

TO WIN A JUST TRANSITION, WE NEED TO DREAM BIG & ORGANIZE BIG

Over the past two years, we've flooded Parliament with support for a just transition.

Dozens of Members of Parliament tabled our petition calling for a just transition. Thousands of people wrote to the government. The Council supported days of action alongside allies, which saw events take place in dozens of communities from coast to coast. And many unions and other organizations took action in a multitude of ways to demand a just transition.

Through our collective organizing, we succeeded in compelling the government to finally table relevant legislation a few months ago. That is a win.

But the work remains unfinished. While just transition legislation has been a key goal of our collective movement for transformative climate justice, this bill is far too timid to get us there.

As I write these words, record-breaking wildfires continue to rage from coast to

coast, inundating our communities with toxic smoke. The urgency of this crisis, and the need for bold, transformative climate and energy policies, is becoming harder and harder to deny.

To match this reality, we need to dream big—and organize big.

THE SUSTAINABLE JOBS ACT: TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

The Trudeau government has for years pledged to table legislation to support a just transition away from fossil fuels and towards a green economy. The Sustainable Jobs Act promises to fulfill that mandate, but it falls significantly short in its scope, ambition, and sense of urgency.

The bill—which should have been known as the Just Transition Act, had the government not started to back away from its promise—avoids any mention of a just transition altogether. It designates an existing federal minister with responsibility for the Act, but

it falls short of establishing the full-fledged Ministry of Just Transition that we urgently need.

The bill also tasks a Secretariat with coordinating the Sustainable Jobs Action Plan, and it proposes a Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council that would advise relevant federal ministers on the progress of the legislation, once passed. These provisions could help to ensure the participation of workers and communities in decision-making about just transition. But they lack important details and could involve major pitfalls. For example, will the federal government include fossil fuel CEOs on the Partnership Council? It's long past time to take the reins of climate and job policies away from CEOs and billionaires and put decision-making in the hands of workers and communities.

The bill gestures at inclusivity and encourages “the creation of employment opportunities for groups underrepresented in the labour market, including women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, Black and other racialized individuals, 2SLGBTQIA+, and other equity-seeking groups.” But it includes no details on how such a plan would be brought to life. There are further mentions of Indigenous rights and the rights of people with disabilities, but these are in the preamble of the bill, rather than sections that instruct government action.

And while the preamble notes that Canada has passed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, there's no mention of the right of Indigenous peoples to free, prior, and informed consent about projects in their territories—even though this right was explicitly laid out in the interim “Sustainable Jobs Plan” that the government released back in February.

Also notable in the bill is the absence of a clear plan for any economic transition to a post-carbon economy, let alone a just one. It remains unclear how or when the government's proposed good, green jobs will come to fruition.

The federal government, unsurprisingly, is also pushing false climate solutions as “opportunities,” including critical minerals, hydrogen, carbon capture, utilization, and storage (CCUS), and small modular nuclear reactors (SMRs). Investing in false solutions helps prop up the fossil fuel

industry and delays a real transition towards decarbonization, which hurts everyone including fossil fuel workers.

The inclusion of these “solutions” is a loophole in the bill that’s big enough to build several pipelines through.

The bill also fails to address regional and sectoral mechanisms that would ensure major sources of emissions like food production and distribution, housing and buildings, and transportation are included in job-creating transition plans.

What’s more, the bill sticks to the government’s insufficient plan to reduce emissions by 40 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030 and reach net-zero emissions by 2050, with net-zero goals acting as a smokescreen to conceal not actually reaching zero. According to the Climate Action Network’s calculations, a “fair share” emissions reductions target would see Canada reduce emissions by at least 60 per cent by 2030 as well as to make significant contributions to emissions reductions in countries in the Global South.

TIME TO REDOUBLE OUR EFFORTS

Despite its limitations, the Sustainable Jobs Act shows that our organizing is working. Thanks to the hard work of labour, Indigenous, migrant justice, environmental, and other allied groups, the bill is much stronger than it would have otherwise been.

Our voices and demands have become impossible to ignore.



Left: Over the last year, thousands of people from hundreds of communities took part in the Council of Canadians’ campaign to flood Parliament with support for a just transition. As a result, 39 MPs from all four major parties tabled our petition in the House. Photo: Eagleclaw Thom



Right: Council of Canadians Nelson chapter members held a rally for the Just Transition National Day of Action in March 2022.

But we can’t allow the government to settle for inadequate legislation that merely gestures at change without offering a concrete blueprint or a bold vision to make it happen. We must not allow the government to co-opt and then water down our demands, disarming us of our power and momentum in the process.

Instead, we need to organize in ways that build the power of our movement.

To begin, we can still push for improvements to the bill as it makes its way through the parliamentary process.

Throughout the summer, many of you joined us as we teamed up with 350 Canada to support local organizers applying pressure on their MPs from coast to coast. People like you have been grilling their MPs about whether they’ll support the necessary level of ambition in just transition legislation, beyond the table scraps offered so far.

Council of Canadians members collected signatures for the just transition campaign in the South Shore of Nova Scotia in October 2021. Photo: David Sorcher

Together, we need to build on that momentum by keeping MPs’ feet to the fire in the fall as the bill gets debated in the House of Commons. We need to organize more people in our communities to contact MPs and demand they ensure that the bill is amended so that it advances a just transition instead of just serving as a vehicle for profiteering by Big Oil CEOs.

But we must also direct our focus beyond this insufficient bill. We need to hold this government to its word. Trudeau promised just transition legislation and his government has made it clear that the Sustainable Jobs Act isn’t it.

We need to push for a full just transition and the broader suite of systemic changes that are needed to address the crisis and ensure that it’s done in a way that all affected workers and communities are supported.

We need to escalate the political pressure for a just transition and climate justice until our voices outweigh the pervasive and undue influence of Big Oil CEOs over federal climate policies.

Whether this government ultimately implements a just transition is up to us. We’ve already gotten them to move—now we just need to push them past the finish line. **CP**

Dylan Penner is a Climate and Social Justice Campaigner at the Council of Canadians.

GET INVOLVED!

Join the Pan-Canadian Just Transition Day of Action
November 4, 2023

Learn more at
Canadians.org/JustTransition

