long term sense.

The "ground game" is essential to building a movement capable of countering the capitalists who're often well-trained in the art of propaganda and have scripted playbooks for neutralizing opposition (including, but not limited to painting the challenges to their profiteering as "outsiders" (or, to once again conflate the standard talking points often used by capitalists, "unwashed-out-of-town-jobless-hippies-on-drugs"), coercing their workers into acting as a block of "support" (or, at the very least, the appearance of support), or forming fake "astroturf" supposedly grassroots seeming groups to create the illusion of community support for their interests (and sometimes there are genuine enables among such groups, but often these are in the minority in reality).

Sometimes, identity politics do matter: A fatal mistake too often made by environmentalists, climate justice activists, and—to be fair—union organizers, is falling into the trap of playing the "knight in shining armor" (to put it politely) or "the great white savior" (to be more blunt). Like it or not, if the workers or community in which the targeted industry is based is predominantly composed of women, people of color, or working class white folks, and the campaign leaders are professional looking, college educated white "middle class" professionals, the campaign will be seen by those in the community as outsiders, and they will be met with distrust. The capitalists know this and will do everything the can to sow divisions between the organizers and affected communities.

It is, therefore, crucial that the campaign organizers cultivate leadership and spokespeople from all constituents within the affected community, including all ethnic groups, workers, businesses, faith communities, etc., and those leaders must be respected individuals within those communities. Doing so is often challenging, especially when remaining committed to rank and file democracy, and sometimes egos may get bruised in the process, but experience shows, time and again, if this is not done, the campaign will fail.

An Injury to One is an Injury to All: In many cases, the goals of climate justice

and environmental campaigns are actually not inconsistent with the long-term best interest of the workers, though these congruencies are sometimes hard to spot initially. For example, railroad workers are concerned about safety and workplace issues, such as preventing the reduction in train crews from two to one, eliminating excessively long and heavy trains, adopting regular and consistent scheduling (to prevent fatigue), increased track maintenance, and the like.

All such measures protect the railroad workers' personal safety, but they also greatly reduce the likelihood of accidents, such as derailments which might cause a disaster similar to the incident at Lac Mégantic. Those opposing crude-by-rail may not, in the short term, be able to convince railroad workers to share their opposition outright at first, but they can agree that making these trains safer is a useful goal in preventing further catastrophe.[21]

In the case of refineries, workers are generally concerned about safety. Accidents can often be attributable to either inadequate (or worn out) equipment, inadequate safety training, or fatigued workers. Climate justice and environmental activists would therefore do well to support refinery workers (even those that vehemently disagree with them in matters of climate or the environment) in such disputes, whenever possible, in order to demonstrate good faith. It's not always easy to make these connections.

Very often the only opportunity to do so in a non-adversarial fashion is on a picket line (unless, of course, the climate justice activist and the refinery worker have existing social bonds outside the context of the struggle, such as both having children in the same schools, churches, scouting groups, or youth sports leagues for example). In some cases, making connections between climate justice activists and refinery workers (or workers of any other sort, for that matter) requires striking up a conversation in a setting where the two are on opposite sides of an issue (such as at a public hearing) and delicately winning trust.

Sometimes, doing the unexpected can go a long way. For example, in 1988, in Mendocino and Humboldt County, the Louisiana Pacific corporation shuttered two of its timber mills, claiming that the shut downs were due to constraints placed on their logging activities by lawsuits filed by environmentalists in order to protect the Northern Spotted Owl (in actual fact, there were no lawsuits against L-P for that reason and the company was actually preparing to outsource those mill jobs to Mexico). More than 150 mill workers lost their jobs. The Earth First! chapter there, led by IWW members including Judi Bari and Darryl Cherney, called L-P's bluff by promising to withdraw any lawsuits or Spotted Owl set-asides if the company would agree to re-open the mills, hire back all of the furloughed workers, and promise them job security. The

company, of course, refused (because they had been lying all along), but many of the timber workers in the area realized that the Earth First!ers were not their enemies, and many of them started (mostly secretly) feeding them information about timber harvest plans and other internal operations.

Currently, there is a push by fossil fuel interests to lift a ban on unrefined crude oil exports from the United States. Climate justice activists oppose that change, because doing so would likely result in prolonging the transition to renewable energy sources, and the crude would be refined in nations where environmental regulations are even weaker than they currently are domestically. The USW (and the refineries themselves) oppose lifting the ban, because it could threaten their jobs (or their operations). While the short-term goals of the two groups may be divergent, the opportunity to forge alliances and trust between the climate justice movement and refinery workers exists and should be seized upon.

Identify Common Adversaries: Beyond the examples previously listed, it may be possible to forge alliances between workers and environmentalists in order to defeat common adversaries, such as an unpopular politician, a particularly obnoxious boss, or other interests. Doing so may not be possible in an immediate campaign, but can be part of the proverbial “long game”. For example, the Koch Brothers are one of the biggest financial supporters of climate denialism. This is due, in no small part, to the fact that they profit very heavily from fossil fuel extraction. They also happen to be one of the biggest supporters of the so-called union destroying “right-to-work” movement. Establishing a campaign against the Koch Brothers for both would be one way to forge alliances between climate justice activists and union workers, even those workers engaged in fossil fuel related industries. A long-term campaign to bring down such a powerful adversary would naturally create many opportunities for both constituencies to discuss matters of workplace safety and environmentalism.

Agree to Disagree: Climate Justice and Class Struggle both require playing the long game. While union workers and climate justice activists should see both as having common goals, in the short term, there may be incidents where one group cannot agree with the terms of the other, either in part or in whole. For example, those opposing crude-by-rail may not be able to convince railroad workers to oppose it, but they can agree on other issues (such as the safety measures previously outlined).

In such cases, the best strategy is to agree to disagree. Accept that agreement exists to an extent, but not completely. Do not fixate on the disagreement, and consider the long game. If trust has been established between both groups, sometimes it's possible to formally communicate the message “we disagree on this particular issue, but we consider you allies, still intend support you in the

long term.”

Beware the trap of reformism: The source of many disagreements is the willingness by either the environmentalists or the unions to work within the capitalist system. Very often, environmentalists seek to use or modify existing regulatory processes to achieve their goals, or the unions will reach accommodation with their employers to minimize the often messy and unpredictable results of a prolonged class conflict. The capitalists, meanwhile, are seeking to continue to maximize their profits. In doing so, the latter will attempt to shift any costs they might incur elsewhere.

If environmentalists succeed in constraining the capitalists engaged in ecologically destructive practices, or enacting new regulations that create new constraints, the capitalists will likely incur a loss of profits unless they cut costs or raise prices elsewhere. Usually this results in shifting the burdens to the workers through job cuts, speed ups, cuts in safety measures, etc. Naturally, the workers will oppose this, and the employers will seek to misdirect the workers’ anger towards the environmentalists or regulatory agencies.

Likewise, if the union is successful in gaining workplace improvements or securing higher wages, the bosses will try to either expand their business (to maintain profit margins) which will result in more ecological destruction, or seek to weaken environmental regulations (not that they don’t constantly do this anyway). This is the trap presented by reformism.

Don’t discount the concerns of workers, even if they don’t seem immediately related to the climate justice campaign’s goals: SB 350 campaign failed and the Washington State I-732 campaign was co-opted, in no small part, because the campaign leaders didn’t directly address the concerns of the workers and communities that would potentially be affected by them. For example, supporters of SB 350 rightfully pointed out that the WSPA’s claims that if passed unamended, the refineries would immediately relocate to other states with laxer environmental regulations, were bogus,[22] but in the case of addressing the long term implications for refinery workers’ employment, pointed to vague and undefined statistics about potential replacement jobs in renewable energy fields.

While such jobs do exist and will no doubt vastly outnumber any jobs lost in the refining field, SB350 contained no concrete language or guarantees that these jobs would be awarded to the refinery workers (let alone in order of seniority), that these jobs would be unionized, that these workers would be retrained, or receive any severance package. Some supporters of the bill promised that such concerns “would be addressed later” (presumably in a follow-up bill), but such promises carry no actual political force, and given the tendency by politicians—99.9% of whom have capitalist orientations—to cut

deals and horse trade, the likelihood is that the workers concerns would have been negotiated away anyway, because, in the vulgar language of statecraft “politics is the art of the possible.”

Without a much more strongly organized movement, led by grassroots climate justice activists and rank and file workers making “Just Transition” demands indivisible with demands for transitioning from fossil fuel capitalism to energy democracy, the workers need would naturally be sacrificed on the altar of profit should strict limitations be placed on fossil fuel operations in one state, such as California, and in that sense, the WSPA is technically correct that the workers’ livelihoods would be in doubt. Sure, the refinery workers would likely be able to find work, and many of them would find work in the renewable energy industry, the transition would still be messy and uncertain, with disruptions to married and family life, and unpredictable consequences. It’s simply not enough to make vague promises to workers that “the jobs will be created,” and many workers would find it insulting.

And, to be certain, some environmentalists are genuinely callous and insensitive to workers’ concerns. For example, in the 1990s, in a discussion on an email list established by Earth First!ers (led by Kelpie Wilson) to address the Salvage Logging Rider signed into law by then President Bill Clinton,[23] when the issue of protection of logging and mill workers came up (in the context of new regulations that might overturn the rider), one environmentalist remarked that he addressed the concerns of timber workers and jobs by saying “get used to working at Starbucks.”[24]

By contrast, Judi Bari and Naomi Wagner, both IWW members working within Earth First! with experience as labor organizers and union members, developed the following ten “Earth First! Logging Rules” to address concerns of timber workers whose jobs might be effected by more stringent timber practices (many of these ideas were suggested by the timber workers with whom they had cultivated relationships):

1. NO OLD GROWTH CUTTING — not one more tree. We know that there may be individual exceptions, but basically we’ve taken so much old growth that there’s not much left and we need to preserve it.
2. NO CLEARCUTTING — No minimum acreage. No shelterwood removal. Selection cutting only.
3. INVENTORY MUST INCREASE 10% PER DECADE — until forests are restored to their maximum productivity at which point you could then go to sustained yield.
4. NO HIGH GRADING, NO MONOCULTURE — Forest management must be for all ages and all species.
5. PROTECT WILDLIFE MIGRATION CORRIDORS — as defined by biologists and experts.

6. DAMAGED WATERSHEDS MUST BE IDENTIFIED AND RESTORED — restoration jobs at comparable wages to logging jobs, and financed by the companies that did the damage. Priority hiring for displaced timber workers.
7. NO CONVERSION OF TIMBERLANDS — No more vineyards or subdivisions. Timberlands must stay timberlands.
8. HIGHEST POSSIBLE USE OF THE RESOURCE — No chipping baby trees for pulp, fiber or fuel. High quality saw wood products only.
9. SECONDARY JOBS STAY IN THE AREA — All value-added processes, such as milling and planing, must be done on site or close by. No Mexico mills or Siberia operations at our expense.
10. RESTITUTION — No corporate ownership. Corporate executives will be put to work cleaning up toxic spills and hot spots at the abandoned mill sites that they have left in their wake.

With a little effort and research, similar proposals and demands can be crafted for any industry targeted by climate justice and/or environmental campaigns.

More recently, Trade Unions for Energy Democracy has drafted a detailed document on how to win the support of union workers for transformation from a fossil fuel based economy to one based on renewable energy.

Focus on the Big Picture: Climate justice activists need to understand how their actions affect the entire capitalist system. Focusing on one narrow area may represent an incremental victory, but can actually weaken their position in the long game (the same is true for unions in regards to class struggle). All too often it's tempting to rely solely on reformism and incrementalism, because the overall strategy of challenging capitalism seems simply too daunting to consider. A little historical perspective is useful here. The New Deal, enacted by President Franklin D Roosevelt, and the social democratic period of Western Capitalism that followed (until its dismantling by Reagan and Thatcher in the 1980s) happened because the capitalist class feared that the U.S. working class might bring about a revolution. Several decades of agitation and organizing by various socialist, communist, and anarchist tendencies coupled with the Great Depression had emboldened and radicalized the working class.

While many or the more right-leaning capitalists vehemently and loudly condemned the New Deal, many of the slicker and more sophisticated capitalists knew that acquiescing to it was in their best interests. They bided their time and very slowly and very quietly began to undermine it piece by piece, little by little, slowly demobilizing the labor movement, steering it further and further in the direction of reformism and bureaucracy while isolating the radicals and convincing the majority of the working class that the latter were a nefarious element. It took almost a half century to do so, but the

capitalist class never lost site of the long game and ultimately destroyed the New Deal by the end of the 20th Century.

Therefore, it stands to reason that climate justice activists and workers need to understand that they, too, must play this “long game.” That means that sometimes, they may not win everything at once. Sometimes they may have to accept a few compromises with affected workers, such as 45% reduction in fossil fuels as opposed to 50%, in order to secure the support of those workers. By doing so, the climate justice activists potentially gain the alliance with these same workers and can campaign together to demand just transition as well as fossil fuel usage reductions. Likewise, it may be necessary to accept some safer crude-by-rail transportation in exchange for much better and safer conditions for railroad workers (which will also result in less profit for the bosses).

Such compromises are never desirable, but they need to be seen in the context of the greater goal, and that is putting an end to capitalism and fossil fuel based energy. One may object and say that this is no less an “incrementalist” strategy that also falls into the trap of reformism, but there is a significant difference between making compromises to win the support of workers (which will build a stronger movement to challenge capitalism overall) and making compromises to win the support of politicians and capitalists (which won't).

The capitalist class was able to defeat anti-capitalist revolution by sacrificing some of its power, temporarily in the short term, in exchange for class collaborationist unions, in order to defeat the left wing revolutionary unions, and it worked. The climate justice movement and workers must be prepared to make a few sacrifices in order to defeat capitalism (or else we're all doomed, anyway). The long game is essential.

What Would Winning Look Like? In matters of climate justice, winning isn't just desirable, it's essential! There are no jobs on a dead planet, and capitalism cannot be reformed. Fortunately, the changes that are necessary to transform human civilization into one more ecologically sustainable will necessarily bring about the end of capitalism and the transformation of the economic sphere into one that is more democratic and approaching the utopian visions put forward by Marxists and anarchists alike (Marxists and anarchists can debate the particulars of their respective visions elsewhere).

An inspiring vision of what this transformation might look like is proposed by the organization Trade Unions for Energy Democracy in this short video:



In all phases of the campaign, there should be attention paid to the immediate goals, the long game, and the ultimate ideal. The three should mesh as well as possible. It's not always easy, and often the connections are unclear, but where they can be identified, they can help inspire others, including workers employed by the targeted industries to support the campaign. Another world is not just possible, it's a matter of survival. Fortunately, that world is a good one.

Notes

[1] Trade Unions for Energy Democracy, itself is not a union, but a coalition of unions who agree with the general position that the climate destroying, fossil fuel based economy and energy system must be replaced, by workers organizing at the point of production (and elsewhere) with "Energy Democracy". This process would necessarily entail the unions involved in it to actively challenge capitalism, especially fossil fuel based capitalism.

[2] Labor Network for Sustainability has published a comprehensive, though not exhaustive guide—or Labor Landscape Analysis, rather—on where unions stand on environmental issues, albeit through largely social democratic lenses.

[3] The Laborers' union is essentially regurgitating fossil fuel industry propaganda in saying this. All of the claims they make have been thoroughly debunked by a Cornell University Global Labor Institute study, Pipe dreams?

Jobs Gained, Jobs Lost by the Construction of Keystone XL published in September 2011.

[4] In fact, the Blue-Green Alliance is hardly a bastion of militant green unionism in any meaningful sense. They've refused to take a stand opposing the misleadingly labeled "clean coal" (because the USW supports it, while the Sierra Club opposes it). They gave California Governor Jerry Brown an award for "environmental stewardship" in 2013, even though Brown refuses to ban fracking in California, supports charter schools (a tool the capitalist class uses to destroy teachers' unions, among other goals), and pushed for the construction of a controversial water diversion tunnel project in California's Sacramento River Delta region (among other environmentally destructive and anti-union acts). The following year, they issued the same award to President Barack Obama's pro-fracking and pro-nuclear power energy secretary, Ernest Moniz.

Ironically the seed of the Blue Green Alliance was planted by myself and two Earth First!ers (Mikal Jakubal and Andy Caffery) in 1998, in a successful attempt to unite striking USW members in a contract dispute with Kaiser Aluminum and Earth First! who were fighting to save the Headwaters Forest in Humboldt County of California from the chain saws of the Pacific Lumber Corporation. Both companies had been relatively progressive (under capitalism, at least) until taken over by corporate junk-bond financier Charles Hurwitz in the late 1980s (with the tacit support of the Reagan administration). The alliance morphed into the Alliance for Sustainable Jobs and the Environment, which begat the Apollo Alliance, which, in turn begat the Blue-Green Alliance. Each successive change has resulted in the increasing bureaucratization and demobilization of what was once a rank and file alliance between militant rank and file steel workers and radical deep ecology environmentalists, and the morphing of its successors into what is essentially a front for the corporate wing of the US Democratic Party. It's clearly not what myself, Jakubal and Caffery intended.

[5] Hence the number "350", i.e. 50% increase in building efficiency, 50% electricity generated by renewable energy, and 50% reduction in GHG emissions, or three-times-fifty. The bill was also authored, in large part, with a good deal of input from the climate activist NGO "350".

[6] A complete list of SB350's supporters can be found here. It should be noted that SB350 also drew support from many capitalist interests, including the state's two major private utility companies, Pacific Gas & Electric and Southern California Edison.

[7] The individual unions that signed onto the letter of opposition to coal exports, at the time of this writing, included AFSCME District Council 57, ATU Local 192, APWU Local 78, the Bay Area General Membership Branch of the IWW, California Nurses Association, ILWU Local 34, National Nurses United, Oakland Education Association, Peralta Federation of Teachers, SEIU 1021, SEIU USWW, UNITE HERE 2850, and UAW Local 2865 (ILWU Locals 6 and 10 passed their own resolutions against coal exports). A complete list of supporters of the coal export ban is available [here](#).

[8] Teamsters District Council 7 drafted this letter in opposition to the grassroots campaign against coal exports, which was rebutted in this response.

[9] This is actually a time-honored script, carried out by employers profiting off of resource extraction, but easily exposed as theater if one looks closely enough. The employers do everything they can to paint the picture that they represent the community and those that oppose them are outsiders (or generally “unwashed-out-of-town-jobless-hippies-on-drugs” if one were to conflate all of the propagandistic talking points used to smear dissenters). In Oakland, the “pro”-coal workers wore yellow shirts, provided by the developers, reading “I Support Oakland Jobs” (as if those opposing coal exports somehow didn’t) in contrast to the opposition’s union-made and union-printed red shirts, which were provided by the Sierra Club. Such tactics date back at least a quarter century and were used very heavily during the “Timber Wars” in the late 1980s and early 1990s, where green and yellow colors were used to divide the “environmental” and “worker” camps, even though the greens included no shortage of timber workers themselves, including one logger, Ernie Pardini, who conducted a tree sit in 1993, with the support of Earth First! and the yellows—in spite of their loud and vociferous claims to be the defenders of the timber workers—would think nothing about sending scabs across a lumber mill workers’ union picket line. (for more details on the timber struggles, visit judibari.info and ecology.iww.org).

[10] These organizations have varying approaches to the problem of (lack of) union democracy and corruption. AUD, for example, takes a legalistic approach, sometimes to the extent of relying on (capitalist) state legal apparatuses to charge corrupt union officials, which is not always appreciated among rank and file militants who see the interference of the state as an equal (or larger) threat to rank and file union democracy. Labor Notes is primarily a newspaper and propaganda league, and as such, some left critics find it limited to some extent, even though it does conduct “Troublemakers’ Schools” for rank and file militants. Beyond that, however, some Marxists and syndicalists question the wisdom of seeking to elect leftist leadership to (what they perceive as) fatally flawed reformist union leadership when they believe

that a more effective strategy would entail organizing a revolutionary workers' party or revolutionary syndicalist unions to directly challenge capital instead, however many Labor Notes supporters are open to both approaches, and in the case of climate justice and understanding the union structure, Labor Notes can be an invaluable resource.

[11] Earth First! – IWW Local #1, led by Judi Bari (among others) did this to great effect among union and even non union loggers and mill workers in northwestern California between 1988-98 (sometimes even challenging the union officialdom of the International Woodworkers Association and Carpenters' Unions who often collaborated with the employers in not only clearcutting old growth forests but eliminating these same timber workers jobs in the hundreds). For more information, see judibari.info.

[12] For example, oil production jobs declined by nearly 200,000 between October 2014 and September 2015, due in large part to the decline in oil prices from a high of \$114 US per barrel (Brent Crude) in June 2014 to as low as \$37 US. The decline has been attributed to overproduction of unconventional ("extreme") fossil fuels, including tar sands, shale oil, and fracking; OPECs refusal to cut production in February 2015; the collapse of the commodities market due to a downturn in the Chinese economy; the growing conflicts in Iraq, Syria, and Turkey; and the US reaching an accord with Iran over nuclear weapons. Meanwhile coal job losses have been mounting in the US, primarily due to the replacement of abundant natural gas (which is somewhat cleaner and less GHG producing than coal, but anything but carbon neutral or negative) as a source of power generation, but also the growing implementation of greater efficiency and energy conservation measures, and the acceleratingly rapid growth of renewable energy alternatives, such as wind and solar.

[13] Numerous studies show that the number of direct and indirect jobs created by the solar and wind energy greatly outnumber those in the fossil fuel and nuclear fission power sectors. For example, see Global Climate Jobs booklet – by the Global Climate Jobs network, September 2015; Renewable Energy 'Creates More Jobs Than Fossil Fuels', By Anastasia Pantsios – EcoWatch, November 11, 2014; Low carbon jobs: The evidence for net job creation from policy support for energy efficiency and renewable energy – By Will Blyth, Rob Gross, Jamie Speirs, Steve Sorrell, Jack Nicholls, Alex Dorgan, and Nick Hughes, UK Energy Research Center, November 2014; One Million Climate Jobs: Tackling the Environmental and Economic Crises – by the Campaign against Climate Change, 2014 (third edition); and Reinventing the Wheel: The REAL Green Jobs Story, By x356039, IWW Environmental Unionism Caucus – May 2, 2013, just to name a few.

[14] This is certainly one of the problems with the Marin County CCA, which

allowed IBEW Local 1245 in the San Francisco Bay Area to stump for PG&E and convince the Alameda County and San Mateo Central Labor Councils to pass resolutions against it. Trade Unions for Energy Democracy has written a well researched guide for clean energy advocates to avoid such problems by working with unions to create worker-centric clean energy transition programs; of course, such plans necessitate directly challenging capitalism.

[15] Not to be confused with class-struggle anarchism (anarcho-communism or anarcho-syndicalism), which can mesh well with ecosocialism or green syndicalism or anarcho-individualism (an anti-capitalist tendency within anarchism that still eschews class struggle as a means for achieving a classless and stateless society).

[16] There are exceptions. For example, the rank and file members of the Laborers' Union who showed up at an Oakland City Council meeting to "support" the OBOT project (meaning that they specifically supported coal exports) were Latino and Black workers. Of course, it's something of a stretch to say that these workers, who were paid to attend (and threatened with reprisal if they didn't), given a free meal and yellow shirts by their bosses, and all ceded their time to the bosses and developers actively supported coal exports (in fact, many of them were not even fully aware why they were brought there at all), but the leadership of their union, who did actively support coal exports—whatever the underlying reason—are also Latino, so there are exceptions, particularly in the very ethnically diverse San Francisco Bay Area.

[17] For the record, neither the railroad workers unions nor RWU have taken a position on coal exports in the matter of the OBOT.

[18] Tagami and Teamsters District Council 7 have had a close relationship for several years, often endorsing the same candidates, and taking the same stances on political issues. For example, in 2011, the Teamsters joined in with filmmakers and other artists to oppose the City of Oakland's decision to terminate funding for the city's Film Commission. Phil Tagami, who stood to benefit from those efforts, also opposed the Council. In 2013, District Council 7, led by Doug Bloch (Aloise's predecessor), vocally joined in a dispute against Oakland Maritime Support Services (OMSS) owner Phil Aboudi, and called for his rental agreement with the Port of Oakland to be terminated, ostensibly because the latter had illegally withheld approximately \$1,000,000 in wages to the nonunion employees at AB Trucking (one of the 18 companies that composed OMSS). While a judge confirmed the suit against Aboudi, and Aboudi was admittedly nonunion, it's also true that Phil Tagami also opposed extending Aboudi's contract, because he would eventually benefit from the latter's removal (the land formerly occupied by OMSS includes parcels of land to be used for the OBOT!). The City of Oakland ultimately shelled out \$1.5 to

relocate Aboudi, a move vehemently opposed by the Teamsters. It's also the case that both the Teamsters and Tagami have an adversarial relationship with Margaret Gordon, one of the organizers of the coalition opposing coal exports due to her campaign against environmental racism and her advocacy in favor of hiring local workers and supporting local, often black-owned businesses in the Port of Oakland.

[19] There are exceptions to this principle. Some workers possess the ambition to climb the capitalist ladder and become part of the employing class (and many of the worst offenders, such as Massey CEO Don Blankenship, took this course in life), and as such will be unreachable. These individuals are often the most hostile to union organizing efforts as well as climate justice.

[20] These tactics should be used to mobilize supporters in the community, including residents, unions, churches, synagogues, temples, mosques, businesses, schools, retirement communities, and the like anyway, and focus should be oriented towards reaching the rank and file, ideally with the support of the leadership, but in opposition to their support for the adversary if necessary.

[21] Some environmentalists opposing crude-by-rail have balked at this idea, suggesting that making the crude-by-rail trains "safer" (and it's certainly debatable that it's possible at all to make such trains safe) will provide those profiting off of crude-by-rail with the arguments they need to justify the act, but such arguments miss the forest for the trees. Any increased safety measures, including increasing crew size, reducing the length of trains, requiring upgraded rail cars, increasing track maintenance cost money and impact the employers' pocketbooks. Increasing the cost of conducting ecological destructive acts is one effective way to limit them. As for the opposite side of the coin, the fear that driving up the cost will result in loss of railroad business, or the elimination of railroad jobs, it should also be evident that transformation to a more ecologically sustainable society will require increased transportation by rail (as opposed to truck or aircraft), because it offers the least energy intensive mode.

[22] One cannot simply shift refining operations from one state to another overnight. The whole supply chain, which is a very complex operation, with numerous transportation modes and nodes, subject to numerous regulations, permits, schedules, contracts, and agreements, would have to be reworked, retooled, and renegotiated. Refining capacity would have to exist or be recreated elsewhere, requiring permits and scoping hearings, regulatory approval, etc. Very likely refinery expansion in just about any location, even those with far more conservative political opinions than California, would draw opposition. Plus shutting down existing refining operations would involve

permitting processes, clean ups, dismantling, and so forth. Any such shift would require decades, unless the refiners had constructed excess capacity and already secured all of the necessary regulatory permits and negotiated all of the necessary agreements and contracts involved in vastly shifting operations, and if that were the case, they'd likely have been preparing to shift operations anyway, an event which the union workers would likely have noticed and have been prepared to challenge.

[23] The Salvage Rider was a legal abomination which allowed private logging interests to claim that their profit driven logging operations were an attempt to remove "diseased and dying trees" from forest stands in order to "protect forest health." Of course, the language defining "diseased and dying" was so vague it could apply to just about any standing tree (the bark of the tree is biologically "dead" in all cases). The rider was an example of legal trickery that enabled creeping privatization of public lands, a commonly used tactic by Clinton Democrats, and a perfect example of why environmentalism is doomed to fail unless it directly challenges capitalism.

[24] Attempts by this author to convince this same fellow environmentalist that such an attitude would almost certainly generate hostility among the mill workers (who would have to stomach the loss of dignity from transitioning from a well-paying skilled job, one which was often part of the culture of the timber dependent communities—where fourth, fifth, and sixth generation logging families were quite common—to working for minimum wage as a Barista), and that gaining trust among those workers was essential to build a truly effective movement to challenge capitalism—ultimately the only way to prevent such profit driven ecologically destructive logging practices were met with derision by the aforementioned environmentalist and a few others who sneeringly dismissed this author's "repeating outdated Marxist bullshit!" (the author's being an anarcho-syndicalist notwithstanding). Fortunately, there were no shortage of others involved in the discussion who were not so sneeringly dismissive of workers or their concerns, but the vast majority seemed to think that legislative and electoral strategies (coupled with traditional Earth First! style direct action) should be the primary strategy, and that organizing working class opposition was either unlikely or utopian.

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