

# INTRODUCING “JUST TRANSITION”

## AS A CONCEPT FOR A SOCIALLY SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

By: Carlo Bierbaum



[Image: Eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk)

Climate Change is one of the biggest challenges that humankind is facing. It is necessary to protect the planet for a sustainable future. We have to reflect the way we are producing. An industry based on fossil energy has no future and has to be changed. Social industrial transformation has to be enforced to protect and transform jobs of the working class which will be highly affected by the needed transformation of economy. Just transition as a progressive concept develops measures for workers that enable social policies as social protection, work opportunities, new skills and a better connectivity between workers, etc. A just transition process evolves in changing the economy and production, as well as relations of productions towards a green economy that reduces carbon emissions and guarantees environmental sustainability and at the same time protects and develops jobs for the people. The transformation process aims to shift for a sustainable production. In the following paragraph the concept of just transition will be further discussed.

Just transition targets for a low carbon economy to prevent the consequences of climate change and build up social protection for workers affected by the transformation process of economy. It is also in the interest of protecting communities. The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has stated several policies which should be applied and enhanced in the future. Measures comprise investment in low emission and job-rich sectors as well as green technology while protecting human and labour rights, and creating a social dialogue and democratic consultation of social partners that include trade unions and employers. To analyse the impact of climate change on workers, research will be further advanced. Workers should be trained for the industrial change and new technologies enhancing their skills. Another point is to work out Labour market policies to assure social protection. The transition also needs to facilitate communities to have persistent stability that protects workers on a local economic level.

According to the ITUC, the policy measures have to be implemented on the national and international level. Thus policy should be influenced to act in the interest of the working class. Since COP16 in Cancun (Sixteenth session of the Conference of the Parties), different parties and stakeholders supporting the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) have shown their interest and

support for the Concept of just transition. It has been implemented on the COP16. Parties in the Conference have stated: “Recognizing the importance of avoiding or minimizing negative impacts of response measures on social and economic sectors, promoting a just transition of the workforce, the creating of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities and strategies and contributing to building new capacity for both production and service-related jobs in all sectors, promoting economic growth and sustainable development.”<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, the UNFCCC has been established a just transition process. This will facilitate the cooperation between UNFCCC and the International Labor Organization (ILO). People of the working class who will frontline the upcoming economic transition should be recognized by the UNFCCC, which to emerge importance on the highest political level to secure the livelihoods of the people, as ILO has stated. A second reference is a report of the ‘Labor Network for Sustainability’ and the ‘Strategic Practice: Grassroot Policy Project’. They have conducted 17 interviews between 2015-16 to analyse the just transition language, what it stands for and what different perspectives among different stakeholders are concluded. According to the terminology of just transition, Joe Uehlein of the Labor Network for Sustainability has stated, “we believe it is possible to work for the great leap forward, a transition away from capitalism and toward local democratic economies, while at the same time fighting for what working people need today.”<sup>2</sup>

---

- <sup>1</sup> “ITUC – Frontlines Briefing March 2015 – Climate Justice: There are no jobs on a dead planet”. *International Trade Union Confederation*. 2015.

- <sup>2</sup> “‘Just Transition’ – Just What Is It?”. *Labor Network for Sustainability / Strategic Practice: Grassroots Policy Project*. 2015.

Different concepts of just transition have been targeted and issued. One approach was the “original Superfund for workers proposal”<sup>3</sup>. This proposal includes protection for workers and communities who will be largely affected by the transition of industry caused by climate change. Many workers risk to lose their jobs. This superfund expanded into different proposals. Some of the proposals have been operated in the “Clean Energy Worker Just Transition Act” that has been proposed by Senator Bernie Sanders and other people. The bill has the intention to represent coal workers and other workers from the energy sector. The bill procures health care, unemployment insurance, job training, pensions for several years and living expenses, as well as facilitates countries to strengthen networking. Just transition proposals also comprise studies, like the LNS (Labor Network for sustainability) study: “Employment after Coal: Creating New Jobs in Eastern Kentucky”.

Joe Uehlein from the LNS stated, that Just Transition has to be issued in a federal and national program to guarantee that every worker benefits from the concept. A report that has been established by the LNS defines several examples of cooperation work between unions, community groups, environmentalists, and governments to enable a transition to workers affected by the closing of coal-fired power-plants. Referring to this empirical observation the LNS created some key recommendations for workers and communities. This includes job agreements with unions representing affected workers, to find jobs for workers, establish job retraining for people who need to shift to other sectors, pensions with healthcare and fund job creation in the community.

These are a few examples that concepts of Just Transition can be measured and conducted together with different stakeholders and that workers will be represented and be heard to face the issues they have with a shifting economy.

---

- <sup>3</sup> “Just Transition’ – Just What Is It?”. *Labor Network for Sustainability / Strategic Practice: Grassroots Policy Project*. 2015.

Climate change is on the rise and the international community has agreed on reducing carbon emissions to fight climate change and shifting the economy towards a sustainable future. When it comes to that society and politics are taken measures into action for a new economy with new energy sectors, the just transition dialogue and process has to be adopted by society and policymakers. The society, the stakeholders and governments have to face the issues of the working class that come along with restructuring the economy and labour market. The working class has to be involved in the shifting process to stand up for their rights to ensure social justice. From the perspective of globalization, countries of the global south will suffer more from the impact of climate change. As industrial transformation towards a green economy will rise, workers in less developed countries will have more difficulties to shift to some new job perspectives. Infrastructure, the labour market and industrial premises have to be given to enable a successful social industrial transformation. Countries from the global north, especially the industrial leading countries, have to do more in order to support countries of the global south.

Sources:

- “Employment after coal – Creating New Jobs in Eastern Kentucky”. Labor Network for Sustainability / Synapse Energy Economics, Inc. 2016.  
[https://labor4sustainability.org/files/KYcleanenergy\\_final\\_03032016.pdf](https://labor4sustainability.org/files/KYcleanenergy_final_03032016.pdf)  
(Accessed on the 15<sup>th</sup> of February 2020 of)
  
- “ITUC – Frontlines Briefing March 2015 – Climate Justice: There are no jobs on a dead planet”. International Trade Union Confederation. 2015.  
[https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc\\_frontlines\\_climate\\_change\\_report\\_en.pdf](https://www.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_frontlines_climate_change_report_en.pdf)  
(Accessed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of February 2020)
  
- “‘Just Transition’ – Just What Is It?”. Labor Network for Sustainability / Strategic Practice: Grassroots Policy Project. 2015.  
<https://www.labor4sustainability.org/uncategorized/just-transition-just-what-is-it/>  
(Accessed on the 05<sup>th</sup> of March 2020)