



BLUEGREEN
CANADA

JUST TRANSITION AND GOOD GREEN JOBS FOR ALBERTA

2017 CONFERENCE SUMMARY

BlueGreenCanada.ca/Alberta2017

September 27, 2017 | Calgary, AB
Ramada Plaza Calgary Downtown
#BlueGreenAB17

Blue Green Canada is an alliance between Canadian labour unions, environmental and civil society organizations to advocate for working people and the environment by promoting solutions to environmental issues that have positive employment and economic impacts

TABLE OF CONTENTS

"What's so radical about planning a new clean economy, instead of bits & pieces? We've done it before."

2 INTRODUCTION

3 THEMES

- 3 Urgency
- 3 Excellent examples and potential
- 3 Multi-party planning
- 4 Affordable
- 4 Involving and supporting communities
- 4 Industrial strategy
- 4 Good green jobs, prioritizing affected communities
- 4 Ease the path for workers - training and credentials
- 5 This transition will help inform larger transitions to come
- 5 Action, and early wins

5 LESSONS LEARNED FROM ALBERTA'S COAL TRANSITION

6 APPENDIX I - CONFERENCE AGENDA



Please see Blue Green Canada's set of five conference backgrounders:

- Just transition and good green jobs - update and progress
- Context: Alberta coal and other transitions
- Worker transitions - training and green jobs
- Financial security for workers in transition
- Community transitions

Backgrounders and other materials available for download at: www.bluegreencanada.ca/Alberta2017

See also:

Blue Green Canada, "Just Transition and Good Green Jobs for Alberta - Edmonton 2016 Conference Summary"
www.bluegreencanada.ca/alberta

Alberta Coal Transition Coalition, "Getting it Right: A Just Transition Strategy for Alberta's Coal Workers."
www.coaltransition.ca/

INTRODUCTION

Transition is a reality that does not guarantee justice for workers and communities. That was the concern when Blue Green Canada hosted the first conference on **Just Transition and Good Green Jobs for Alberta**. On September 27, 2017, Blue Green Canada hosted its second conference on Just Transition and Good Green Jobs for Alberta in Calgary to discuss provincial action, the actions of industry, and the impact on people in the coal and other energy sectors. The context for this event included:

- coal-fired generation plant owners speeding up closures, with one unit closing in 2017 and units scheduled to close every year until the majority of plants and associated coal mine jobs are eliminated in 2023 - seven years before the government's 2030 phase out timeline; and,
- the release of the Government's Advisory Panel on Coal Communities report being delayed until the Fall of 2017.

Despite these challenges, conference participants from unions, communities, power generation companies, environmental groups, schools, and other organizations engaged in a productive, candid, no-attribution exchange of information and ideas.

The exchange involved facilitated large group discussions, small group discussions, and individual input. Morning presentations with large group Q&A sessions helped to provide an up-to-date foundation for the afternoon discussions.

The afternoon provided an opportunity for everyone to participate intensively, through facilitated table discussions of six people per table, plenary sessions, larger-group exercises including power mapping and timelining of the transition period, and potential organizing and mobilizing strategies. Participants brought a great deal of information and expertise to the discussions.

A great deal was learned.

First, evidence from other jurisdictions shows transition can be just under specific conditions, including a central role for unions, a role for employers in retaining workers through the process, while government at all levels creates the enabling conditions. Second, these actions are urgent given the accelerated rate of change in Alberta's electrical generation industry. The good news: just transition is affordable and a progressive government is a leading partner.

This report details discussions during the day-long conference as participants sought to answer the question: **What is the way forward?**

As the lessons from Alberta's experience with coal emerge, some immediate solutions and a call to action were proposed:

- centre just transition for workers and communities in all discussions on climate change, particularly as plans are shaped
- ensure a union seat at table alongside employers and government
- direct existing and future funds to leverage support for workers
- recognize that decision-making needs to be open and include the representatives of those with the greatest stake: workers and the communities where they live.

The next section outlines key themes that emerged. The conference agenda is provided in Appendix I. The five backgrounders prepared for this conference are available for download at **www.BlueGreenCanada.ca/Alberta2017**

"Internationally, everyone is watching what is happening with the coal phase-out and just transition in Alberta."

THEMES

This section does not attempt to reflect everything that was said in the conference, but rather to outline the main themes that emerged. There were consistent views on many topics. On others, there was a wider range of views. The themes noted below are the ones where the views expressed were consistent, or clearly shared by the majority. Additional information relevant to the themes and other topics can be found in the Conference Backgrounders, and sources cited in them.

Urgency

Since the last conference, the timeline for developing and implementing a just transition has been significantly shortened by the power generation companies. The owners of 13 of the 18 generation units announced that they would be closing early, with most of those closing five to ten years ahead of the schedules required by government (provincial and federal) policy. Three-quarters of workers will be affected by these early closures by 2023.

The only company that hasn't yet announced an early closure - Capital Power - will likely do so soon, as suggested in their investor presentations. If so, there will be no coal plant or coal mine workers left by the 2030 pollution phase-out deadline, and likely several years before that. Closures and layoffs began in July 2017, and will continue every year going forward. Some workers have already sold their houses and started looking for new jobs.

What the government had been anticipating as a long "runway" to the transition is effectively behind us, and we are already living in the transition. The government's pace in addressing worker and community concerns already was regarded by many workers and communities as being too slow; now it will need to accelerate dramatically. Planning and implementation needs to begin immediately to make the transition just.

Excellent examples and potential

Fortunately, there are a number of case studies from around the world illustrating the potential for an excellent transition that protects both workers and communities. Large industrial facilities and entire industries have been closed, many with very few to no involuntary job losses, and others with significant worker transition supports and successful establishment of new industries in affected communities and regions.

The broad principles of just transitions and good green jobs initiatives are well established, and examples abound. Alberta does not have to reinvent the wheel; the tools and materials are available to build a world-class just transition. The world is watching Alberta, as it knows Alberta has a progressive government, and adequate resources - financial and know-how - to make it happen.

"Any climate action plan must include a plan for workers and communities."

Multi-party planning

Successful just transitions are created through dialogue between workers, employers, government, and local communities. The only way for transition to both be just and to succeed is for workers and local communities to be included in all aspects of decision-making, analysis, policy development and organizing. There was broad agreement at the conference that all parties need to be involved in the process, and to bring their particular expertise and knowledge. The provincial government has a role in launching and facilitating that process, as well as being a primary funder and actor.

Workers and communities will need to engage strongly with the provincial and federal governments, which will be dealing with competing interests (e.g. generation companies), and also have their own interests at heart.

In the end, the deal that workers and communities get will reflect the creativity and scale of their vision, the strengths of their coalitions, and the effectiveness of their strategies. While celebrating the past and their achievements, workers and communities will need to develop a positive vision of the future that includes good jobs and vibrant communities and regions with new industries.

Affordable

The cost of providing workers with training, moving allowances, income support, and other requirements of a just transition will be affordable. The number of workers involved in Alberta's coal transition - about 3,400 - is relatively small compared to the available resources from the Alberta's carbon pricing system. Alberta already has demonstrated the ability to allocate those resources by providing generous compensation payments to affected generation companies. The cost to assist workers in the transition would likely be considerably lower. Alberta can afford to build a world-class just transition.

Involving and supporting communities

Each community is unique, and there can be no cookie cutter solutions. Communities must be involved in local, specific planning from the outset. The planning should take a whole-community approach, mapping community assets and resources, and matching those with real opportunities. Each community should aim to develop a range of occupational choices in order to future-proof their community, and training should include training for jobs that are located in the community. We need to relocalize how we deliver services, so that we leave nobody behind.

Industrial strategy

Alberta needs to embrace developing and implementing an active industrial strategy to employ the affected workers and to support community economic development and diversification. Consistent with its past - e.g. the development of the oil and gas industry, the development of the oilsands, the development of the medical research industry and much more - Alberta can and should intentionally develop economic sectors that are well-positioned for the future, e.g. energy efficiency, renewable energy, and electrification of transportation. Initiating and capturing R&D in growth sectors is a proven way to capture subsequent investments and jobs.

A range of policies is required - regulation, public equity investment and more. Simply "leaving it to the market" as per neoliberal orthodoxy is not what Alberta has done in the past, and is not an option at this time.

"Just Transition for coal workers in Alberta is urgent & affordable"

Good green jobs, prioritizing affected communities

Having jobs to go to is essential for a just transition. Alberta should make public investments and establish other policy initiatives to grow the main good green jobs sectors - renewable energy, energy efficiency, low-carbon transportation - as well as other sectors that can provide good green jobs (e.g. reclamation and remediation, clean water, waste reduction).

This growth should prioritize affected communities, e.g. through setting criteria for future rounds of renewable energy procurement auctions, as well as public equity investment. Affected communities will be suitable for these developments, as they will have an available and highly skilled workforce, as well as key infrastructure already in place (e.g. access to the power grid). Local economic development bodies can help provide knowledge and expertise to guide the efforts.

Ease the path for workers - training and credentials

Workers training should be undertaken while workers are in their current job, so that they are credentialed and able to find other work when their job ends. Training should be provided at a workforce level, not left to individuals. It should provide a high level, broad and diverse set of skills - skills that enable workers to be well-rounded and nimble, and to enter multiple different industries over the course of a career. For example, electricians should be able to work in power plants, in solar farms, in transmission, or in solar PV residential systems. The future for workers from Alberta's coal plants and coal mines, as well as other workers, will be uncertain and will likely involve multiple job and career changes.

At the same time, it needs to be easier for workers to provide documentation of their skills, including skills that cross standard occupations, or are not in traditionally-recognized trades, e.g. apprenticeships in green tech sectors.

This transition will help inform larger transitions to come

We will learn a great deal from going through this transition, and that learning will be helpful as Alberta (and the rest of the world) goes through other transitions in the future. We know that we will need to address climate change, and there will be other changes that this will require; coal is only one of the sectors. And there will be massive changes coming from automation, which could affect half of all jobs.

We need to do the best job we can making the coal transition just, not only for affected workers and communities, but also for the sake of workers and communities affected by the larger transitions to come.

Action, and early wins

Conference participants and others need to work with their communities and organizations to get quick wins, in order to catch up to the transition that is already happening, and to boost confidence that it will be just. Mounting a campaign will require serious planning, including detailed-level power mapping of supporters and opponents, developing a detailed timeline, developing strategies for individual worksites, and organizing and mobilizing members and allies.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM ALBERTA'S COAL TRANSITION

As part of the conference we heard from Alberta's Coal Transition Coalition, an Alberta-based coalition working to ensure communities and workers have a voice as market forces, low electricity prices, and climate policies move the province away from coal-fired electricity generation. This is a summary of lessons learned that were shared with us based on the coalition's experiences in the year since our first Just Transition conference in 2016.

- 1) We're not leaving climate action up to the market; we shouldn't leave people, jobs and communities up to the market either. We need jobs where people already are.
- 2) Fight tooth and nail to make sure Just Transition is central to any discussion of and plans for climate change.
- 3) In North America, we must fight to get workers a seat at the table. We don't have good traditions for it.
- 4) Just Transition is about people. People resist climate action because their lives are being upended.
- 5) Be organized and ready with a plan that's good for your members, so they can't be used as political pawns.
- 6) Delays, lack of information, and insecurity undermine Just Transition. People become more fearful and angry.
- 7) The government of Alberta compensated companies for stranded assets first, without workers at the table. This was a big mistake.
- 8) Be realistic about how much power unions really have in Just Transition. We need allies.
- 9) People are losing their jobs and need concrete answers and plans to win trust.
- 10) Once a phase-out decision is made, change accelerates. Companies already closing coal plants and not waiting for 2030.
- 11) Once everyone knows the plant will close, housing prices drop and people can't leave because they can't sell.
- 12) Organize in the new sectors - wind and solar - and start early.

APPENDIX I - CONFERENCE AGENDA



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AGENDA

8:30a	Welcome, Introductions, and Goals for the Day - <i>Grand Ballroom</i> Mark Rowlinson, President of Blue Green Canada and Alejandra Bravo, Director of Leadership and Training, Broadbent Institute	11:30	Group Debrief and Discussion
9:15	Keynote Presentation: Samantha Smith, Director of the ITUC Just Transition Centre <i>Concrete examples of successful transitions from around the world</i> Interview by Joie Warnock, Unifor's Western Regional Director	12:00p	Buffet Lunch - Niagara Room
10:15	Coffee break	1:00	Introduction to Breakout Discussions: Review Goals, Process, and Topics of Discussion
10:30	Dave Thompson, PolicyLink Research Canada <i>Just transitions and good green jobs: update and progress</i>	1:15	<i>Financial Security for Workers in Transition</i>
11:00	Gil McGowan, President of the Alberta Federation of Labour <i>Update on the Coal Transition Coalition, talks with government and industry, and what's next</i>	2:00	<i>Transition to what? Skills training, Education, Apprenticeships, and Green Jobs</i>
		2:45	Coffee Break and Flip Chart review
		3:00	<i>Community Transitions - Challenges and Opportunities</i>
		3:45	Group Debrief and Discussion
		4:45	Wrap up - Call to action - next steps
		5:15	Reception - Niagara Room

Blue Green Canada is an alliance between Canadian labour unions, environmental and civil society organizations to advocate for working people and the environment by promoting solutions to environmental issues that have positive employment and economic impacts

On November 10, 2017 the Government of Alberta announced their Coal Workforce Transition Plans. Blue Green Canada released the following statement on the government's plans:

BLUE GREEN CANADA applauds today's announcement by the Government of Alberta of funding and other crucial supports for workers and communities in the transition from coal to lower carbon electricity generated by natural gas and renewables.

Alberta's plan represents the clearest commitment to a fair and just transition for workers and communities by a government in Canada to date.

Blue Green Canada, an alliance of environmental and labour organizations working for solutions to environmental issues that have positive employment and economic impacts, has been actively engaging with workers in Alberta on the need for just transitions and good green jobs.

In our conversations about the coal phase-out, people are looking for certainty and plans that will help them support their families. This plan, paired with the necessary work ahead with the power companies, unions, impacted communities, and governments, is an important part of providing certainty and a successful transition for Albertans.

The Alberta Government has committed to income supports up to 75% of impacted worker's previous earnings, tuition vouchers for retraining workers and onsite counselling services. These commitments that are tailored to individual workplaces and communities recognize that workers and communities need more than a "one-size-fits-all" solution.

However, for Alberta's plans to have the most impact they must be supplemented by the federal government which has imposed a national coal phase out by the end of 2029.

The Federal Government has a responsibility to help this transition succeed by allowing greater flexibility and access to employment insurance for impacted coal workers.

To learn more on the Government of Alberta's plans to support for workers affected by coal phase out and the work of the Coal Communities Advisory Panel visit www.alberta.ca/coal-communities.aspx

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The conference was facilitated by Alejandra Bravo, Director of Leadership and Training with the Broadbent Institute. This summary report and conference backgrounders were prepared by Diana Gibson and David Thompson, PolicyLink Research and Consulting.

This report and all other conference materials were designed by Jason Ulrich.

