



**Submission to the Standing Senate Committee
on Social Affairs, Science and Technology on
Bill C-50, *the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act***

June 6, 2024





The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE) is a family of 13 Component unions. Taken together, we are one of the largest unions in Canada. Most of our 425,000 members work to deliver public services of every kind to the citizens of their home provinces. We also have a large and growing number of members who work for private businesses.

The office of the National Union of Public and General Employees is on the traditional and unceded territory of the Algonquin peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples.

We recognize the crimes that have been committed and the harm that has been done and dedicate ourselves as a union to moving forward in partnership with Indigenous communities in a spirit of reconciliation and striving for justice.

Bert Blundon, President

Jason MacLean, Secretary-Treasurer



Why We Need Just Transition Legislation

The National Union of Public and General Employees (NUPGE), which represents 425,000 workers across Canada, supports Bill C-50, *the Canadian Sustainable Jobs Act*. The climate crisis is affecting workers and communities, and the transition to a low-carbon economy will have impacts on every worker and community, particularly those who are on the front lines or are vulnerable. We need federal leadership to ensure that workers and communities are able to thrive in the transition to a greener economy.

NUPGE members know first-hand the impacts of climate change. They are working in more extreme conditions, experiencing disasters and displacement in their communities, and facing anxiety about the future. In their jobs, our members are feeling the strain on critical public services that are responding to the climate crisis. In these jobs, our members are providing health care, delivering social services, fighting wildfires, coordinating emergency response, maintaining infrastructure, or delivering numerous other public services through disasters and crises.

Our members are also delivering the services that will help our communities and our economy through the climate crisis and towards a more sustainable future. Examples include education and training, environmental policies and programs, income assistance, housing, health care, and public transit.

We need federal legislation, together with proactive plans and programs supported by adequate funding, to support a Just Transition for workers and communities as we decarbonize our economy.

Just Transition means

greening the economy in a way that is as fair and inclusive as possible to everyone concerned, creating decent work opportunities and leaving no one behind. A Just Transition involves maximizing the social and economic opportunities of climate action, while minimizing and carefully managing any challenges—including through effective social dialogue among all groups impacted, and respect for fundamental labour principles and rights.¹

Minimizing and managing challenges associated with a green transition is important. This aspect of a Just Transition is often the focus of discussions and policy proposals, such as income supports or training. The transition to a low-carbon economy, particularly the transition to renewable energy, will bring with it challenges. It is important that governments acknowledge this and take steps to prepare and manage the transition, which includes ensuring that workers aren't forgotten or made to suffer.

Additionally, the aspect of a Just Transition that involves maximizing the opportunities and benefits of climate action deserves equal attention. Met with a crisis, we have an

¹ "Climate change and financing a just transition," International Labour Organization, October 28, 2021, <https://www.ilo.org/resource/other/climate-change-and-financing-just-transition>.

opportunity to build a future that is more sustainable—economically and environmentally. Acting on climate change can result in good jobs in sustainable industries. It can deliver infrastructure that is resilient to extreme weather and a changing climate. Climate action can mean cleaner air and water, sustainable food systems, and strong public services that respond to our communities' needs.

By tackling the climate crisis, we have an opportunity to redress existing inequities and foster a more just and equal society. We have seen how the climate crisis disproportionately impacts people who are Black, Indigenous, or people of colour, people with disabilities, women, girls, and gender-diverse people, people living in poverty and those experiencing homelessness.

Just Transition is about ensuring we do not replicate the unequal and unsustainable systems that have caused the climate crisis. That includes addressing rising income and wealth inequality and corporate power.

It also includes colonialism and racism. Respecting Indigenous rights and sovereignty, including when it comes to land, water, resources, and food, is not just important for reconciliation and justice for Indigenous peoples, but it is climate action. Indigenous and climate groups have developed a *Just Transition Guide*, which draws on the lived experience of Indigenous peoples. The guide illustrates Indigenous-led solutions and leadership on fostering sustainable economies and communities.²

In order to achieve a Just Transition and the future we want to see, it is essential that workers and communities themselves be part of decision-making and policy-making. It is here that Bill C-50 represents a crucial step for Just Transition.

Social Dialogue Is Integral to a Just Transition

Although it deals with setting up a framework and governance, rather than programs or funds to realize a Just Transition, Bill C-50 is important because it ensures workers will have a seat at the table.

Workers need to be involved in developing the plans and programs for a Just Transition, because they will be affected, and so deserve to have a voice. But workers also need a seat at the table, because they have crucial knowledge and expertise to contribute to developing and implementing the steps towards a more sustainable economy.

For this reason, we welcome the creation of a Sustainable Jobs Partnership Council with designated representation from unions. We also welcome the House of Commons committee's amendments adding the principle of *social dialogue* to the body of the legislation, rather than having the principle only in the preamble.

² Melina Laboucan-Massimo et al., *Just Transition Guide: Indigenous-led pathways toward equitable climate solutions and resiliency in the climate crisis*, Sacred Earth Solar and Indigenous Climate Action, November 2023, <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5c9860bf77b9034bc5e70122/t/6555222edcea4d681ccf0454/1700078320040/Just+Transition+Guide.pdf>.

Social dialogue refers to ongoing consultation, negotiation, and exchange among parties—specifically, representatives of workers, employers, and governments. The International Labour Organization’s guidelines for a Just Transition emphasize social dialogue as integral to the framework for developing and implementing Just Transition policies and programs.³ A key recommendation of the Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities was that affected workers and communities be at the heart of decision-making and be involved at every stage of the transition.⁴

There is no one-size-fits-all Just Transition policy or program; this process will look different in different regions or sectors and depending on workers’ and communities’ circumstances. This was another key finding of the Task Force. This is why it’s important that workers and communities are part of decision-making and policy-making. They know what is needed in their sector or community and, in many cases, are already leading the way on solutions.

The Sustainable Jobs Action Plans will be important for articulating these types of policies and programs that are needed to realize a Just Transition. And so, the Partnership Council’s role in giving guidance to the Minister on the development of these plans is crucial.

First Step on the Path to a Fairer, More Just Future

This legislation is a crucial first step. But it is just that—a first step. I urge the committee to recognize the urgency in studying this bill and sending it back to the House so it can be quickly passed and implemented.

This legislation will set up the framework needed to develop, through social dialogue, Just Transition plans and programs. These could include education and training, income supports and pension bridging for workers in transitioning industries, and investing in public services that will support the transition and respond to the climate crisis. It is these types of strategies, policies, and programs that, we hope, will be dealt with in the Sustainable Jobs Action plans, as outlined in the legislation. It is important to pass Bill C-50 in order to get to work on these efforts to realize a Just Transition.

³ International Labour Organization, *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all*, Geneva, 2015, https://webapps.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_emp/---emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf.

⁴ Task Force on Just Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities, *A Just and Fair Transition for Canadian Coal Power Workers and Communities*, Final Report, December 2018, <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/climate-change/task-force-just-transition/final-report.html>.

There are numerous international cases that Canada can learn lessons from, both model examples and cautionary tales.⁵ When governments are proactive and meaningfully engage workers and communities through social dialogue, they—such as those in Spain, Denmark, Germany, and Scotland—have been able to minimize job loss, provide reskilling efforts and job creation, and meet the needs of communities. And there are lessons to learn from a country like New Zealand and its involvement of Indigenous peoples, the Māori, in the Just Transition process.

Canada, too, can be part of the growing movement towards implementing a Just Transition. The Canadian government showed leadership with its task force for coal workers and communities. If done right, Bill C-50 and what comes next represent an important opportunity to build on this.

Amendments Made by the House of Commons Committee

NUPGE was disappointed to see delays and filibustering led by members of the Conservative Party in the House of Commons and its committee. We urge the Senate to work to avoid delays and focus on studying the legislation.

We are encouraged by some amendments made by the House of Commons committee:

- The addition of the principle of social dialogue in the body of the legislation, so it is not only in the preamble.
- The definition of *sustainable jobs* that includes decent work, acknowledges the role of unions, and includes elements like fair income, job security, social protection, and social dialogue. This will help to ensure that *green jobs* are good jobs.
- Reference to Canada’s climate action obligations under the Paris Agreement.

These amendments have helped to strengthen the bill. We urge you to ensure that Bill C-50 retains these amendments.

⁵ Hadrian Mertins-Kirkwood and Clay Duncalfe, Roadmap to a Canadian Just Transition Act: A path to a clean and inclusive economy, Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Adapting Canadian Work and Workplaces to Respond to Climate Change, April 2021, <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2021/04/Roadmap%20to%20a%20Canadian%20just%20transition%20act.pdf>; Vanessa Corkal and Estan Beedell, Making Good Green Jobs the Law: How Canada can build on international best practice to advance just transition for all, Winnipeg: International Institute for Sustainable Development, 2022, <https://www.iisd.org/system/files/2022-01/green-jobs-advance-canada-just-transition.pdf>.

Summary of Recommendations

Given the urgent need to plan and prepare for a Just Transition, we urge the Committee to proceed without delay to ensure this legislation is passed in order to support a Just Transition. This means

- studying the bill without delay or obstruction;
- preserving important amendments made by the House of Commons committee, such as the addition of key principles like social dialogue and decent work; and
- passing the bill so that the work of Just Transition/Sustainable Jobs can get underway.

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COMPONENTS



B.C. GENERAL EMPLOYEES' UNION



CANADIAN UNION OF BREWERY AND GENERAL WORKERS



HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF ALBERTA



HEALTH SCIENCES ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA



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The National Union of Public and General Employees is an affiliate of the Canadian Labour Congress and a member of the Public Services International.