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GREEN JOBS INSTEAD OF CORPORATE BLACKMAIL

Ten years ago the world's leaders gathered in Rio de Janeiro to talk about the environmental crisis created by pollution, deforestation, and climate change. Their concerns led to the creation of the Kyoto protocol on the reduction of greenhouse gases - in which nations committed to reduce the amount of carbon dioxide flowing into the atmosphere. These measures were immediately opposed by the multinational oil cartels, and their massive funding of George Bush's election resulted in the United States attempt to sabotage the Kyoto process.

In Canada corporate voices are crying about job loss and economic costs in an effort to derail the signing of the accord. Their rhetoric about "job-killing" has a familiar ring - they used the same arguments against banning strikebreakers. The labour movement, on the other hand, has started to advocate that we can have both jobs and a healthier environment. In 1999, the Canadian Labour Congress adopted a resolution to develop a strategy on "green jobs", and a special conference looked at what it would take to create truly sustainable communities and green jobs.

Sustainability is defined as practice which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. Green jobs can include everything from restoring forests and wetlands to teaching children how to be environmentally responsible. Here in Toronto we have had two outstanding examples initiated by unions:

The construction trades in Toronto actively pursued work in retrofitting buildings as a way to provide jobs for their members during the bleak days of the 90's recession. Through the City's "Better Buildings Partnership, hundreds of jobs were created, while building owners saved 30-50% on utility and energy costs.. CO2 emissions were significantly reduced and air quality in offices often improved

CUPE 416 and the Toronto Environmental Alliance co-sponsored a proposal for recycling and composting that would have diverted 72% of Toronto's solid waste from landfills, and created 900 new jobs. It was ignored until the Adams Mine fiasco, when it finally became the basis for the Mayor's Task Force 2010 report.

Throughout Europe, the labour movement is involved in many such initiatives. In some cases their standards, such as chlorine-free bleaching for pulp and paper, have forced Canadian mills to upgrade. In Finland, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers have implemented an eco-audit at hotels, resorts, and campgrounds. The process resulted in changes to purchasing practices, energy and water consumption, waste management, and food preparation.

In fact, there are examples in enough areas to provide the basis for a comprehensive program of green redesign of every major facet of our economy. In the process, however, some jobs will be displaced. The CLC has a strong position on "Just Transition", which calls for funding to provide adequate protection for workers and communities affected by environmental change. The CEP, which represents thousands of members in the energy sector, has come out in support of Kyoto as long as such just transition is included. It concludes that more jobs will be created in alternative energy production than will be lost in the "carbon economy".

Rebuilding our economy into a sustainable one can create jobs - in every sector. From resource extraction to public transit. From redesigning industrial processes that "close the loop" to different crops and food production. From water treatment to demand side

management for electricity. The list goes on and on. It benefits the public sector, by making facilities and services more cost effective. That includes the use of "full cost accounting" to measure what is truly good or bad about a particular activity. It includes making our private sector industries more capable of surviving the future challenges as resources shrink and pollution is curtailed. And it will begin to unleash the tremendous economic potentials of environmental technologies.

Can we bring all of these ideas into a campaign that creates the momentum towards real alternatives? Decades ago our movements pushed the political agenda for change, and thousands of activists developed a "world view" that refused to accept the power structure as it stood. Construction workers marched for peace, autoworkers fought apartheid, and steelworkers stood up for women's rights - all because we saw these things as part of the struggle for true social justice. A new "green" world view could help to inspire the same kind of passion and commitment that are required to challenge the current system. And it could give young activist something to struggle for - jobs and justice, interlinked with saving the ecology of our planet.

The Executive recommends that the Labour Council:

- 1) Urge the federal and provincial government to endorse the Kyoto Protocol
- 2) Undertake to work with affiliates, environmental and community groups to develop policies on sustainability for our communities in the greater Toronto area
- 3) Establish a Labour Council Environmental Forum open to all trade unionists to help develop and implement a green job strategy for all sectors of the economy