

Introduction: The genealogy and contemporary politics of just transitions

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LESSONS FROM KATOWICE

Organised in early December 2018 in the heart of Polish coal country, the Katowice Climate Conference (COP24) was billed the 'Just Transition COP' by participants and observers. As Kate Wheeling explains in the *Pacific Standard*, it 'was meant to be the one that prioritized the rights and needs of workers whose livelihoods are dependent on fossil fuels, so that they don't suffer as countries work to decarbonize their economies' (Wheeling, 2018). Given its symbolic location, COP24 was seen as an opportunity to focus the international community's attention on the justice and equity dimensions of climate mitigation and adaptation. It was a chance to counter a resurgent 'jobs vs environment' discourse and hopefully make progress in an international climate negotiation space that was struggling to deliver on the Paris Climate Agreement, especially following Donald Trump's decision in 2017 to exit the agreement. The hope for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) – recently rebranded as UN Climate Change – and the host country was to use COP24 to generate 'momentum' and send strong 'signals' that the low-carbon transition was not only good for the climate and the economy, but good for workers and communities as well – and especially those whose livelihoods still depended on coal.

On the face of it, COP24 appears to have delivered on its promise. As part of the official conference, an 'Ambition and Just Transition Day' (10 December 2018) was organised and over 25 side events were devoted to the issue (Jenkins, 2019). These were opportunities for stakeholders to launch and showcase reports and initiatives, and share stories of just transitions in action. The Polish presidency of the COP, with support from around fifty governments, drafted and launched the 'Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration'. In the document, signatories 'stress that just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs are crucial to ensure an effective and inclusive

transition to low greenhouse gas emission and climate resilient development'.¹ A series of just transition-themed events were also organised on the margins of the official conference space. These included the Climate Hub, a civil society space hosted by Greenpeace, where a number of talks and presentations were organised on just transition. These and other just transition-related efforts within and around COP24 were not new but a product of the concept's mainstreaming in the UN space over the past decade, in particular following its inclusion in the preamble of the Paris Agreement in 2015. The Agreement refers to the need to '[take] into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities' (UNFCCC, 2015).

Yet, on closer scrutiny, the 'Just Transition COP', rather than providing a clear sense of how a just transition can be achieved, exposed the gap between climate policy makers' narrow understandings of just transition, and the complex and multifaceted reality of a 'living concept' whose origins and meanings lie deep in the everyday experiences of workers and frontline communities. It also exposed the gap between governmental endorsement of just transition and the reality on the ground; a reality in which the most vulnerable sections of society and least responsible for the climate crisis are either made to pay the price for low-carbon transition or used/manipulated to justify climate inaction or low ambition.

The fact, for instance, that the host country, Poland, presented itself as a champion of just transition while simultaneously backing the coal industry and calling for an 'evolutionary transformation of the power sector, instead of drastic restriction on the use of fossil fuels' (Darby, 2018), is revealing of this gap between discourse and reality. The conference organisation and venue also embodied this contradiction. The conference's main sponsors were the state-owned coking coal company, Jastrzebska Spółka Węglowa SA, the state-owned utility company Polska Grupa Energetyczna SA, which burns more coal than any other power company in Europe, and the Katowice-based Tauron Polska Energia SA, which owns coal mines. If this was not enough, the host city's official booth featured large cages full of coal and household products made of ash (Chemnick, 2018).

As the climate conference unfolded, two major events contributed to emphasise the importance of a just transition in addressing the justice and equity dimensions of climate change, while further highlighting the multiple and at times contradictory approaches to it. France, whose

¹ https://cop24.gov.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/Solidarity_and_Just_Transition_Silesia_Declaration_2_-_pdf

government had officially endorsed the Silesia Declaration² and whose President, Emmanuel Macron, was designated ‘Champion of the Earth’ by UN Environment in 2018, was in the midst of what would become the greatest social movement protest since May 1968. Just two days before the Katowice COP, ‘Yellow Vest’ protesters hit the global headlines during a day of violent clashes with the police in the streets of central Paris. Images of burning vehicles, barricades and a ransacked Arc de Triomphe were all over the news. The movement was triggered by a tax increase on fuel whose proceeds were intended to fund the low-carbon energy transition. The ‘Yellow Vests’ expressed, among other things, a growing sense of anger at the fact that the country’s increasingly cash-strapped and precarious working and lower-middle class, was unjustly being made to pay for the energy transition. The movement highlighted the gap between political rhetoric and the reality of French climate policies. At a press conference on 4 December 2018 in Katowice and in response to the French government’s decision to freeze the tax increase following the preceding day of protests, Pierre Cannet of WWF France summed up the situation in the following manner:

There’s no viable solution to reducing emissions on the scale needed in France without a price on carbon pollution as well as complementary policies, but a process that is not developed in an inclusive manner is destined to fail. Today’s announcement that the French government is freezing carbon tax shows they put the cart before the horse by not addressing the social measures necessary for a just transition. Achieving decarbonization at the speed called for by science requires political will, and equity needs to remain at the core of the discussion. (WWF, 2018)

At around the same time and on the back of the 2018 mid-term elections, the equity and justice dimensions of the low-carbon transition also came to occupy the political debate in the United States. Just weeks before the COP, on 13 November, a group of activists from the Sunrise Movement, a youth-led political movement on the left of the Democratic Party, staged a sit-in in the office of Nancy Pelosi, the House Speaker, to get her to endorse a Green New Deal. This marked the beginning of a sustained campaign to persuade Congress to pass a ten-year plan to transition the United States towards a low-carbon economy. In February 2019, the newly elected Democratic Representative, Alexandria Ocasio-

2 https://cop24.gov.pl/fileadmin/user_upload/files/The_List_of_Leaders_and_Parties_endorsing_the_Solidarity_and_Just_Transition_Silesia_Declaration.pdf

Cortez and Senator Ed Markey, presented a joint ‘Green New Deal Resolution’ (House Resolution 109, 2019) that explicitly referred to the need ‘to achieve net-zero gas emissions through a fair and just transition for all communities and workers’. Growing calls for a Green New Deal have spurred a massive debate within the Democratic Party, as well as within and between labour and environmental justice groups – such as the Climate Justice Alliance (CJA) – that actively campaign for a just transition. In particular, it has led to interesting discussions on who should drive the just transition, and for whom.

ONE CONCEPT – DIFFERENT MEANINGS

What the Yellow Vest movement and Green New Deal debates highlight is that the Paris Agreement alone was not responsible for the popularisation of just transition. It is an idea that is currently being promoted by a range of actors. It reflects a growing awareness of and concern about deepening inequalities between the world’s rich and poor, and how the climate and environmental crises, and efforts to address them, are accentuating them. The climate justice issue is increasingly being framed as one that cuts across national borders. The tension is more and more between a minority of super-rich individuals with high-carbon lifestyles, and a mass of poor people who are least responsible for the climate crisis but suffer the most from its effects *and* are disproportionately made to pay for climate mitigation and adaptation measures. As Oxfam showed in a report published just before COP21 in December 2015, the richest 10 per cent are responsible for almost 50 per cent of lifestyle consumption emissions, as opposed to the poorest 50 per cent, who are responsible for only about 10 per cent of lifestyle consumption emissions (Oxfam, 2015). In short, the notion of ‘common but differentiated responsibilities’ does not only apply between countries but within countries as well.

The current political climate marked by growing defiance towards political elites, and the ensuing resurgence of populist, xenophobic, nationalist, anti-climate, ‘jobs vs environment’ discourses – from Hungary to the United States, to Brazil and the Philippines – has also done a lot to raise just transition’s profile. In particular, Donald Trump’s victory in the 2016 US presidential election, following a campaign where he expressed his love affair with coal – ‘Trump digs coal’ – acted as a wake-up call for mainstream climate advocates. On the back of Trump’s decision to exit the Paris Agreement, and in a bid to better integrate the social justice dimensions of the shift from a dirty to a green economy, various mainstream climate NGOs, think tanks, business interests and foundations – from Bloomberg Philanthropies to Greenpeace, to We

Mean Business and the World Resources Institute – appropriated the just transition concept.

The growing references to just transition undoubtedly signal a desire to further root social and equity concerns into the climate debate. While this is to be welcomed, it also complicates the task of identifying what just transition stands for, who is behind it, what are the underlying politics, and who it is for. Instead of leading to an alignment of views, the concept's growing popularity has actually turned it into a contested concept, like sustainable development (Connelly, 2007). It has created the conditions for struggles to impose a given understanding of what just transition should *actually* mean. What underlying theories of change and worldviews are associated with these various understandings of just transition? Are they mutually exclusive or compatible? Given the concept's growing popularity and centrality in the climate governance space – especially among corporate interests whose commitment to social justice is questionable to say the least – addressing these and other questions is essential for anyone who takes climate justice seriously. This appropriation of the concept is especially of concern to groups that were actively mobilising behind it long before it became fashionable in mainstream climate circles. As Jacqueline Patterson, director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's Environmental and Climate Program explains, 'It's a concern when Big Greens and others are using the term and getting funded for using the term. It's become the term du jour for foundations, and those front-line communities become objectified' (McKibben, 2017).

The inclusion of just transition in the Paris Agreement, while raising awareness of the social dimensions of the low-carbon transition and contributing to the concept's popularisation, has also paradoxically contributed to de-historicise it and to – conveniently? – separate it from the frontline communities and labour unions that originally developed it and continue to mobilise around it in their day-to-day struggles. The risk is in losing sight of the fact that current references to just transition in the Silesia Declaration, Paris Agreement and Green New Deal are the outcome of four decades of debates, campaigns and hard-won struggles by workers and frontline communities at the local, national and international levels. By paying lip service to the concept's history and embeddedness in the labour movement and frontline communities, policy makers and climate specialists 'uproot' the concept and empty it of its transformative, emancipatory and subversive potential that essentially comes from the fact that the just transition is both aspirational and grounded in people's everyday lives and struggles. As various contributions to this volume highlight, just transition acts as a beacon to guide

collective action and simultaneously gives rise to tangible alternatives on the ground.

This process of 'de-historicisation' and 'uprooting' of the concept through appropriation is not restricted to stakeholders in the climate debate but also characterises certain academic analyses. Indeed, as we will see in the following section, a significant part of the burgeoning academic literature tends to present just transition as a rigid, ahistorical concept for policy makers, and to downplay its essential function as a mobilising tool for the disenfranchised. Much of the research pays lip service to the decisive and historic role of labour and frontline groups in conceiving, nurturing and developing the concept over the past forty years, as well as their motivations for doing so.

JUST TRANSITION IN ACADEMIA

While academic research on just transition is fairly recent, there is a long history of applied and programmatic research on the topic, for the most part conducted by activists and organic intellectuals from within the ranks of the labour movement and associated groups and organisations. Union-friendly publications such as *New Solutions* in the United States – launched by union leader Tony Mazzocchi and his networks in 1990 (see below) – as well as the UK-based *Hazards* magazine, played an important role in hosting analyses and debates on the strategy of just transition (Slatin, 2002, 2009; Bennett, 1999). Rather than providing an analysis of this work here, we feel that it is more relevant to integrate it into the historical account that follows so as to better grasp its embeddedness and function for just transition advocates.

In the early 2000s, a handful of academic articles referred to the just transition concept. Noteworthy examples include an article on labour environmentalism in the United States (Gould et al., 2004), another on Australia with a focus on coal (Evans, 2007) as well as reflections by people directly involved (Bennett, 2007). Towards the beginning of the present decade, a larger body of academic research – in the field of labour environmentalism (Rätzl and Uzzell, 2013) – began to more systematically refer to and, on fewer occasions, focus on just transition (Rätzl et al., 2010; Snell & Fairbrother, 2011; Stevis, 2011, 2013). It is also worth highlighting the precursory role of a small group of Australian and South African academics (Cock, 2011, 2015; Snell & Fairbrother, 2011, 2013; Goods 2013).

While most early research was rooted in the experience and politics of the labour movement, a 2012 volume by Mark Swilling and Eve Annecke, entitled *Just Transitions: Explorations of Sustainability in an*

*Un/*fair *World* presages a different approach that combines sociotechnical transitions with social justice and transitional justice approaches – in this case in South Africa (Swilling & Annecke, 2012). This has led Peter Newell and Dustin Mulvaney (2013) to argue in their much-cited article that ‘[in] academic circles the [just transition] term derives from a set of literatures on “socio-technical” transitions ... that are also increasingly being applied to questions of energy politics and policy’ (Newell & Mulvaney, 2013:133). While some of the more recent research on just transition may in fact draw from the field of sociotechnical transitions, such an affirmation does not do justice to the fact that most just transition research was and has been grounded in labour environmentalism and, more problematically, contributes to obscure the concept’s origins. Instead of sociotechnical transitions, a more appropriate connection would have been with sociotechnical systems, an approach developed after the Second World War to deal with the design of work in UK coal mines but which is not acknowledged by sociotechnical transition analysts (Cohen-Rosenthal, 1997; Cohen-Rosenthal et al., 1998). Additionally, just sustainability transitions have more affinity with just transition (Agyeman et al., 2016).

Swilling and Annecke’s book fits into a first category of literature that focuses on broad topics or issues, such as sustainable development, justice, or energy transitions, but tends to leave out or downplay the role of organised labour or other specific actors. This body of work refers to just transition in a rather generic manner and with little to no references to the concept’s history or to research – especially from labour environmentalism – that adopts a historical approach (Swilling & Annecke, 2012; Jasanoff, 2018; Heffron & McCauley, 2018). Within this category, some analyses, especially on energy transitions and environmental justice, do include limited references to the concept’s origins and history (Farrell 2012; Newell & Mulvaney, 2013; Routledge et al., 2018). Such research can contribute to a broader understanding of just transition provided it does not strip it of historical agency – whether unions or other social forces – and does not downplay the importance of the research and analysis produced by unions and their allies over the years.

A second body of work recognises the importance of specific historical actors and relations, including labour. Within this category, a first subcategory specifically looks at the labour origins of just transition and explores union and union-ally efforts to implement just transition policies (Snell & Fairbrother, 2013; Goods, 2013; Felli & Stevis, 2014; Hampton, 2015; Snell, 2018; Morena, 2018). Drawing extensively on Felli’s (2014) work on global union environmentalism, Dimitris Stevis

and Romain Felli, for instance, explore the variability of global unions’ approaches to just transition (Felli, 2014; Stevis & Felli, 2015).

A second subcategory recognises the origins of just transition and the centrality of unions but also situates just transition within broader political and theoretical debates (Cock, 2011; Stevis & Felli, 2016; Evans & Phelan, 2016; Healy & Barry, 2017; JTRC, 2018; White, 2019; Ciplec & Harrison, 2019). This engaged research combines historical depth and contemporary analysis of both the just transition concept, as well as its links to broader transformations on the left (Barca, 2015a). In a recent article, and drawing on the current Green New Deal debates in the United States, Damian White offers a fascinating analysis of the possible convergences between just transitions and ‘design for transitions’ currents. In particular, he looks at how they could ‘facilitate modes of antiracist, feminist and ecosocialist design futuring that can get us to think beyond degrowth/Left ecomodern binaries and toward a design politics that can support a Green New Deal’ (White, 2019:1).

The just transition concept’s growing popularity has led some academics to categorise the uses and understandings of just transition (Cock, 2011, 2015; Felli & Stevis, 2014; Stevis & Felli, 2015; Hampton, 2015; JTRC, 2018; Barca, 2015b). In their recent article, David Ciplec and Jill Lindsey Harrison, for instance, focus on the different understandings of just transition and the concept’s increasingly contested nature (see also Goddard & Farrelly, 2018; Barca, 2015a). Having retraced its evolution and appropriation by environmental justice groups, they explore existing and potential areas of conflict, tensions, and trade offs within just transition planning and activism’ that derive from this (Ciplec & Harrison, 2019:1). Stefania Barca shows how just transition demands range ‘from a simple claim for jobs creation in the green economy, to a radical critique of capitalism and refusal of market solutions’ (Barca, 2015b: 392).

As our brief – and necessarily incomplete – overview of the literature indicates, many academic studies of just transition either leave out or only mention the concept’s origins in US labour environmentalism and its globalisation through the agency of national and global labour unions and environmental justice groups. They tend, and this is justifiable given the urgency of the climate crisis, to focus on its contemporary uses, as well as its conceptual and theoretical implications and potential. Yet, by downplaying the importance of the concept’s history and the centrality of agency, they run the risk of downgrading – and even omitting – grassroots and labour contributions to debates around low-carbon transitions and further reinforcing the misleading narrative that labour and nature do not mix (for a view of the breadth of labour environmentalism

based on theory and cases, see Rätzl & Uzzell, 2013). In the following section, we seek to rectify this by providing a comprehensive history of just transition. This, we believe, is essential to fully grasp the similarities and contradictions between the different uses of the just transition concept in the different chapters of this book.

THE EMERGENCE OF JUST TRANSITION: 1980S–C.2001

Just transition was not the product of theoretical debates over environmental justice or sociotechnical transitions. It was developed during the 1970s and 1980s by workers in response to ‘job blackmail’ from capital and its allies under the increasingly hyperliberal capitalist turn unfolding in the United States.³ Over time it expanded both geographically and to other constituencies through the efforts of national and global labour unions. Unlike various other concepts that have spread throughout the global environmental or developmental field (such as ‘sustainable development’ or ‘green growth’), just transition’s emergence was geographically and socially rooted.

The idea behind what was eventually called ‘just transition’ was born in the United States, in the 1970s. Most observers agree that it was the brainchild of Tony Mazzocchi – a trade unionist working on occupational safety and health at the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers’ Union (OCAW). Just transition, while not initially referred to in those terms, was the product of his determined efforts to reconcile environmental and social concerns. As far back as the 1950s, Mazzocchi had been exposed to social environmentalist ideas. Unlike many fellow trade unionists, his priority was not to make all jobs safer. He acknowledged that certain jobs were too detrimental to workers, society and the environment, and should therefore be scrapped – in the case of nuclear weapons for instance – or replaced by automation (Leopold, 2007). In all cases, the priority should be to empower workers and communities, and enable them ‘to know and act’, especially in the face of job blackmail. This, he believed, could be achieved through the strengthening of labour environmentalism. As early as 1973, for example, Mazzocchi successfully enlisted support from environmentalists to help OCAW wage what he presented as ‘the first environmental strike’ over health and safety issues at Shell refineries across four US states.

3 This strategic connection should not obscure the fact that just transitions are not limited to the environment and that transitional strategies in response to various other transitions, such as offshoring or demobilisation, have been common if not satisfactory.

Mazzocchi was not operating in a vacuum. Other unions had also shown an interest in the intersections between jobs and the environment and had supported environmental legislation early on. In 1976, for instance, the United Automobile Workers organised a conference entitled ‘Working for Economic and Environmental Justice and Jobs’ (Bryant, 1997; Rector, 2014, 2018). The conference brought together people from various demographics as well as local and national unions and environmentalists, who shared a broad understanding of nature-society relations. A group called Environmentalists for Full Employment also sought for a number of years to bring together environmentalists and unions and published what can be considered as the first green industrial policy proposal that addressed work and workers (Grossman & Daneke, 1979).

The rise of hyperliberalism during the 1980s allowed corporations to engage in job blackmail, as well as to actually move highly toxic operations off shore (Leonard, 1988), leading to a precipitous drop in the OCAW’s membership. For a while, the union merely reacted to this general trend because its resources were tied up in the five-and-a-half year strike (June 1984 to December 1989) against chemicals giant BASF (Minchin, 2002). International political shifts allowed for a resurgence of labour environmentalism within the union. In 1987, it received a major grant to develop a model health and training programme for workers. In 1989, it called for a single payer national health care programme for the United States and at its 1991 convention it ‘passed a resolution calling for “A New Social, Political, and Economic Agenda” which set goals for the 1990s, including national health care, a Labor Party alternative, environmental protection, a Superfund for Workers, and international trade unionism.’⁴

The Superfund for Workers was the first name for just transition. It was developed by Mazzocchi (1993) and a network of activists – including Mike Merrill and Les Leopold (for a broader discussion, see Wykle et al., 1991), and was a direct response to the dominant ‘jobs versus environment’ discourse (OCAW, 1991), a discourse that was fuelled by the neoconservative right in response to environmental regulation (see, for example, Gollop & Roberts, 1983). In the same way that earlier evocations of a GI Bill for Workers sought to capture the imagination of the public, the Superfund for Workers evoked the Superfund programme that was put in place in 1980 at the federal level to fund the clean-up of thousands of contaminated industrial sites – manufacturing facilities,

4 Information on developments between 1987 and 1991 from www.usw-608.com/ocaw-history-page.html. See also Wykle et al., 1991.

processing plants, landfills and mining sites – where hazardous wastes had been dumped.

It was in 1995 that Les Leopold and Brian Kohler first publicly referred to the just transition concept during a presentation to the International Joint Commission on Great Lakes Water Quality (Hampton, 2015). In their words:

We propose that a special fund be established; a just-transition fund which we've called in the past a superfund for workers. Essentially this fund will provide the following: full wages and benefits until the worker retires or until he or she finds a comparable job; two – up to four years of tuition stipends to attend vocational schools or colleges plus full income while in school; three – post-educational stipends or subsidies if no jobs at comparable wages are available after graduation; and four – relocation assistance. (Leopold, 1995:83)

The breadth of OCAW's vision was evident in its role in catalysing the creation of the Just Transition Alliance (JTA) in 1997 (Harvey, 2018; Labor Network for Sustainability & Strategic Practice: Grassroots Policy Project, 2016:7). The JTA brought together environmental and social justice organisations that represented the most vulnerable and marginalised populations in the United States. In addition to its participation in innovative training initiatives, the JTA was also involved in a number of specific local campaigns that sought to bring together workers and frontline communities to enhance unionisation and raise awareness about their exposure to anti-union and environmentally unjust practices. An important product of this effort was a training manual entitled 'A Just Transition for Jobs and the Environment' produced by the Public Health and Labor Institutes (2000) which were the vehicles through which the OCAW network sought to engage with environmentalists and communities.⁵ The training tools were intimately connected to these local campaigns and drew upon a longer history of training workers and unions on occupational health and safety (Slatin, 2002, 2009).

The goal was to diffuse unionism within the environmental movement and environmentalism within the union movement. In short, the just transition initiatives of the 1990s did not only target public policy; they also sought to bridge the gaps between workers, environmentalists and communities, and to foster an alternative socioenvironmental politics that valued collective representation by workers and communities around principles of social and environmental justice. While largely

5 The network still exists within the United Steelworkers.

anthropocentric, it did not merely view nature as a means towards greater social equality. While motivated by the maldistribution of environmental harms, it did not seek to solve them by simply displacing the problem across space or time but sought to address the root causes of those harms, including by downsizing the production of toxics.

The OCAW had a direct influence on the Canadian labour movement as well as sections of the British labour movement working on occupational safety and health (see *Hazards* magazine). The Canadian Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP) (part of which used to be the Canadian arm of OCAW) adopted a just transition resolution in 1996 and, in 1997, the OCAW followed suit. The Spanish Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) was also aware of these developments (Leopold, 1995). In 1999, the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) adopted a just transition resolution and produced a fairly detailed programme of action in an ultimately unsuccessful effort to push Canada to adopt an ambitious climate policy (CLC, 2000; for more on the CLC's efforts, see Bennett, 2007).

The efforts of the OCAW and its allies were also reflected at the international level. In November 1999, for instance, the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM), adopted a just transition resolution at its second world meeting. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) and the Trade Union Advisory Council (TUAC) to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) included just transition language in their occupational safety and health and environmental activities. The ICFTU's position at the climate conference (COP3) in Kyoto (1997), for example, included the declaration that 'workers will demand an equitable distribution of costs through "just transition" policies that include measures for equitable recovery of the economic and social costs of climate change programmes' (ICFTU, 1997:1). A 2001 report by Winston Gereluk and Lucien Royer, who coordinated labour at the global level, particularly the UN Commission for Sustainable Development (CSD), placed just transition at the heart of labour's sustainable development agenda (Gereluk & Royer, 2001).

In addition to the just transition efforts of the OCAW and the JTA there emerged a second thread of labour environmentalism during the late 1990s that also sought to include just transition. In 1997, despite the opposition of the United Mine Workers, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) established a BlueGreen Working Group. After two years of deliberations, the group held a two-day meeting at AFL-CIO headquarters (14–15 April 1999) which was attended by the Congress of South African Trade Unions

(COSATU) as well as ICEM. While some more radical environmental organisations were involved that was not the case with environmental justice organisations. Moreover, some of the participants were more interested in preventing just transition policies, rather than advancing them. Bob Wages, the last president of the OCAW and by then vice president of the union into which the OCAW had merged, co-authored the follow-up memo that specified just transition as one of the working group's priorities.⁶ The next major meeting of the group was scheduled for 11 September 2001 (9/11). The meeting never took place and the nationalist and conservative policies that followed complicated the dialogue between unions and environmentalists. Nonetheless, the report that emerged from these efforts, drafted by two technical advisers to the group (Barrett et al., 2002), did address just transition, particularly in light of the market mechanisms proposed to deal with climate change. This report can be considered as the first applied scholarship publication that sought to fuse a green industrial policy with just transition. Around that time, and due to strong opposition by the Mine Workers, just transition fell off the US union and environmental movements' agendas (for more on the period see Renner, 2000:59–71).

It is possible to distinguish three lines of green or environmental transitions by the end of this period. The first one was proposed by the OCAW and its allies in public health and environmental justice. While highlighting the detrimental impacts on workers, this group also focused on frontline communities. It was less about speaking in their name than about getting them on board and mobilising them. While it called upon companies to negotiate with unions and communities, it also focused on the role of the state in promoting a green industrial policy, and in which unions were expected to play a key role. Finally, and as the 1991 resolution indicates, the OCAW's just transition efforts were part of an ambitious set of policy proposals and efforts aimed at reorganising the US political economy. It is worth highlighting that the OCAW approach did not challenge growth per se; however, it did question certain trajectories of growth, even when this meant sacrificing jobs for the greater benefit of workers, society and the environment.

The OCAW approach contrasted with that of the BlueGreen Working Group which accepted the hegemony of market mechanisms and presented green economic growth as inherently positive for workers, especially given its job-creating potential (Barrett et al., 2002). Such an approach saw just transition as a corrective of the dislocations of green

⁶ Wages resigned from his new position in the spring of 2001 in reaction to the anti-environmental politics of the union into which the OCAW merged.

industrial policy. A third approach, emerging in the United States and elsewhere, left out just transition policies and placed all its hopes in green industrial policy (Apollo Alliance, 2004). This approach has historically dominated mainstream labour environmentalism in the United States but, as we will see shortly, it is not limited to the United States.

LABOUR AND THE GLOBALISATION OF JUST TRANSITION: 2001–2013

By 2001, the concept of just transition had gone into hibernation in the United States as well as globally, particularly due to opposition by the AFL-CIO (see Rosemberg, in this volume). By the end of the decade, however, just transition re-emerged nationally and internationally (Hampton, 2015). An important moment in this regard was the 2006 merger of the ICFTU and the World Confederation of Labour that gave birth to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). From the outset, the ITUC placed environmental concerns at the heart of its agenda (Rosemberg, in this volume). Another noteworthy milestone includes the production of a policy brief in the lead-up to the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference (COP15) that explicitly linked the just transition concept to climate policy (ITUC, 2009a). Shortly after, an issue of the *International Journal of Labour Research* – the in-house journal of the International Labour Organization's Bureau for Workers Activities – was dedicated to just transition (Rosemberg, 2010a,b). Overall, the role of global union organisations, increasingly coordinated by Anabella Rosemberg of the ITUC, was paramount but behind them there was a network of national union pioneers.

The globalisation of just transition owes a great deal to the efforts of national unions. Noteworthy examples of unions that actively connected labour and environmental issues include the CCOO in Spain, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) in the United Kingdom, and the Australian Council of Trade Unions as well as the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Unions. While just transition was largely a strategy promoted by unions in the Global North, it did have some diffusion in the Global South. In South Africa, the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa, for example, organised a training programme to spread environmentalism within its ranks and raise capacity to support a just transition (Cock, 2011).

Under the leadership of Joaquin Nieto and as far back as the late 1980s, the CCOO adopted a proactive approach to the environment and climate that was partly informed by efforts in the United States. In

1996, the CCOO established the Instituto Sindical de Trabajo, Ambiente y Salud (ISTAS),⁷ which served as a research and education arm that would allow the union to integrate environmental and health and safety priorities into its practice, demands and collective agreements (Martin Murillo, 2013; Gil, 2013).

Another important actor in the diffusion of just transition was the British TUC. The TUC had focused on sustainable development and environmental issues since the late 1980s, and was actively involved in European and international climate debates. From 2005 to 2007, under the guidance of Philip Pearson, the TUC sponsored a research project on just transition conducted by the Working Lives Research Institute (Hampton, 2015), which resulted in a report on just transition (TUC, 2008). The TUC's participation in global climate negotiations also contributed to the diffusion of just transition with respect to climate policy.

Just transition was also being referred to by Australian unions who had a long history of labour environmentalism, going back to the green bans of the early 1970s (Burgmann & Burgmann, 1998). As an extractive economy, Australia faces significant challenges related to climate as well as pollution from lignite mining (Snell, in this volume; Goods, in this volume). Over the course of the 1990s, Australian unions explored the promise of green jobs (Crowley, 1999) and during the early years of the millennium Australian unions participated in and explored just transition solutions (AMWU, 2008; Evans, 2007; Snell & Fairbrother, 2011). By the end of this period South African unions were also engaged (e.g., COSATU 2011)

At the international level, a key promoter of just transition was the Sustainable Labour Foundation, a green think tank closely linked to the research and educational arm of the CCOO and active at the international level (Martin Murillo, 2013; Hunter, 2010). Launched in 2004 and directed by Laura Martin Murillo, Sustainable Labour – over its twelve years of existence – organised training sessions for union members, and published thematic reports, case studies, and policy recommendations, a number of which focused on developing contexts (see Rosemberg, in this volume; Martin Murillo, 2013). In close collaboration with the ITUC, it played a pivotal role in getting workers' voices heard in national and international policy spaces such as UN Environment (UNEP), the International Labour Organization (ILO), the UNFCCC and the CSD. Sustainable Labour was also instrumental in organising the first Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment in January 2006, which produced a landmark res-

7 At its height, ISTAS employed over a hundred people, including experts in occupational health and safety.

olution (UNEP, 2007, Annex 1). A second assembly was organised in 2012, in the lead-up to the Rio+20 Conference.

Drawing on the work of the 2006 Trade Union Assembly, the 2007 UNEP Labour and the Environment report explores the range of environmental transitions faced by labour and society at large, including climate change, toxics and health, production and consumption, and so on (UNEP, 2007). It provides an inclusive vision with respect to 'for whom' just transition should take place.

Given its growing importance, the UN climate process – through the UNFCCC – became a privileged venue for the ITUC, Sustainable Labour and national unions to push a just transition agenda. As a result, just transition was increasingly framed and recognised as the trade union movement's contribution to the international climate debate. In a flyer produced in the lead-up to the 2009 Copenhagen Climate Conference, the ITUC presented just transition as 'a tool the trade union movement shares with the international community, aimed at smoothing the shift towards a more sustainable society and providing hope for the capacity of a "green economy" to sustain decent jobs and livelihoods for all' (ITUC, 2009b:1).

Trade unions that were engaged in the climate process pushed for the inclusion of just transition in successive UNFCCC decisions and agreements to highlight the benefits of decisive climate action for workers and their communities. Just transition also represented a way of mainstreaming environmental issues within the union movement and building bridges with other – especially environmentalist – actors engaged in the international climate debate (Morena, 2015; Rosemberg, in this volume). Building on the growing awareness and public concern for climate change and linking it up to the global economic crisis, the ITUC – as well as global union federations such as the International Transport Workers' Federation, Public Services International and IndustriALL – made a credible case for greater union engagement in the environmental field.

By shedding light on the social implications of climate change, just transition filled an important gap in the international climate debate. Until the early 2000s, equity and justice issues had been almost exclusively framed along a North-South axis. The priority for many climate justice activists involved in and around the UNFCCC had been to get developed countries to recognise their historical responsibilities for climate change and to act upon them – both through more ambitious national mitigation efforts and through higher levels of financial and technological assistance to developing countries (that are much more vulnerable to climate change). When climate justice groups referred to

the uneven social impacts of climate change, they tended to focus on geographical differences (Fisher & Galli, 2015). Limited attention was paid to the differentiated social implications of both climate change and climate policies on the world of work in both the Global North and South (ITRC, 2018).⁸

For the ITUC, the aim of just transition was to 'strengthen the idea that environmental and social policies are not contradictory but, on the contrary, can reinforce each other' (Rosemberg, 2013:19). Through its efforts, especially in the lead-up to the Paris Climate Conference (COP21), the international trade union movement got certain UN agencies and programmes to adopt the just transition concept and language, contributing to its further diffusion within the international development and environmental community. Despite differences among them it is fair to say that global unions sought to integrate some kind of just transition within the political economy they were advancing (Felli, 2014; Stevis & Felli, 2015).

This is worth highlighting because the Great Recession accelerated the production of green growth and green capitalism proposals (Jacobs, 2012; Tienhaara, 2014), some including just transition as a crisis management tool and others not referring to it at all. The 2008 Green Jobs report published by UNEP, the ILO, IOE (International Organisation of Employers) and ITUC did include a chapter on just transition (Renner et al., 2008). However, the term is only mentioned once in the foreword and not at all in the sectoral chapters, leading one to think that it was added in response to political negotiations. Most importantly, the report associated just transition with decent employment and opportunities for employment, leaving out the policies necessary to transition specific workers and communities out of sunset industries, as envisioned in the original Superfund for Workers.

Other unions, particularly but not exclusively in the United States, were more attracted by proposals that avoided just transition altogether (Pollin et al., 2008, 2009). This was the case of the AFL-CIO, whose Energy Working Group avoided just transition terminology. This is not surprising since the president of the AFL-CIO at the time had previously been the president of the United Mineworkers during the 1990s.

It is worth noting that, unlike today, the various Green New Deal proposals at the time did not refer to the just transition concept, and in many cases, did not even focus on work and workers. While not referring

to just transition, Green New Deal proposals by UNEP (Barbier, 2009; UNEP, 2009), the Green New Deal Group (2008), the German Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, 2012), or the Böll Foundation (Heinrich Böll Stiftung, 2009) did address ways in which to prepare workers for the green economy but without elaborating on questions of justice.

DIFFUSION BEYOND UNIONS: 2013 TO THE PRESENT

Just transition language has entered the mainstream of international, national and subnational climate-related debates. The concept is now used by UN and other intergovernmental organisations, governments, environmental and development NGOs, indigenous groups, feminist groups, businesses and philanthropists, to name a few. As has previously been highlighted, the term's growing popularity has led to a diversification of meanings associated with it. In the United States, for instance, there is a marked difference between national unions and grass-roots environmental and labour justice groups' approaches and understandings of just transition. Despite its growing popularity, we should not overstate the concept's significance. Many within the environmentalist and union spaces are still reluctant to employ it while there are cases of unions that were formerly leaders in the just transition debate that are now backtracking and abandoning it entirely. And even though just transition has gained traction in the international policy space and the Global North, it is still much less used or discussed in the Global South (see Cock, 2011, 2015; Kenfack, 2018; Satgar, 2018; Hirsch et al., 2017).

As was highlighted earlier, the previous decade was characterised by a growing, if tentative, institutionalisation of the just transition concept at the international level. Just transition, for instance, was explicitly referred to in the Green Jobs Initiative (2009–14), a joint initiative of UNEP, the ILO, the ITUC and the IOE. The initiative's goal was to encourage governments, employers and workers to collaborate on coherent policies and programmes to realise a sustainable and just transition with green jobs and decent work for all.⁹ Through this and similar UN-backed initiatives, just transition was increasingly placed on other global agendas and was also gradually associated with concepts such as 'green and decent jobs' (ILO) and 'green economy' (UNEP). The ILO's adoption of a just transition agenda in 2013 and just transition guidelines (ILO, 2015; International Labour Office, 2018) and, of course, the inclusion of just transition in the Paris Agreement (which was followed by the UNFCCC

8 This and a few other passages in this introduction were adapted from the report *Mapping Just Transition(s) to a Low-Carbon World* published by the Just Transition Research Collaborative in November 2018.

9 www.ilo.org/beijing/what-we-do/projects/WCMS_182418/lang-en/index.htm

Secretariat commissioning a technical report on just transition from the ILO, have all contributed to popularise the concept in international and national policy circles. Other intergovernmental organisations are also taking an interest in the topic, but not always with a focus on workers and frontline communities, and are likely to use ‘inclusive’ rather than ‘just’ transition. In 2017, for instance, the OECD commissioned a report on just transition from the newly created Just Transition Centre (Smith, 2017), while the World Bank (2018) explored the equity challenges of a green transition in coal mining.

Its growing popularity among non-labour organisations notwithstanding, just transition remains firmly rooted in the union movement at the international level. The union movement’s active presence in the international negotiation space, its sustained efforts to mainstream environmental and climate concerns within the union community, and its successful lobbying efforts to include just transition language in the 2015 Paris Agreement on climate change have also contributed to further anchor the concept within the union movement. At the international level, the ITUC and International Transport Workers’ Federation have the most elaborate just transition policies (Stewis & Felli, 2015). Other global union organisations, such as IndustriALL (2019) and Public Services International, are also playing an increasingly active role in the just transition debate as has the Trade Union Network for Energy Democracy (Sweeney & Treat, 2018).

The 2016 launch of the Just Transition Centre (JTC) signals the beginning of a new phase in the ITUC’s just transition efforts – one that reflects a renewed commitment to collaborative industrial relations. The centre’s strategy centres around close collaboration with two global green business groupings – The B Team and We Mean Business – that are actively involved in the international climate arena. This collaboration between business interests and the JTC resulted in the publication of a *Just Transition: Business Guide* (JTC & The B Team, 2018). It is worth mentioning that the launch of the JTC coincided with the closure of Sustainlabour which, as we have shown, was a primary driver of labour environmentalism and just transition at the international level, moreover one with a strong Southern focus.

The global diffusion of just transition, particularly in the context of the international climate negotiations, has led to the adoption of just transition language by the most prominent environmental NGOs and networks. The reference to just transition in the preamble of the Paris Agreement further legitimised the concept and encouraged a wider range of stakeholders to use it. This was complemented by the concept’s compatibility with the agreement’s voluntary and bottom-up approach

and the wider narrative on the combined economic, social and environmental benefits of climate action, especially in the energy field (Aykut et al., 2017; Morena, 2016). Many stakeholders now refer to just transition in their campaigns and publications (Nelson, 2018; The Lofoten Declaration, 2017). These include the Sierra Club in the United States, as well as Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth International. The largest global network of NGOs working on climate change, Climate Action Network International, has also taken an interest in the concept and developed advocacy positions on the topic (CAN, 2018).

A number of regional, national and subnational governments – the European Union, Canada and Spain, Scotland, New York State, Colorado for example – have suggested or developed just transition task forces, commissions, funds, or policies. Most of these efforts aim at the transition out of coal (see chapters by van Niekerk, Snell, Reitzenstein et al., and Mertins-Kirkwood & Hussey in this volume). This focus, while important, has contributed to narrowing down the scope of just transition and to leaving out other sectors, as well as workers and communities that will be affected by climate change and efforts to address it (*International Journal of Labour Research*, 2014).

In parallel, just transition has also made a noteworthy comeback in the United States. At the grass-roots level, community-based labour and environmental justice organisations and networks are actively campaigning for a just transition that is not restricted to labour issues or dirty energy, but also focuses on cultural, gender and racial injustices and is connected to a more general critique of extractive capitalism. Noteworthy examples include the Climate Justice Alliance and its ‘Our Power: Communities for a Just Transition’ campaign (Climate Justice Alliance, 2017a; Akuno, in this volume). As Cipliet and Harrison explain:

in practice, [environmental justice] and just transition organizations, networks, and movements in the United States have extended the frame of a just transition broadly to issues facing communities including environmental racism, zero waste, energy democracy, mass incarceration and inequitable policing, gentrification, and Indigenous rights and sovereignty, among others. (Cipliet & Harrison, 2019:4)

The US resurgence is interesting, given national unions’ continued reluctance to fully engage in the just transition debate, and this despite repeated efforts from networks such as the Labor Network for Sustainability and the Climate Justice Alliance (2017b) to place just transition at the heart of the national union agenda. Yet, and while unions are no longer central, one could argue that, through their focus on workers

and frontline communities, environmental justice groups that mobilise around the just transition are in fact reconnecting with its initial meanings and uses, as laid out by Tony Mazzocchi, the OCAW and the JTA in the 1990s (described above). In that respect, it is worth following the efforts of both the Climate Justice Alliance, that does not directly include unions but prioritises the role of workers and frontline communities, and the People's Climate Movement, that does include some unions as well as a range of societal organisations.

Other noteworthy and innovative initiatives come from the philanthropic sector. These include the Just Transition Fund in the United States, launched in April 2015 with support from the Rockefeller Family Fund and Chorus Foundation, whose mission is to support Appalachian coal-dependent communities to transition to a strong, resilient and diversified economy.¹⁰ German political foundations have also been active in the international just transition space. More mainstream climate funders such as Bloomberg Philanthropies and the European Climate Foundation have also incorporated just transition wording into their work – for example, the Beyond Coal campaigns in the United States and Europe – as have foundations involved in the recently established F2o Platform. At a recent G20 event in Argentina, the platform called upon political leaders to take action for a just transition.

We are therefore currently witnessing an accelerating diffusion of just transition across social forces and organisations. The variability of just transitions is impressive if we were to map them in terms of frequencies. However, it is still possible to identify those that place just transition within a broader and more cohesive political economy, those that see it as a corrective of the tensions of green transitions and, finally, those that put their hopes in the positive impacts of green growth. Just transition's globalisation and diffusion has not ended the tensions among these visions. Rather, it has made them more apparent and ubiquitous.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST TO FIGHT FOR THE FUTURE

Our overview of the origins and trajectory of just transition has allowed us to reposition the world of labour and frontline communities in their rightful place in relation to the environmental debate. It has more broadly involved reaffirming the view that meaningful social or environmental change cannot happen without the emancipation of workers. This does not mean essentialising workers by overstating their role, or placing them above other alienated and oppressed groups, but rather of

10 www.justtransitionfund.org/

highlighting that without profound changes in the organisation of and relations at work a just, inclusive and transformative socioenvironmental transition is impossible. For too long, and despite the efforts of certain environmental historians (Dewey, 1998; Montrie, 2008; Barca, 2016; Rector, 2014) and environmental labour studies researchers (Rätzl & Uzzell, 2013), the academic and policy debate has been dominated by the 'jobs vs environment' binary and the idea that labour and other 'old social movements' were indifferent or opposed to environmental concerns.

Historicising just transition is also important because it allows us to show that the concept was not always associated with climate or energy (and more narrowly, coal) policy – something that is widely assumed, especially following its inclusion in the preamble of the Paris Agreement. As we have shown, over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, just transition was mostly associated with toxics and their impacts on workers, and the local environment. In short, just transition is about more than responding to the energy crisis. It is also about addressing a broader range of issues, from the low-carbon transition to the uses and abuses of ecosystems, to our food systems (UNEP, 2007; *International Journal of Labour Research*, 2014).

Finally, historicising the just transition concept also enables us to highlight its multiple functions for workers and organised labour. Just transition is not only about creating a safety net for precarious workers in declining sectors. As various chapters in this book highlight, it is about getting workers and frontline communities to engage in the environmental debate, organising workers in ascending green sectors and getting those still dependent on polluting industries and sectors to accept and support a green transition (Álvarez Mullaly et al., Rosemberg, van Niekerk, Reitzenstein et al., all in this volume).

The most important historical lesson from the study of just transition is to avoid thinking of the last thirty years as an inexorable road from less to greater ambition. As we pointed out in the beginning, the proliferation of just transition references is evidence of the success of progressive labour. But it also carries with it the real potential of its appropriation by corporate interests for greenwashing purposes, and its manipulation by forces that are not interested in either green or just transitions (see the chapters of Moussu and Goods in this volume).

As Rector (2018) and Purdy (2018) suggest, the contemporary period lacks the strong democratic socialist vision that existed in the post-Second World War period and which informed the mobilisations of the 1960s and 1970s. The range of proposals and initiatives aiming at the empowerment of various constituencies is broader – as is the opposition

– but the overall political vision is less ambitious. While there have been spurts of hope in post-apartheid South Africa and post-dictatorship Brazil and, more recently in places such as Greece, Spain and the UK, the cause of a credible egalitarian and ecological left has been in decline. It is for this reason that the current traction of democratic socialism in parts of US society is so important, especially as such developments at the core of the world political economy have both domestic and global implications.

The current Green New Deal proposal supported by a number of US political leaders is an ambitious political proposal that does marry greening the economy with just transition. Its goal is to provide an agenda for the US left and it has increasingly been taken up as such in other parts of the world (Varoufakis & Adler, 2019; Alternative Information and Development Center, 2019). In a very real sense, it is both forward looking and at the same time reminiscent of Tony Mazzocchi's vision and the OCAW's just transition efforts, which in turn sought to revive the aspirations of the late 1960s and the 1970s before US hyperliberalism defeated the bastions of US democratic socialism. Historicising just transition therefore forces us to reflect on the broader historical trajectory in which it emerged and developed. When we do this, we realise that just transition involves more than simply helping workers to adapt to changes in their industries. It is about fulfilling a broader and deeper egalitarian and ecological vision (Alvarez Mullally et al., in this volume). The question becomes one of seeing whether contemporary just transition advocates will follow Mazzocchi's lead and foster a broad, counterhegemonic coalition of unions, environmentalists and justice advocates, or risk allowing this fascinating concept to be co-opted and stripped of its transformative potential.

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