

## GREEN JOBS AND POWER

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We often propose that green jobs and stronger public services are part of the solution to the economic crisis we face. But the question that keeps nagging at me is one of power: how will we achieve the political power needed to overcome the natural instincts of global capitalism? It's like we're architects who can imagine truly inspired designs, but have yet to bring together the skilled workforce and essential materials to turn the designs into reality.

What are the obstacles to a green, prosperous future? Some will say it is the industrial model, which seeks to conquer nature rather than complement it. Others will point to vested interests like big oil, the auto giants, or government bureaucracies. No doubt there is an element of truth in all those observations. But I believe the problem is something more fundamental: the relentless assertion of corporate power in Canada, and across the entire globe.

That power is nothing new. The first multinational joint-stock corporation was the Dutch East India Company. It was chartered in 1602 with the right to claim foreign lands, raise private armies, and make slaves of indigenous peoples. This business plan generated an 18 per cent annual profit for over two centuries. Its success was mirrored by the British East India Company, which, at one point, employed 100,000 men under arms.

The point of relating this history is that global corporate rule has been around for a long time, and humankind has had to take some serious steps to curtail its worst impulses. There have been revolutions, colonial uprisings, and many gains made by people's collective action. Along the bumpy road, the Declaration of Universal Human Rights was an important marker. So was the Kyoto Accord. Now we need a new marker – one that points in the direction of a global economy that is both sustainable and equitable.

There are inspiring examples how we might green our world, from alternative energy generation to zero-footprint buildings to industrial design based on “bio-mimicry” – emulating the rhythms

of natural world. Europe is usually seen as the leader in this, but much is also happening in the global south that should not be ignored. The world's largest cities have carved out a special role in figuring out solutions, and unions are exploring how best to embrace a green agenda.

The challenge is how to paint a picture of a sustainable future where all of us can see a place for ourselves. People who work in industry, resource extraction, construction; First Nations and newcomers; teachers and grocery workers; youth and people of colour. Everyone needs to be able to describe a green or greener job that they could be doing in years hence. A new ecological vision needs to be crafted that will become as widely embraced as today's social networking.

Attaining all this will require overcoming real obstacles. You only have to look south of the border to see the relentless Republican/Fox News assault on the Obama administration for daring to dream green. Van Jones, one of the most inspiring environmental leaders in the United States, was hounded out of the White House by a vicious smear campaign reminiscent of the McCarthy years.

Canada has its own demons to deal with, including a Prime Minister smitten with delusions of leading an energy superpower. For the last quarter century the Business Council on National Issues has shaped nearly all key government policy. That elite group of CEOs has changed its name to the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, but their main goals remain the same: free trade and continental integration.

Free market supremacy stands directly opposed to basic green principles such as local procurement – getting governments to require things they buy to be built locally. The CCCE boys want to be able to outsource the work and get what they need anywhere in the world, from the cheapest sweatshops available. They will only accept controls on greenhouse gases if money can be made in carbon trading schemes. Whether a greener economy provides jobs for the next generation of Canadians is irrelevant to them. But, for everyone else, this is a crucial question.

We have won some important victories around contracts for transit vehicles, and Ontario's Green Energy Act gives a nod in the right direction. But what about the materials needed for retrofitting

thousands of buildings, or building fuel-efficient cars? Will young trainees get a true apprenticeship or only a limited skill set?

The challenge is not just to imagine an economy that provides good green jobs for all. The real challenge is how to force that to happen. I would suggest that the first step is to identify the potential benefits from greening every sector of the economy. The second step is to create a policy framework, for both the public and private sector, that will ensure living wages and true accountability. The third step will be to fight like hell to make sure those good jobs and benefits are shared by all.

**John Cartwright is the president of the Toronto and York Region Labour Council, which is part of the Good Jobs For All coalition of community, labour, social justice, youth and environmental organizations in the Toronto region.**