



**THE LABOR-CLIMATE LANDSCAPE:
A GUIDED TOUR FOR WORKER-AND CLIMATE-
PROTECTION ADVOCATES**

By the Labor Network for Sustainability

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Introduction

Today the American labor movement—like the rest of American society and like labor movements throughout the world—is being forced to grapple with climate change and climate protection. This “guided tour” of the “labor-climate landscape” is intended as a tool that climate protection advocates inside and outside of organized labor can use to navigate the complex and sometimes obscure world of organized labor and its approach to climate change.

Climate change changes everything: Everything about how we organize society, how we conduct politics, and how we envision the role of an organized labor movement in society. All workers, no matter what industry they work in and no matter what harm their industry may do to society, deserve union representation. But in an age of global warming and climate disruption labor can no longer advocate for every possible job regardless of its impact on the world around us.

The trade union movement needs to become a part of the solution to the climate crisis and stop being part of the problem. The stakes are too high. Our society is transitioning before our eyes to a sustainable future, and the struggle for this transition is intense, with the forces of capital arraying against us. The path to future growth for organized labor lies in its ability to become a central player in the movement to build a sustainable future for the planet and its people, and this means supporting a just transition away from a carbon-based economy toward a carbon-neutral economy. And the climate fight may not be won without labor.

The Labor Network for Sustainability is dedicated to engaging trade unionists, workers, and their allies to support economic, social, and environmental sustainability. When it was founded in 2009, one of its first projects was to develop profiles of 17 unions, federations, and other labor organizations. The purpose of the profiles was to provide the information that people both inside and outside organized labor could use to initiate discussion of sustainability issues in the labor movement. The profiles examined the structure of each organization, its leadership, its principal concerns, its self-interest, and its record on issues of sustainability, in particular the greatest sustainability challenge of our era, climate change.

On the basis of the profiles of individual organizations, LNS co-founder the late Tim Costello produced “Labor and Climate Change: A Briefing Paper for Activists” designed to “provide a strategy for addressing organized labor’s stake in climate change” and “help shape effective, worker friendly climate protection policies and garner support for them from organized labor.” For the past five years it has provided an orientation and strategic guide for advocates of labor concerned with climate change.

Five years later, LNS has completed a new and far more extensive set of profiles — 42 in all. They are posted on the LNS website as a resource for those addressing sustainability in general and climate change in particular with the labor movement. We have also compiled data on more than 800 labor leaders at the local, regional and national level. “The Labor-Climate Landscape: A Guided Tour for Worker- and Climate-Protection Advocates” draws heavily on Tim Costello’s original briefing paper, but expands and updates it based on the new profiles and new conditions.

In the intervening five years, the context of climate protection has radically changed. Climate change is now widely recognized not just as something happening far away or looming in the future, but as something that is affecting us here and now. From floods, hurricanes, and superstorm Sandy to Western droughts, heat waves, and wildfires, from crop failures to food price spikes, climate change is visibly affecting our lives.

When the “Labor and Climate Change” briefing paper was originally published, the primary focus of climate action was national legislation and international treaty negotiations. While these will no doubt again become critical, at present the focus has shifted to other arenas, notably regulation of greenhouse gas emissions by the Environmental Protection Agency, struggles over coal-fired power plants, natural gas fracking, the Keystone XL pipeline, other fossil fuel installations, and local initiatives all across the country to reduce carbon emissions and work for environmental justice.

Organized labor has also changed in the past five years. The proportion of unionized workers has continued to fall; by 2011 fewer than 12 percent of all workers and fewer than 7 percent of private sector workers were members of unions. Rightwing attacks in states like Wisconsin, Ohio, Michigan, and Pennsylvania have rolled back basic union rights, and some rightwing leaders speak openly of simply eliminating unionism. But there have also been a series of “mini-revolts” representing the eruption of new constituencies and forms of working class organization.¹ These have included the massive resistance to the effort to destroy public sector unionism in Wisconsin; the explosion of Occupy Wall Street and its equivalents in 600 cities around the US; the rise of militant coalitions of teachers, parents, and students in defense of public education; and the emergence of organization and strikes in rapidly expanding low-wage industries like fast food, retail sales, and home care with high concentrations of young, minority, and immigrant workers. Many of these new forces within the labor movement have expressed strong concern for climate protection.

Our goal in this guide is to nourish a fundamental change in the relation of organized labor and the working class to sustainability and climate change. In

¹ For a review of these mini-revolts, see the revised, expanded, and updated edition of Jeremy Brecher, *Strike!* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2014) Chapter 10, “Beyond One-Sided Class War.”



the past, organized labor has undergone enormous changes in its relation to civil rights, immigration, gay rights, war, and other contested issues. In each case a strategy that combined grassroots organizing, direct action, and eventually power shifts at the highest levels turned the labor movement from a drag on progress to a leader of desperately needed social change. No change today is more desperately needed than a shift to effective climate protection. It will no doubt require a strategy combining action from below and action from the top. We offer this analysis of the labor landscape as a guided tour of the terrain of the struggle to make labor a leader in the fight for climate safety.

This guide would not have been possible without the massive research by Emily Norton compiling the profiles on which it is based.

LNS dedicates this publication to the memory of our late colleague Tim Costello.



Labor's Stake in Climate Protection

Rays of light from the sun warm the Earth; if just the right amount of that heat goes back out into space, the Earth's average temperature stays the same. But if too much heat is trapped by carbon and other gases in the atmosphere, the average temperature of the Earth will rise. This "greenhouse effect" is like a blanket warming the Earth. According to NASA, "ninety-seven percent of climate scientists agree that climate-warming trends over the past century are very likely due to human activities."²

The Earth has already warmed nearly 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit since the industrial revolution, when fossil fuels started to be burned on a large scale. Carbon already in the air will cause another 1.5 degrees Fahrenheit increase. Unless we reverse current trends, there will be a 4 to 9 degree Fahrenheit increase by the end of century. Unpredictable "tipping points" – like melting of Arctic ice that has reflected sunlight back to space and release of methane from thawing tundra -- may make it far worse.

The effects of global warming can seem contradictory, producing snowstorms as well as heat waves, downpours as well as droughts. That is because global warming destabilizes and disrupts the earth's entire climate system, leading to opposite extremes. Results already include:

- Heat waves
- droughts
- wildfires
- crop failures
- floods
- hurricanes
- tornadoes
- food shortages and price spikes
- water wars
- extinction of species

These are already affecting American workers. Effects include:

- Workplace closings from extreme weather events and coastal flooding
- Reduction in tourism and outdoor recreation
- Higher taxes for cleanup, repair, and adaptation
- Gutting of public budgets from costs of cleanup, repair, and adaptation

Climate change will affect jobs. According to a recent study, "As the costs for doing business increase, competitiveness of individual firms, entire sectors or regions may decline. With this decline may come a loss of employment and

² <http://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus>



overall economic security.”³

Why should workers and their unions be concerned about climate change?

- the universal interest in protecting our planet that workers share with all people
- the threats of climate change to their own workplaces and the resulting economic devastation and job loss – climate change is the real job killer
- the positive interest of specific unions and groups of workers in more and better jobs
- the negative interest of specific unions and groups of workers whose jobs are threatened
- the interest of the labor movement as a whole in its overall social role and its alliances with other social groups
- the exponentially increasing cost of climate protection if we wait
- the jobs and other benefits to labor from pursuing a pathway to sustainability

Stumbling blocks to labor support for climate protection

Organized labor’s approach to climate change has been primarily employment based. Unions like the green job gains from climate protection measures; but they fear the potential job losses from phasing out carbon-fueled industries. This should not be surprising since unions are organized primarily to look after the specific employment interests of workers.

Even the most far sighted trade union leaders have a very difficult job: They must represent the immediate interests of existing members, some of whom may face job losses in the transition to a low carbon economy, while keeping in mind the longer term economic, social, and ecological concerns.

But a narrow focus on the short term has led some unions to neglect the longer-term effects of climate change on jobs, workers, and their communities and the action needed to address them. Unless labor develops a full-fledged response to climate change, it is likely to be left by the roadside in what will be the pivotal challenge of the 21st century.

While unions are bargaining opponents of their employers over wages and

³ CIER, “The US Economic Impacts of Climate Change and the Costs of Inaction,” October, 2007. <http://www.cier.umd.edu/climateadaptation/index.html>



working conditions, they have a long tradition of building alliances with them over public policy issues that affect growth in their sectors. This too often leads unions to follow the narrow self-interest of their industry instead of developing independent positions representing the interests of labor as a whole.

A striking example is the UAW's long alliance with the big car companies in opposition to strong fuel economy standards – a policy which contributed not only to carbon emissions but to the near-collapse of the American auto industry. Such shortsighted sectoral alliances can be a significant obstacle to drawing labor into the climate change fight.

Although labor's response has often been confused and contradictory, there is a growing awareness that re-tooling the energy and transportation infrastructure and retrofitting existing buildings to make them more energy efficient can both save the planet and create a new sustainable economy that will benefit all. One illustration of that change is the UAW's support (along with ten auto companies) for more stringent fuel economy standards.

A stumbling block for labor in addressing climate change is the attitude that “we never met a job we didn't like.” This uncritical advocacy of any and all jobs tempts unions to support projects that are inherently anti-social and against the interest of working people in general – for example, extreme energy projects like fracking, tar sands development and pipelines, and deep off-shore oil drilling. It also tempts unions to oppose climate protection measures that are essential for the future of humanity – including American workers – but may result in the loss of some jobs.

This approach can lead to another stumbling block – a dubious definition of solidarity. Solidarity is organized labor's supreme value for a simple reason: Workers can influence their conditions of labor only if they support each other. “An injury to one is an injury to all” is the most fundamental union principle; *Solidarity Forever* is its most famous anthem. But solidarity can be abused when one group of workers demands that others support them even when the result is catastrophic for other working people and for humanity as a whole. Organized labor only defeats its own underlying reason for existence if it advocates wars to increase war jobs, criminalization to increase prison jobs, and fossil fuel energy to increase extraction, pipeline, and power plant jobs. Solidarity for limited groups can tear the labor movement apart unless it is coordinated with the interests of other workers and humanity as a whole.

Crucial to addressing these concerns is the idea of a “just transition.” It is a basic principle of fairness that the burden of policies that are necessary for society—like protecting the environment—shouldn't be borne by a small minority who happen to be victimized by their side effects. Protecting workers and communities from the effects of socially and environmentally necessary economic change is often referred to as a *just transition*.



A just transition is a matter of elementary justice—it is unfair that workers who through no fault of their own happen to work in jobs that need to be eliminated to achieve a social good should bear the burden of that change by losing their jobs. Insisting that climate protection policies protect the current and future livelihoods of workers they affect is a prerequisite for addressing labor about climate. Climate protection advocates should insist from the outset that part of any transition away from fossil fuels includes protection for the wellbeing of workers whose jobs may be threatened.

Another stumbling block is the fact that protecting the climate will require not just adding solar, wind, and other sources of clean energy, but sharply reducing the use of fossil fuels that emit climate-destroying greenhouse gases. Many unions, and the AFL-CIO, support the expansion of renewable energy, but they also promote an “all of the above” energy policy that guarantees still more catastrophic climate change. That includes such extreme forms of fossil fuel extraction as natural gas fracking, tar sands oil, and deep off-shore oil drilling. It includes expanded use of coal, often justified as advocacy for “clean coal” that has been subject to “carbon capture and storage” (CCS) – something that has so far proven impossible to create at commercial prices and that will in all likelihood remain far more expensive than renewable energy. It includes expanded nuclear energy, despite its unsolved problems of radioactive waste, catastrophic Fukushima-style meltdowns, and far greater cost than renewable energy.

An additional stumbling block is that many proposals for climate protection are not labor-friendly.⁴ Those in organized labor who are skeptical about climate protection efforts identify genuine problems in the policies proposed by environmentalists. They point out that the closing of coal-fired power plants, for example, will lead miners, truck drivers, and utility workers to lose their jobs -- in many cases, the only well-paid union jobs in their localities. They argue that projects like the Keystone XL pipeline will provide jobs for workers who are suffering from historic rates of unemployment. They maintain that a prosperous economy depends on cheap and abundant energy -- so that restrictions on fossil fuel energy could well lead to economic catastrophe. And they point out that restrictions on fossil fuel energy are likely to lead to rising prices for the energy to heat our houses, run our appliances, and drive our cars -- price increases that will hurt workers and the poor most and further increase our society's unjust economic inequality.

Much in this critique is valid. But criticizing the weaknesses in mainstream climate policy proposals is not a strategy for combating climate change. Labor needs to propose a climate protection strategy of its own -- one that realistically protects the livelihood and wellbeing of working people and helps

⁴ For a labor-friendly climate protection plan, see Jeremy Brecher, Ron Blackwell and Joe Uehlein, “If Not Now, When? A Labor Movement Plan to Address Climate Change,” *New Labor Forum* fall, 2014. <http://nlf.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/07/24/1095796014541793>



reverse America's trend to greater inequality while reducing greenhouse gas emissions at the speed scientists say is necessary to reduce climate catastrophe. A strategy designed to provide full employment and rising living standards by putting millions of people to work on the transition to a climate-safe economy could transform the politics of climate by shattering the "jobs vs. the environment" frame. And it could provide a common platform around which climate protection advocates at every level of the labor movement could rally.

Fortunately, labor-friendly programs for climate protection are proliferating. For examples of programs addressed to particular industries, see [Jobs Beyond Coal](#); [Fixing Bad Chemistry](#); and [Labor's Route to a New Transportation System](#). For an jobs alternative to a specific fossil fuel project, see [The Keystone Pipeline Debate: An Alternative Job Creation Strategy](#). For a wide range of green job proposals, see the [Blue-Green Alliance](#) and its affiliated [Apollo Alliance](#). For a labor-oriented program to make America climate safe, see "If Not Now, When: A Labor Movement Plan to Address Climate Change."⁵

How Organized Labor Is Organized

American unions have a two-hundred-year history that has created a structure that can be difficult for outsiders to decode; indeed, even insiders often have detailed knowledge of only their own part of the forest and limited historical knowledge of different visions of a labor movement. The best way to understand your local labor movement is to develop relationships with people in a variety of unions and allied institutions. Here are some broader dynamics to be aware of.

Since the nineteenth century, the most powerful unit in organized labor has been the national union. The first unions represented workers in individual crafts, such as carpenters and printers, and such craft unions continue to this day. In the twentieth century, a new form of industrial union aimed to represent workers throughout a major industry, like the auto industry or the steel industry. More recently, union mergers have resulted in many unions representing diverse workers in largely unrelated occupations and industries—what is sometimes called general unionism.

As a result, workers in the same occupation, industry, or workplace may be represented by many different unions. For example, utility workers are represented not only by the Utility Workers Union, but by the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, the Steelworkers, among others.

Most unions are members of the AFL-CIO (57 affiliated unions). A few unions

⁵ Jeremy Brecher, Ron Blackwell, and Joe Uehlein, "If Not Now, When: A Labor Movement Plan to Address Climate Change," *New Labor Forum*, in press.



pulled out in 2005 and created the Change to Win federation, but it is currently down to two large unions, the Service Employees and the Teamsters, and two others, the United Food and Commercial Workers and the United Farm Workers; some of its affiliated unions, such as UFCW and LIUNA, have returned to the AFL-CIO. Each national union is largely autonomous and sets its own policy, even if it differs from its federation. The AFL-CIO plays a role in speaking for the broader interests of its members and of working people in general, but it devotes much of its work to providing support for its member unions.

At a local level, workers belong to local unions, which are affiliates of national unions. A workplace may be represented by one local or by different locals from different unions. A local may represent workers in one workplace or in many. Local unions take public policy positions under the general guidance of their national union but often on their own initiative.

Most unions in a particular area are represented by a central labor council (CLC). CLCs typically used to represent a single city or county, but they have increasingly merged to form regional councils. State labor councils represent most unions in each state. Local and state labor councils are chartered arms of the national AFL-CIO, but they often also include locals from unions that are not AFL-CIO members, such as Change to Win locals that have “solidarity charters.” Local and state labor councils speak for the broader interests of working people, but they also are responsible for mobilizing support for the particular concerns of their member unions. Often unions, especially the larger and more powerful ones, operate more on their own in the political and public policy arenas than they do through central labor councils.

The majority of union members, like the majority of Americans, undoubtedly are concerned about global warming. But the US labor movement has particular structural problems that make it difficult to confront broad social issues like global warming.

On the one hand, since the days of Samuel Gompers, founding president of the AFL in the 19th century, U.S. unions have represented particular groups of workers – first workers in the same craft, then increasingly workers in the same industry. On the other hand, the federations of unions – historically the AFL, the CIO, and Change to Win, today the AFL-CIO – have in principle represented the interests of workers as a whole. This dual function at times produces a tension that can block action on key issues.

This picture is further complicated by the trend toward general unionism. As core union memberships within specific industries declined in recent years, unions began to organize workers wherever they could find them. The Mineworkers now represents school cafeteria workers; the Communication Workers represent nurses; the Laborers represents postal workers. This often produces even more contradictory relationships around issues like climate change within unions.



The Decision-Making Process

Organized labor's approach to climate protection is affected by its complex organizational history and structure. While the AFL-CIO federation appears to speak for labor, each national and even each local union has its own membership, power bases, and policies. An effective effort to change labor's approach to climate change is likely to require action both at the grassroots and at the higher echelons of labor organizations.

The structure and history of the AFL-CIO—weak centralized authority with relatively autonomous affiliates – can make it difficult for the Federation to reach a position on important issues like climate change. One or a small group of unions can often block or dictate policy.

As a result there is a tendency for the Federation to develop “least common denominator” positions on important issues. So far, this is the case with climate change mitigation. The Federation has focused on potential short term job gains and losses. This perspective results in a fairly straightforward position: Green jobs programs are good, carbon reduction programs are suspect.

The fear of job losses and declining memberships has led the AFL-CIO to take public positions at odds with the scientific consensus or the public interest. For instance, the AFL-CIO opposed signing the Kyoto treaty; it continues to oppose a timeline for tough global carbon emission standards; it remains committed to expanding so-called “clean” coal, despite its impracticality; and it continues to advocate nuclear power, despite its manifest hazards and costs.

At the level of individual unions affiliated with the AFL-CIO, the picture is more complex. First, decision making in most trade unions—unlike the labor federations—is very centralized. In almost all of the unions we surveyed, national decision making power is concentrated in the hands of a union leadership and bureaucracy that is relatively closed and self-perpetuating. Leadership succession fights are rare and rarely successful; national officers are generally groomed and selected by those they replace. Broaching new issues can be difficult.

Second, a significant portion of the US labor movement is comprised of workers in service, education, and other jobs that are not directly impacted by carbon reduction programs in the short term, and these unions may take a more nuanced position or no position at all on key legislation. Motivating these unions to take positions on issues like climate change that they do not view as directly related to the immediate needs of their core constituency can be difficult. Yet these unions are now stepping out on climate and sustainability issues – as illustrated by the participation of many of them in the September 2014 Peoples Climate March at the United Nations climate summit.



The structure and tradition of organizational solidarity of the AFL-CIO mean that a small number of unions can exercise hegemony over policy decisions on specific issues like climate change. A strategy for changing labor's position on climate protection can include helping unions to see that it is in their self-interest to become part of the solution.

A Climate Change Continuum

In this age of general unionism, unions often represent workers across a range of industries. Building trades unions may also represent workers in manufacturing, transportation, and even in services. Nevertheless it is still possible to group most unions according to the core constituencies that they represent. The 57 unions that belong to the AFL-CIO and the several that don't, including the giant National Education Association (NEA) and those in the Change to Win federation, can be put on a rough continuum based on their immediate exposure to climate change mitigation policies. Those most impacted tend to be most active on climate change issues.

On one end of the continuum are unions involved in energy production like the Mineworkers, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, and Utility Workers which represent power plant workers and the building trades workers who construct and maintain the energy infrastructure. Next are the transportation unions—rail, ports, trucking, airlines—that are impacted by energy prices and potentially by shifts in transportation policies to reduce carbon emissions. Further along the continuum are manufacturing unions that depend on cheap energy and/or that manufacture the components of the existing or emerging energy infrastructure. Least likely to be involved until recently are unions in the service and education sectors that tend to view themselves as less directly affected by climate change mitigation efforts. But now these unions are often leading labor on climate.

While there is a strong correlation between policy impact and activism on climate issues, some highly impacted unions have been relatively silent, while some service sector unions have been more active. The Amalgamated Transit Workers (ATW), Service Employees (SEIU), and Laborers (LIUNA) for example, have endorsed the greenhouse gas emissions reductions called for by climate scientists. The Communications Workers (CWA) has participated in climate actions like the large national Climate Forward rally. A wide range of local, state, and national unions endorsed the September 21, 2014 Peoples Climate March at the climate summit at the United Nations in New York.

Labor organizations that are emerging among new constituencies, such as the National Nurses United and the National Domestic Workers Alliance, are often expressing strong concern with climate change. The same is true of other unions that have a significant number of young people, minorities, and immigrants — constituencies that polls and organizing experience indicate



strongly support climate protection. These groups will be the future of organized labor.

The range of approaches to climate among different sectors of organized labor has implications for strategy to affect labor's approach to climate protection. For unions in mining, construction, and manufacturing whose members might be adversely affected by climate protection policies it is crucial to focus on positive jobs alternatives and on fighting for a just transition that protects their members against adverse effects.

For all unions it is crucial to recognize that their members, their organizations, and their futures are deeply affected by climate change. Their members' health and well-being are already being affected by global warming. The public budgets on which public sector unions depend are being ravished by floods, wildfires, droughts, and other climate change effects. Their members' jobs and daily lives are on the line.

Asserting that unions in education, health care, the professions, and other services have a direct and legitimate interest in climate protection will be a key element of a strategy to deepen the labor movement's engagement in climate action. These groups are now often regarded — and regard themselves — as marginal to labor's climate policy. They are sometimes disregarded as having “no skin in the game.” Indeed, some unions have even been denigrated by other unions for advocating climate protection on the grounds that it might curtail jobs. Tragically, some unions have even accused other unions of violating the principle of solidarity among workers because they opposed projects that might produce some jobs but at the cost of accelerating destruction of the climate.

The threat of global warming requires a different concept of solidarity, one which recognizes the common interest of all workers in climate protection. That concept gives all unions a legitimate role in shaping labor's climate policy. But it also gives them an obligation to protect the livelihoods and well-being of any workers who might be adversely affected by climate protection policies through a just transition to a climate-safe economy.

What Unions Can Do about Climate Change

Labor matters in the fight against climate change. Even in its weakened condition, it retains enough political clout to help or hinder the passage of meaningful climate change legislation. And unions can act on their own to reduce the carbon emissions in their workplaces and communities.

What should activists inside and outside of organized labor be encouraging unions to do? Here are some actions unions can take — and that various unions are already taking:

- Articulate a vision of organized labor as a leader in a broad climate protection movement promoting a just transition to a climate-safe world
- Define global warming and climate change as the real job killers
- Develop and promote worker-friendly climate strategies that define climate-protecting jobs and protection for affected workers as a central part of climate protection
- Make effective climate protection policies, including legislation, treaties, regulation, and public investment, part of their political agenda
- Use their political clout to support those policies
- Educate members and the public on the realities of global warming and what needs to be done to protect our future
- Pressure employers to go green, for example by making climate protection a bargaining issue
- Provide recruitment, apprenticeship, education, and training to develop the workforce skills necessary for a transition to a climate-safe economy
- Reduce the carbon footprint of their own buildings and operation.
- Collaborate with environmental allies by such means as rallies, demonstrations, lobbying, and media
- Promote climate protection in the AFL-CIO and state and local labor councils by such means as passing resolutions, sponsoring educational programs, and participating in activist events
- Join campaigns for a transition to low-carbon energy and against carbon polluters
- Initiate international tours and delegations to share strategies for climate protection with unions in related industries in other countries
- Divest union pension funds from fossil fuel corporations and invest them in the transition to a climate-safe economy.

Many examples of such efforts are presented in the descriptions of different sectors below.



Building Trades

(Selected list)

International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW)

Laborers' International Union of North America (LIUNA)

International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, Iron Ship Builders, Blacksmiths,
Forgers and Helpers (Boilermakers)

Sheet Metal Workers

United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA)

Building trades unions like the Sheet Metal Workers, the Boilermakers Union, and the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) represent skilled workers who both build and maintain the energy and transportation infrastructure and construct big buildings that consume large amounts of energy. Their jobs include everything from power plant construction to installing boilers and heating and air conditioning systems to maintaining the electrical grid.

Big, capital intensive projects depend on public funding and regulatory support. Not surprisingly, building trades unions spend a great deal of money on national and local political campaigns and lobbying. For instance, the 150,000-member Sheet Metal Workers Union is the 37th largest political contributor in the country.

Building trades unions operate under a unique set of rules within US labor law. In many ways they are similar to temp agencies in that they dispatch skilled workers, including front line supervisors, to employers for time limited projects. Often, the building trades unions organize employers rather than workers by getting employers to sign "pre-hire agreements." These agreements set the wages and working conditions for workers before the job begins and before any workers are hired. Then the union selects and dispatches workers to a job on an as-needed basis. Pre-hire agreements are only legal in the construction and maritime trades where work is project-based. In all other sectors of the economy unions must organize workers already on a job and win a majority vote in a government-supervised election or get an employer to voluntarily recognize a union based on some other measurement of employee wishes.

One consequence of this unique arrangement is that building trades unions develop very close relationships with contractors with whom they do business. Unions and contractors work together on industry lobbying and on efforts to attract new work. Unions often belong to industry associations and jointly sponsor meetings and reports on industry-specific issues.

Unions and employers also operate joint apprenticeship programs to train



journeymen workers. These apprenticeship programs—generally licensed by the states—serve to regulate the entry of new workers into a trade. In the past these programs were often used to exclude minorities and women and to perpetuate family and ethnic continuity within a trade. Allegations that unions blocked the hiring of minorities and women generally stem from the building trades where unions actually have a say in the hiring process. Such discrimination has been widely condemned in the labor movement and is now generally outlawed.

The building trades unions of the AFL-CIO are among the unions most immediately affected by climate change mitigation programs. They are also among the most active labor movement players on climate change issues. They have been enthusiastic backers of green jobs programs. But they have also been strong proponents of the Keystone XL pipeline and expanded use of coal and nuclear power.

Most of the building trades unions, including some unions that do not belong to the AFL-CIO like the Teamsters, belong to the Building and Construction Trades Department of the AFL-CIO. The Building Trades Department has itself taken a strong position promoting green jobs but also supporting the Keystone XL pipeline. The Building Trades form a powerful and usually unified bloc in the AFL-CIO, often able to determine policy decisions on important matters.

Building Trades unions regard the construction of wind, solar, biofuel, and hydro-thermal alternative energy sources as a potential bright spot in a period of continuing high unemployment. A report, widely cited by the building trades, supports the widespread view that the building trades will benefit from the switch to green power alternatives. The report—Green Recovery: A Program to Create Good Jobs and Start Building a Low Carbon Economy http://www.peri.umass.edu/green_recovery/ — done by UMass's Political Economy Research Institute for the Center for American Progress—claims that a \$100 billion green economic recovery package would create 800,000 construction jobs, a majority of which will pay over \$16 per hour. Most of the jobs would be in already existing occupations and would be geographically dispersed. Areas where support should be focused, according to the report, are in sectors that currently employ trades workers, including:

- retrofitting buildings to improve energy efficiency
- expanding mass transit and freight rail
- constructing 'smart' electrical grid transmission systems
- wind power
- solar power
- next-generation biofuels

The report influenced the Obama administration's stimulus package, which received strong backing from the trades.

Green training is now standard in apprenticeship and post-apprenticeship training throughout the construction industry. Building trades unions are also active lobbying at the national, state, and local level for the permitting of alternative power sources such as wind farms.

The Building Trades worry that some new construction could be non-union, but think that they are positioned to “capture” new jobs in their core industries and geographic localities because they can provide highly skilled workers already up to speed on new technologies.

Nonetheless, the Building Trades continue to strongly support the expansion of conventional fossil fuel and nuclear based power sources, as well as extreme energy sources like tar sands, shale oil, and fracked natural gas. The construction and maintenance of such energy sources employs significant numbers of trades workers. Holding on to these jobs is a union priority.

United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters

The United Association of Plumbers and Pipefitters (UA), with 340,000 members, promotes its Green Initiative on its homepage, boasts a green training program, and has formed international partnerships on the basis of sustainability. The UA created the nation’s first union “sustainability office” in the country, which is developing three new “green” craft-specific certifications: Green Plumbing/Pipefitting, Green Sprinkler Fitting, and Green Heating, Ventilation, Air Conditioning and Refrigeration (HVACR). UA has also been driving a “Green Systems Training Trailer” around the country to educate members and the general public about the importance of energy efficiency. For the past three years the union has equipped instructors to certify its members in “Green Systems Awareness” and has opened the program to both its Employer Partners and the general public.

According to the UA, “the design and installation of sustainable water and energy systems in our buildings and homes are just the starting point of energy efficiency and sustainability. If a building or home is to remain ‘green over time,’ it must be maintained and serviced by workers who feel ownership in the Green Building Movement.” UA pipe trades industry workers are “the heart, lungs, brain, and circulatory system of the Green Building Movement.” The UA says its commitment “does not stop once a building has been built or renovated, but throughout the entire life cycle of the building and we are ensuring that our workers have the training to complete this.” Notwithstanding its “green” orientation, the UA supported the Keystone XL pipeline as necessary to provide energy security.



International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) has 675,000 members who work in utilities, construction, telecommunications, broadcasting, manufacturing, railroads, and government. It recognizes the significance of green jobs. For example, Local 569 Business Manager Allen Shur says that “without all the solar work,” the unemployment rate for IBEW workers “would be twice as high.” The IBEW’s publication, *The Electrical Worker*, says “the growth of solar power has also translated into increased opportunities for top-down organizing, as new photovoltaic startups seek out sources of skilled electricians.” The IBEW website features a “working green section” to help members understand the importance of green jobs and to help them launch their green careers. However, the IBEW president has stated that “renewable energy alone is not enough; we must include coal, using carbon capture and storage technologies now in development, and expand nuclear energy generation as a part of the U.S. energy mix,” warning that otherwise, “economic disruption and job losses that will make the current recession look tame.”

Laborers International Union of North America

The Laborers International Union of North America (LIUNA) has over 500,000 members in Construction, Hazardous Waste Remediation, State And Municipal Government, The Postal Service, Healthcare, Maintenance, and Food Service. LIUNA is one of only a few U.S. unions to support science-based targets and timelines for carbon reduction. It has been active in organizing workers in “green jobs,” for example negotiating a card check agreement with Conservation Services Group, a company which conducts nearly a half million home energy assessments annually for utilities and energy efficiency organizations nationwide. LIUNA also chartered a green local designed for workers specializing in weatherization and other green jobs. Green Jobs Local 58’s first round of recruits graduated from LIUNA’s training center and are earning \$14 an hour with benefits. To fund the program, LIUNA joined forces with local environmentalists to pass the New York Green Jobs Financing Law that provides funding for residential weatherization work. Its website points out that “An effort to weatherize 100 million inefficient homes will create more than 500,000 construction jobs and hundreds of thousands more jobs in manufacturing and related activities.”

LIUNA has been a major proponent of the Keystone XL pipeline, stating that failure to build it would “destroy the lives of working men and women.” The union’s president complained that unions opposed to the pipeline were influenced by “delusional environmentalists” and withdrew from the Blue-Green Alliance “in response to job-killing attacks on the Keystone XL pipeline” by some of the Alliance’s labor and environmentalist members. The union proclaims that it is ready to provide a skilled workforce for natural gas fracking.



International Brotherhood of Boilermakers

The International Brotherhood of Boilermakers, with 60,000 members, includes workers in construction, shipbuilding, cement, stove, railroad, testing, and various other industries. In 2008, union president Newton Jones declared that it would be “economic suicide for labor unions to ignore or minimize the potential negative effects of the world’s use of fossil fuels.” The union sponsored a Duke University study titled “Manufacturing Climate Solutions” which assessed five carbon-reducing technologies with potential for future green job creation. In 2013, however, President Jones released an article titled “It’s Time to Renew Promise on Fossil Fuels Future.” It acknowledges the dangers of climate change but calls for an “all-of-the-above” energy strategy, warning “failure to achieve a workable energy policy could send us toward an energy cliff no less dangerous than the fiscal one.”

Manufacturing Unions

(Selected List)

United Steelworkers

International Association of Machinists

International Union of Electrical Workers-Communications Workers of America

United Auto Workers

1,558,000 manufacturing workers are represented by unions, 11 percent of the manufacturing workforce.⁶

A range of unions represent manufacturing workers who will be directly impacted by climate change and climate change mitigation. These unions are becoming more politically active on climate issues.

Manufacturing unions have been battered by globalization and outsourcing, and they approach efforts to deal with climate change through this lens. These unions link the green jobs issue with efforts to revive domestic manufacturing in the US. As a result they place major emphasis on trade issues and on “buy America” clauses in stimulus and subsidy projects.

Many of these unions fear increased energy costs resulting from climate change mitigation policies will hurt the competitive position of US industries. For instance, manufacturing unions in the mid-west—a region that depends on coal fired power plants for cheap energy—worry those restrictions on coal use will force more jobs overseas. The AFL-CIO’s reluctance to back global standards for carbon emissions that do not include tough standards for China, India, and the developing world stems in part from this fear. This

⁶ <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/union2.pdf>



preoccupation comes in spite of the fact that the US produces far more greenhouse gases per capita than any other country in the world and that three decades of US refusal to take the lead in cutting greenhouse gases has meant failure to forestall climate catastrophe.

Unions representing workers producing components used in conventional power generation worry that climate policy may cause job loss. But manufacturing unions are also heavily promoting government programs to create green jobs and new products for the green economy. Unions regularly tout in their public relations materials the green products that their members are producing.

A critical issue here is whether the new jobs will be union jobs or whether they will be low paying jobs. A recent report by Good Jobs First, "High Road or Low Road: Job Quality in the New Green Economy," reports that many new green jobs are either low wage or below existing standards. We will discuss the union involvement with green job standards below.

United Steelworkers of America

The United Steelworkers (USW) is the largest industrial union, with 1.2 million members in the US and Canada, of whom about half are retirees. It is close to a general union, representing workers in diverse industries, starting with:

- Aluminum
- Business services
- Chemical, petroleum and paper products
- Construction

And ending with:

- Transportation equipment
- Travel and hospitality
- Transportation services
- Utilities

The USW has advocated union involvement with environmental issues for more than half a century; it has supported environmental legislation; in 1990 it recognized global warming as "the most important environmental issue of our lifetime." Since the 1990s it has cooperated with the Sierra Club, in 2006 co-founding the Blue-Green Alliance (BGA).

Because the USW is so diverse, it has members who may be affected negatively by climate protection efforts. Its members build components for oil pipelines, mine nonrenewable minerals, and nuclear reactors, and are involved in fracking and nuclear waste management, as well as depending on energy from



coal-fired power plants. It has supported “clean coal” and nuclear energy as part of the climate change solution. As a union that has been decimated by globalization, it has emphasized the inclusion of policies against “carbon leakage” in climate legislation and international climate agreements. President Leo Gerard has said, “Any climate change policy that does not seek to prevent the unnecessary off-shoring of production from state-of-the-art American industries to less efficient, more carbon-intensive industries overseas will both cost American jobs and, perversely, will actually make the problem of global climate change worse.” The USW said it would support the Keystone XL pipeline except for the fact that its initial pipe came from India. In February, 2013 Leo W. Gerard, president of the United Steelworkers, said he would back the pipeline as long as the steel used to make the pipes was produced domestically.⁷

International Association of Machinists

The International Association of Machinists (IAM) includes 720,000 active and retired members in aerospace, automotive, government, transportation, and woodworking industries. New rail systems, carbon-reducing energy efficiency products for heating and air conditioning could all potentially create new jobs for IAM members. The IAM’s current legislative agenda does not incorporate any climate change or green jobs related issues, nor does the IAM’s website list emissions reduction in its goals section. The IAM has portrayed “green manufacturing” as a desirable part of the “pro-manufacturing” agenda it advocates. The IAM has many members who work in trucking, rail, ports, busses, mass transit, and airlines who will be affected by climate policies, but the union has not been extensively involved in transportation aspects of climate policy. The Woodworkers Department, derived from a merger with the International Woodworkers Association, represents woodworking and forestry workers. The IWA fought a contentious battle with environmentalists over logging in the Pacific Northwest in the 1980s and 1990s, but now promotes forest preservation as a key element of climate protection.

Communication Workers

Communication Workers of America (CWA) represents 700,000 workers in both manufacturing and operations in the following industry sectors:

The Association of Flight Attendants (AFA-CWA)
CWA Telecommunications
CWA Telecommunications and Technologies Sector

⁷ http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/28/business/energy-environment/afl-cio-backs-keystone-oil-pipeline-if-indirectly.html?_r=1&



CWA Industrial Division/International Union of Electronic, Electrical, Salaried, Machine and Furniture Workers (IUE-CWA)
Public, Health Care and Education Workers Sector Newspaper Guild (TNG-CWA)
National Association of Broadcast Employees and Technicians (NABET-CWA)
National Coalition of Public Safety Officers-CWA (NCP SO-CWA)
Printing, Publishing and Media Workers Sector

Manufacturing workers are concentrated in IUE-CWA.

The CWA has emphasized the need for “a broad progressive movement to both address climate change and create good jobs.” Its report, *Networking the Green Economy*,” advocates long-term public and private investment in high-speed broadband to build more sustainable communities and the development of Smart Grid and Smart Building technologies. It has developed a Green Production Module to teach industrial workers about environmental practices and regulation to enhance the green-related skills of the production workforce in all manufacturing sectors.

United Automobile Workers

The United Automobile Workers (UAW) has 390,000 active members and more than 600,000 retirees, illustrating the decline in auto and other manufacturing in the US. It illustrates the trend to general unionism, representing workers in diverse industries:

Agricultural Implements
Food & Beverage
Medical, Health
Appliances
Heating & Air Conditioning
Industrial Equipment Supply
Automotive Parts & Equip.
Heavy Trucks/Construction Equip.
Cars, Trucks & Vans
Higher Education [fix spacing hereafter]
Pharmaceutical Products
Child Care
Home Repair & Building Products
Plumbing Products
Education
Housewares & Kitchen Products
Sports & Recreation
Printing, Broadcasting, and Communications

After long resisting raising of auto emissions standards, the UAW has become a supporter, both to protect the environment and because it believes lower-



pollution autos will require more labor to produce. It has also been an advocate of federal programs like the Advanced Technology Vehicle Manufacturing Incentive Program that encourage carbon-reducing technologies. (The UAW is also discussed under Transportation Unions.)

Transportation

(Selected list)

- International Brotherhood of Teamsters
- Amalgamated Transit Workers union
- Transport Workers Union
- United Transportation Union
- International Longshoremen's/ Warehousemen's Union

Transportation is the second biggest contributor to greenhouse gas emissions after electricity generation. The US transportation system alone produces more greenhouse gasses than any country in the world except China. About one half of the transportation emissions comes from commercial transportation—trucks, planes, ships, rail, and busses. The other half comes from private automobiles.

Serious efforts to combat climate change will include changes in the transportation and logistics industries that will have major impacts—both positive and negative—on employment in key industries. Unions representing transportation workers in trucking, rail, ports, busses, mass transit, and airlines will have to address these changes. The 2008 spike in fuel prices provided a harbinger of the kind of changes that could occur. Airlines and trucking companies cut back; rail traffic and mass transit ridership increased; logistics industries sought new efficiencies in an economy increasingly dependent on complex global and national supply chains.

Union density in the transportation industry is much higher than in the economy as a whole. Overall almost 25% of all transport workers are unionized, compared with 7.4% of the entire private sector. Seventy-four percent of railroad workers are unionized; 50 % of airline workers belong to unions; density in local trucking hovers around 20%. Some sectors however, such as long distance trucking, are virtually non-union.

As is often the case in the US labor movement, non-transport unions also have pockets of membership in the industry. For instance, some of the craft unions of the building trades such as the Sheet Metal Workers, the Boilermakers, and the IBEW represent workers employed in their crafts by railroads. A variety of unions representing transportation workers have weighed in politically on the stimulus package and its provisions for improvements in the transportation infrastructure, such as high speed rail. But the most active union— and the pivotal union on climate change issues—is probably the Teamsters Union.



Teamsters

The Teamsters represent 1.4 million workers, most but not all in transportation. The union has been losing union density in the trucking industry for years, but over the last decade some of these losses have been offset by new organizing and mergers with existing unions in rail, airlines, ports, and buses. As a result, today the Teamsters is much more a general transport union than it has ever been. Indeed, it is something of a “general union,” including bakery and laundry, brewery and soft drink, dairy building material and construction, food processing, graphics communication, motion picture and theater, newspaper, magazine, and electronic media, solid waste, and many other non-transportation workers. The union withdrew from the AFL-CIO in 2005 and helped found the Change to Win federation.

In transportation there has long been a competition for scarce public and private funding for infrastructure maintenance and development among trucking, railroads, airlines, and shipping/ports. This sectoral competition has the potential to pit Teamster union members in different transportation sectors against each other.

The Teamsters seek to avoid these conflicts by casting themselves as a “supply chain union,” that is, as the representative of workers at every link of the global supply chain from ports to distribution centers to rail to trucks to the final customer.

This rebranding has been accompanied by new thinking on creating intermodal systems that maximize efficiencies, and thereby reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The union believes that an efficient intermodal system could actually increase employment in sectors where the union has a presence. The big loser would be the inefficient over-the-road long distance trucking sector which is non-union and generally consists of very low wage, high turnover jobs.

Supporting this kind of big systemic thinking should be a key aim of climate change advocacy. It should be noted also that the Teamsters have demonstrated a rare capacity to take the long view even when it seems to conflict with some of the union’s short term interests. For example, after being an enthusiastic supporter for years, the Teamsters pulled out of the coalition in support of oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. Union president Hoffa said:

“Global warming is for real. Air pollution is killing people and making our children sick. And you know what? We share some of the blame. In the past, we were forced to make a false choice. The choice was: Good Jobs or a Clean Environment. We were told no pollution meant no jobs. If we wanted clean air, the economy would suffer and jobs would be sent overseas. Well guess what?



We let the big corporations pollute and the jobs went overseas anyway. We didn't enforce environmental regulations and the economy still went in the toilet. The middle class got decimated and the environment is on the brink of disaster. Well I say ENOUGH IS ENOUGH! No more false divides. The future, if we are to prosper as a nation, will lie in a green economy."

The Teamsters approach to environment and climate issues has been ambiguous, however. Its July 1, 2011 statement on global warming confirms that "human use of fossil fuels is undisputedly contributing to global warming" and that "aiding a transition to more fuel-efficient rail and trucking technology, expanding high-speed passenger and cargo rail and mass-transit, retrofitting and building energy-efficient homes and public facilities, expanding recycling and sustainable warehousing, building wind and solar farms, and revamping the electrical grid are all "clean energy" solutions that will create new jobs, and increase the demand for existing Teamster jobs in industries like warehousing, freight, rail, construction, waste and recycling." However, it also calls for expansion of nuclear and "clean coal" energy.

The Teamsters helped lead a dynamic and successful coalition of labor, environmental, and community groups to clean up pollution from West Coast ports, which also resulted in turning some of the worst trucking jobs into better-paid union jobs. But the Teamsters union has been a strong supporter of the KXL pipeline. TransCanada, the pipeline's builder, early approached four unions including the Teamsters and offered them a project labor agreement that would give them favorable conditions for work on the pipeline. The four unions accepted the offer and led a campaign to support the pipeline. In a May 21, 2013 letter, James P. Hoffa asked members of Congress to pass legislation approving the pipeline. "The Teamsters Union believes that the Keystone XL Pipeline will contribute to enhanced energy security, economic prosperity and, of critical importance, the creation of good paying jobs."

United Automobile Workers

The United Automobile Workers (UAW) is a manufacturing union (see also under Manufacturing), but its fate is deeply tied up with transportation policy. Half of the greenhouse gasses emitted in transportation are from private automobiles.

In the post-war period up to the 1950s the UAW attempted to pressure the big car companies to produce smaller cars. But the union was consistently rebuffed by the companies, which jealously guarded their management prerogatives. Over time the union dropped its efforts to influence product development. Instead for decades the UAW aligned itself with the big carmakers fighting against mileage standards. As a result, the UAW was perceived as part of the problem and not part of the solution and this contributed to the lack of public support for the union when the car companies collapsed.

The collapse of the American automobile industry and the announcement of new fuel economy standards by the Obama administration could be a game changer for the UAW. If it is to survive, the union will have to reposition itself on fuel standards and low carbon technology generally and this may offer opportunities for future alliances with climate change activists. It has taken some steps in this direction, such as supporting higher fuel efficiency standards and proposed climate legislation.

Testifying January 17, 2012 for extending CAFE standards to 2015, UAW president Bob King said, “We are excited about the new green technologies that are being developed in the United States and produced in UAW-represented facilities. The drive to bring innovative fuel-saving technologies to market is transforming the auto industry in the United States and creating good jobs from the research lab to the factory floor.” The UAW also opposed efforts to overturn the EPA’s findings that greenhouse gas emissions endanger public health, in part because it would “unravel the historic agreement on one national standard for fuel economy and greenhouse gas emissions for light duty vehicles.”

Other unions representing transportation workers

Two transportation unions have taken a different approach to climate change. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU) issued a joint statement saying, “We need jobs, but not ones based on increasing our reliance on Tar Sands Oil.” The statement called for major “New Deal” type public investments in infrastructure modernization and repair, energy conservation, and climate protection as a means of “putting people to work and laying the foundations of a green and sustainable economic future for the United States.”

The International Association of Machinists (IAM) is primarily a manufacturing union, but it also represents transportation workers in trucking, rail, ports, busses, mass transit, and airlines. While its members could be deeply affected, positively and negatively, but carbon-reducing transportation policies like mass transit and reduced commercial aviation, it has not been deeply involved with climate policy (see Manufacturing).

Government

(Selected list)

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Workers
Service Employees International Union
American Federation of Government Employees
National Association of Letter Carriers



American Postal Workers Union
National Rural Letter Carriers Association
National Postal Mail Handlers Union (a division of LIUNA)

Roughly half of organized workers are in the public sector. There are 1,096,000 Federal workers, 2,147,000 state workers, and 4,658,000 local workers who are represented by unions. Public-sector workers have a union membership rate of 35%, more than five times higher than that of private-sector workers.⁸ Four postal worker unions have a combined membership of about 600,000.⁹

Many unions represent public sector workers. The largest is the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Workers (AFSCME) with 1.6 million members. But the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has over a million members in public services. The American Federation of Government Employees represents 650,000 members who work primarily for the Federal government.

Public sector workers face some of the most powerful impacts of climate change. As the University of Maryland study *The U.S. Economic Impacts of Climate Change* points out, "The effects of climate change will likely place immense strains on public budgets, particularly as the cost of infrastructure maintenance and replacement increases. At the same time economic losses may translate into lost tax revenue."

LNS has conducted studies of the impact of climate change on unions and workers in Maryland and California. They illustrate the impact of climate change on public sector workers. In Maryland, climate change effects ranging from coastal flooding to heat waves will increase budget pressures. So will reduced tax revenues from sources ranging from closed beaches to reduced maritime activity. The impact of these budget pressures on workers in the public sector is likely to include extensive layoffs, permanent downsizings, further pressure on wages and benefits, speed-up, and deteriorating working conditions. They will also reduce the bargaining power of public sector unions by reducing the funds available to governments to allocate for labor contracts. Federal facilities that will be inundated by the 3.5 foot sea level rise expected by the end of this century include Patuxent Naval Air Station, Naval Surface Warfare Center, Naval Electronics Systems Center, Naval Academy Complex, the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, and the Naval Academy.¹⁰

In California, costs of climate change ranging from fighting forest fires to providing summer drinking water will increase budget pressures. Reduced tax revenues will range from closed ski lodges to reduced real estate values. In California as in Maryland, the impact of these budget pressures on workers in the public sector is likely to be massive layoffs, permanent downsizings, further

⁸ <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t03.htm>

⁹ Not counted as Federal workers?

¹⁰ CIER, "Climate Change and the Cost of Inaction, a 2011 Review," p 25.



pressure on wages and benefits, speed-up, and deteriorating working conditions. Unions likely to be affected include the Amalgamated Transit Union, American Federation of Government Employees, American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Workers, American Federation of Teachers, International Association of Fire Fighters, National Education Association, and Service Employees International Union.

Public sector workers experience many other consequences of climate change as well. Postal workers, for example face heatstroke and vulnerability of workplaces to extreme weather. Workers at the Environmental Protection Agency have faced gag orders and punishment for disregarding agency policy to let the American public know the truth about climate change. (AFGE local 704, which represents workers at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proclaims on its webpage "Working to Protect America's Environment and Labor's Environment in Government!")

American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Workers

The largest public sector union is the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), with 1.6 million members. They work in a wide range of public sector activities:

- Corrections
- Early Childhood Education
- Emergency Services
- Environmental Stewardship
- Health Care Workers
- Higher Education
- Home Care
- Housing
- Human Services
- K-12 Schools
- Law Enforcement
- Library Workers
- Nurses
- Probation and Parole
- Public Administration
- Public Works
- Transportation

The AFSCME 2008 resolution on Global Warming and Green Jobs called for "federal legislation to reduce national greenhouse gas emissions to levels consistent with the recommendations from the IPCC," which urge "60 to 90 percent reductions of greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels by the year 2050 in order to avoid the worst and most costly impacts of climate change."



AFSCME has also resolved to use its influence with governments to encourage climate protection policies. For example, AFSCME joined with the California Wind Energy Association, Sierra Club California and the American Lung Association of California to support the passage of SBX1-2, a law that requires that 33 percent of the state's energy come from renewable sources by 2020. AFSCME's 2010 Climate Action Plan resolution resolved to support "state and local government agencies to accelerate and expand their commitment to greenhouse gas emission reduction programs, and encourage them to include specifications for public contracts to include equitable opportunities for green jobs among historically-disadvantaged communities, fair wages and benefits for workers, and preference for unionized, local firms." AFSCME developed its own [Sustainability Planning Toolkit](#) for helping cities and counties develop a sustainability plan. The union also developed its own [AFSCME Green Network](#) for discussing best practices for the union, home and workplace, legislative and policy proposals, green jobs and training, and more.

AFSCME has encouraged its members to "go green." The AFSCME Advantage card offers discounts on professional home energy audits, HVAC service contract from a union contractor, energy efficient home heating systems, and union made, EPA-approved Green Vehicles.

AFSCME has also pushed for environmentally friendly infrastructure and construction. For example, AFSCME worked with the investment staff of CalPERS, the \$239 billion pension fund for State of California employees, to develop language for its new infrastructure investment policy that specifically targets green infrastructure as a priority area. AFSCME's Corporate Governance and Investment Program has met with real estate development organizations and private equity asset managers to urge them to consider expanding investment programs in buildings that meet LEED standards and use clean, energy saving technologies. AFSCME is affiliated with two investor organizations concerned with climate change, CERES and its project the Investor Network on Climate Risk. AFSCME representatives have met with AIG, Sunoco, British Petroleum, and others large corporations to discuss internal policies related to climate change risk and corporate sustainability disclosure. AFSCME's Civil Service Technical Guild Local 375 of New York City helped develop a LEED design training program to help city engineers, architects, and similar workers to upgrade their knowledge and get certified in the new LEED standards for sustainable, eco-friendly structures.

A number of organizations within AFSCME draw together environmental activists. The AFSCME Environmental Stewardship Employees Network includes the many AFSCME members who work in jobs protecting the environment. An AFSCMEgreen Environmental Caucus aims to bring environmental protection into collective bargaining and to form "greater links between labor and environment in order to ensure that policies and practices both help the environment while also fostering family-wage jobs and a healthy economy." A resolution from an environmentally active local in California



called for AFSCME to “encourage locals and councils to negotiate environmentally related issues into their contract language, including the formation of joint labor-management committees that would strive to apply an environmental ethic to workplace practices.”

Education

(Selected list)

National Education Association
American Federation of Teachers

The National Education Association has 3 million members; the American Federation of Teachers 1.5 million. Together the two education unions include nearly a third of all union members. They cooperate through the NEA-AFT Partnership. The AFT is a member of the AFL-CIO; the NEA has a “solidarity partnership” with the AFL-CIO but is not officially a member; the partnership lets any NEA local affiliate with the AFL-CIO at local, state, and national levels as a Directly Affiliated NEA Local (DANL).

The AFT represents teachers, paraprofessionals, higher education faculty and staff, and some local, state, and federal employees, and some healthcare professionals. It has strongly advocated for sustainable “green schools”; the main emphasis has been on a healthy environment conducive to learning and reducing energy costs, but benefits of pollution reduction, including reducing greenhouse gases, are also noted. It advocates for green schools and the preparation of students for environmental employment as part of a broader plan for green jobs. Many AFT teachers educate their students regarding environmental and climate issues. Some engage in special projects, such as AFT member Steve Ritz whose Green Bronx Machine grows 25,000 pounds of vegetables while providing work opportunities for students.

The NEA represents teachers, support staff, higher education faculty and staff, and school administrators. It is organized through affiliates in every state. In contrast to most unions, state executive directors exercise considerable power relative to state elected officials. In 2008 the NEA convention passed a resolution on Global Climate Change calling for “steps to change activities that contribute to global climate change.” NEA lists Green Schools and Environmental Education as key issues of concern. The NEA has supported climate legislation and developed educational materials for teaching sustainability and climate change to students of all ages. It has partnered for environmental education and green schools with the Earth Day Network, Earth Echo International, EcoSchools, National Audubon Society, National Environmental Education Foundation, National Wildlife Federation, North American Association for Environmental Education, Will Steger Foundation, and the US Green Building Council. NEA Secretary-Treasurer Becky Pringle says, “NEA believes that we all have a responsibility to the environment and must



take steps to stop doing things that contribute to global climate change and its effects.”

The NEA and the AFT participate in the Coalition for Green Schools, which also includes the PTA and the U.S. Green Building Council. Green schools are portrayed as a vehicle for job creation. The NEA, for example, has pointed out that “an initial \$50 billion school renovation program would employ 500,000 workers — a third of the 1.5 million construction workers now unemployed — and could be scaled up.”

Services

(Selected list)

Service Employees International Union
UNITEHERE!
National Nurses United
National Domestic Workers Alliance

“Service occupations” are a highly diverse sector that, as defined by the BLS, include 23 million workers. 2.7 million of them are represented by unions. They include healthcare support, protective services, food preparation and serving, buildings and grounds cleaning and maintenance, and personal care and service workers.¹¹ However, there are many more workers in what are normally considered as service industries and many more of them are in unions.

Service Employees International Union

While many unions represent employees in the service sector, the largest by far is the Service Employees International Union.

2.1 million members

1.1 million members in healthcare

225,000 members in property services

1 million + members in public services

The SEIU withdrew from the AFL-CIO in 2005 and helped found the Change to Win federation.

SEIU’s 2008 convention resolved that “healthcare, public service, and property service workers have an opportunity to make a direct contribution to promoting quality green jobs by working with management to make changes that address climate change and environmental health.” It supported “emission reduction targets based on sound science.” It called for contract negotiations

¹¹ <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/union2.t03.htm>



and union-management partnerships that lead to “public transportation benefits, adoption of more energy efficient equipment, reduced use and improved disposal of hazardous substances, schedule changes (such as day cleaning that will reduce energy use), and more.” It advocated policies promoting new investment in quality green jobs and action by childcare providers and homecare workers to make their home workplaces more energy efficient. It called for protections for workers whose jobs are affected or eliminated by efforts to stem climate change.

SEIU has traditionally bargained over effects of environmental hazards on its members and promoted labor-management committees on environmental and health and safety issues. It has increasingly identified climate change as an issue and it has sought to include carbon emissions as a collective bargaining issue. For example, the SEIU California Public Sector Local 1000 proposed a [“Joint Labor Management Committee on Waste Minimization”](#) and [“Joint Labor Management Committee on Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction”](#) in its 2008 bargaining. SEIU has also advocated for career ladders for “green jobs”; for example, it created a Healthcare Career Advancement Program to “create a new career ladder for 3000 entry level environmental service workers in Los Angeles, Seattle, NYC, and the Baltimore/DC corridor.”

40% of carbon emissions come from buildings, much of it from commercial real estate operated, maintained, and cleaned by SEIU members. SEIU’s property services local 32BJ in New York has pioneered programs in green building management, such as “1000 Green Supers” which helps “ensure the gains made through retrofits are fully realized by a well-trained property services workforce.”

National Nurses United

Well over a million healthcare workers are union members. They represent scores of job categories from orderly to physician and they are divided among many unions, primarily SEIU, AFSCME, and National Nurses United.

National Nurses United was formed in 2009 and represents 185,000 registered nurses. It plays a unique role within the labor movement on climate issues, advocating for climate protection on the basis of nurses’ experience with and responsibility for dealing with the impacts of climate change on public health.

The union has opposed natural gas fracking. Deborah Burger, co-president of National Nurses United, said “We know that drilling and fracking for oil and gas comes with inherent risks to public health and must be banned to safeguard public health, especially that of children, who are most vulnerable.” The union also opposes the Keystone XL pipeline. Burger explained, “Nurses care for patients every day who struggle with health crises aggravated by environmental pollution in its many forms. As a society we need to reduce the



effects of environmental factors, including climate change, that are making people sick, and endangering the future for our children. That's why we oppose the Keystone XL pipeline." The union cites impact of climate change in hastening the spread of infectious disease, waterborne and food borne pathogens, and air pollution, as well as the increase in extreme weather and natural disasters, which already lead to significant health problems across the U.S.

A centerpiece of the NNU's work on climate has been the Robin Hood Tax, which the union presents as a means to find government funding for a transition to a green economy and a happier planet. "The Robin Hood Tax can fund the transition to a non-fossil-fuel based economy. Wall Street reaps billions from oil companies, it's time for them to pay us back — to address the effects of climate change and support a sustainable economy. Green manufacturing, clean energy and mass transit, funded by a tax on Wall Street transactions, would make the development of the Tar Sands and the Keystone XL pipeline unnecessary."

National Domestic Workers Alliance

The National Domestic Workers Alliance is a new organization with 10,000 members, affiliated with the AFL-CIO but not yet officially recognized as a union, that represents nannies, housekeepers, and in-home caregivers. Domestic workers are not covered by most Federal labor law and so far the Alliance does not engage in collective bargaining, but in 2010 the organization and its allies won unprecedented legislation that extends basic labor protections to over 200,000 domestic workers in New York State.

The organization is often seen as an exemplar of new strategies for organizing and empowering a low-wage, marginalized, predominantly young, immigrant, female workforce. It is aligned with social change-oriented groups; for example, it is a member of the Unity Alliance made up of Grassroots Global Justice Alliance, Jobs with Justice, the National Day Laborers Organizing Network, the National Domestic Workers Alliance, the Pushback Network, and the Right to the City uniting "domestic workers, immigrants, parents, children -- all of us in a movement to reclaim our democracy, save our communities and protect our environment."

The National Domestic Workers Alliance has taken strong stands on environmental issues; it has supported legislation for safe chemicals and the right to know the contents of cleaning products, issues that directly affect its members. The NDWA has also taken strong positions on climate protection, notably in opposition to the Keystone XL pipeline or "any actions that lead to the further extraction of Tar Sands oil from Alberta, Canada.". It explained why: "Many of our members come to the U.S. from countries already severely impacted by climate change and environmental devastation. If approved and



constructed, the Keystone XL pipeline will have a huge impact on our communities, on First Nation communities, on global greenhouse gas emissions, and risks major contamination of the largest freshwater aquifer in North America.”

The Blue-Green Alliance

The BlueGreen Alliance (BGA) is a strategic partnership of environmental groups and labor organizations working together to promote clean energy jobs in a green economy. It was first launched in 2006 by the United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club and has since gained many more member organizations (affiliated environmental groups and unions). The BGA is a national action group with initiatives promoting clean energy, workers’ rights, transportation, climate change research, fuel efficient vehicles, green schools, recycling, energy efficiency, infrastructure, locally owned businesses, and broadband connection. Its affiliates currently include:

Labor

- United Steelworkers (USW)
- Communications Workers of America (CWA)
- Service Employees International Union (SEIU)
- Utility Workers Union of America (UWUA)
- American Federation of Teachers (AFT)
- Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU)
- United Auto Workers (UAW)
- United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW)
- Sheet Metal Workers’ International Association (SMWIA)
- United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry (UA)

Environmental

- Sierra Club
- Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
- National Wildlife Federation (NWF)
- Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS)

The BGA’s mission is to advocate for “the growth in the number and quality of jobs in the clean economy by expanding a broad range of industries, including renewable energy, energy efficiency, the substitution of safer, cleaner chemicals, modern transportation systems and advanced vehicle technology, domestic manufacturing, high-speed Internet and a smart, efficient electrical grid, green schools and other public buildings, improving our nation’s water infrastructure, recycling, and sustainable agriculture.”

The BGA offers initiatives on:

- | | | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------------|
| • Clean energy | • Climate change | • Recycling |
| • Worker rights | • Fuel efficient vehicles | • Infrastructure |
| • Transportation | • Green schools | • Made in America |
| • Work, environment, and public health | • Energy efficiency | • Broadband |

The BGA includes member organizations with every different positions on key climate issues. It has not taken a position on targets and timetables for carbon reduction, clean coal, nuclear energy, or the Keystone XL pipeline.



Talking to Labor about Climate Change

- Focus on the inevitability of climate change mitigation policies and the changes they will cause.
- Explore the positive aspects of this change: massive new investment is needed to completely transform the energy and transportation infrastructure, producing millions of new jobs.
- Forthrightly confront the negative aspects of the change for labor: Some jobs will be lost. Unions need to step forward with transition plans to deal with job loss and economic dislocation.
- Focus attention on the negative effects of climate change on jobs, workers, and unions, stressing for example that climate change is the real job killer and that the costs of climate change are undermining public sector union bargaining power.
- Point out the huge costs of inaction on climate change: Inadequate measures will lead to drastic consequences and the necessity for far more disruptive climate protection measures in the not-too-distant future.
- Unions are going to need allies to ensure that green jobs are good jobs and that labor and employment standards are included in subsidy programs.

These messages need to be tailored to the specific concerns of the unions being addressed. For example, when talking to public service unions you can focus on public budgets being decimated by climate change effects. Conversely, when talking to building trades unions you can focus on fewer work hours due to rising temperatures; new construction jobs created by climate protection policies; and the value of getting environmentalist support for job-creating infrastructure modernization.