

# LABOR AND GLOBAL WARMING

## A Global Labor Strategies Discussion Paper

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*ideas and resources for the global labor movement*

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# LABOR AND GLOBAL WARMING

## **Table of Contents:**

Introduction

A Clarion Call

The Ambiguous History of Labor and Global Warming

A Blue-Collar Union Goes Green

The Blue-Green Alliance

Global Labor and Global Warming

Global Warming: Markets and Democracy

A New Global Warming Policy for Labor

Appendix: Labor Assembly on the Climate Crisis

## Introduction

The reality of global warming and its catastrophic consequences are today beyond debate. But American labor is caught in an internal stalemate among those who fear job loss from efforts to deal with global warming, those who have not considered global warming an important union issue, and those who see the climate crisis as a call for immediate action and an opportunity for sustainable economic development.

Labor will confront critical issues to which it must respond at the bargaining table and in the public policy arena. Indeed, organized labor plays a critical role in funding and supporting progressive political action in the United States. Resolving this conflict constructively is a crucial step in developing a new American politics that will do what is necessary to reduce greenhouse gasses – a necessity that is just as important for working people as for everybody else.

This discussion paper grows out of a series of articles originally published on the Global Labor Strategies blog ([www.laborstrategies.blogspot.com](http://www.laborstrategies.blogspot.com)) to help frame a new debate on labor's role in the climate change debate. It was prepared by Jeremy Brecher, Tim Costello, and Brendan Smith for Global Labor Strategies.

## A Clarion Call

It's not every day that employees risk the wrath of their superiors to blow the whistle on acts of public irresponsibility. So it must have been something important that led union representatives for more than 10,000 workers at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to petition Congress to take immediate action against global warming. Their warning should serve as a clarion call not only to the Congressional committee to whom it was addressed, but to American workers and their unions. They wrote:

We, the undersigned, are Presidents of 22 Local Unions representing over 10,000 United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) environmental engineers, environmental scientists, environmental protection specialists and support staff. We are writing to protest the lack of progress in addressing global warming.

The EPA unions point out that the effects of global warming, far from being hypothetical, are already at hand.

The impacts of global warming are clear: scientists have observed that, in general, sea levels have risen, glaciers are shrinking, there are abnormally large changes in the range and distribution of plants and animals, trees are blooming earlier, growing seasons are lengthened, ice on rivers and lakes is freezing later and breaking up earlier, and the permafrost is thawing.

They argue that the need for action is urgent.

As environmentalists and public health advocates, we assure you that we do not have more time to wait for more evidence about the speed of future warming and then take even more time to decide whether, and how much, to limit emissions. If we wait, we will be committing the next generation of Americans to approximately double the current global warming concentrations, with the associated adverse impacts on human health and the environment.

This requires change.

Although the United States announced a comprehensive strategy to reduce the GHG [greenhouse gas] intensity of the American economy by 18 percent over the 10-year period from 2002 to 2012, the Federal government is using primarily voluntary and incentive-based programs to reduce the bulk of the emissions.

But "the voluntary and incentive-based programs to encourage the reduction in GHG emissions are not enough." Congressional leaders must "support a vigorous program of enforcement and reduction in GHG emissions" and "research programs aimed at abating global warming through direct, cost-effective technological intervention." And they must support "policies and regulations that reduce GHG emission sources, in line with the principles of the Kyoto Protocol."

The petition added a peculiar-sounding plea:

We request that Congress mandate that U.S. EPA inform the public about their 'right to know' regarding the current technology that is available to control carbon emissions from coal-electric plants under review [and] allow U.S. EPA's scientists and engineers to speak frankly and directly with Congress and the public regarding climate change, without fear of reprisal.

Jeff Ruch, Executive Director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, which helped publicize the effort, helps explain the peculiar request:

Professionals working for the Environmental Protection Agency are protesting being ordered to sit on the sidelines while we face the greatest environmental challenge of our generation," stated, noting that the petition began among agency staff. "Under a new Congress, perhaps the scientists at EPA can begin to directly communicate with their true employers – the American public.

This extraordinary act of worker and union responsibility comes in response to a historic irresponsibility on the part of American business and the American government.

Early in 2007, the AFL-CIO weblog published an article headed "Exxon Mobil Secretly Funds Efforts to Deny Global Warming" by Managing Editor Tula Connell. It quotes a new study from the Union of Concerned Scientists revealing that Exxon "gave \$16 million to 43 ideological groups between 1998 and 2005 in an effort to mislead the public by discrediting the science behind global warming."

According to the weblog, the report found the company "has adopted the tobacco industry's disinformation tactics, as well as some of the same organizations and personnel, to cloud the scientific understanding of climate change and delay action on the issue."

Exxon "funded an array of front organizations to create the appearance of a broad platform for a tight-knit group of vocal climate change contrarians who misrepresent peer-reviewed scientific findings; attempted to portray its opposition to action as a positive quest for 'sound science' rather than business self-interest; used its access to the Bush administration to block federal policies and shape government communications on global warming."

The efforts to prove that global warming isn't happening, or that it isn't the result of human actions, or that its effects will be negligible, or that nothing can or should be done about it, have now all been discredited. More and more people in the U.S. and worldwide are heeding the clarion call issued by the EPA workers. Yet few labor trumpets have so far joined that call. The next article in this series will examine the ambiguous role American labor has played so far in the great debate over global warming.

## **The Ambiguous History of Labor and Global Warming**

The majority of union members, like the majority of Americans, undoubtedly want action on global warming. But the US labor movement has particular structural problems that make it difficult to confront broad social issues like global warming.

On the one hand, since the days of Samuel Gompers, founding president of the AFL in the 19th century, U.S. unions have represented particular groups of workers – first workers in the same craft, then increasingly workers in the same industry. On the other hand, the federation of unions – the AFL, the CIO, and more recently Change to Win – have in principle represented the interests of workers as a whole.

This dual function produces a tension at times that has blocked action on key issues.

A long standing tradition of organizational solidarity has sometimes meant that the immediate sectoral interests of member unions has trumped broader class interests. It's a genuine conundrum. After all, the reality is that workers join unions to protect their jobs and immediate economic interests and unions join federations to further their organizational interests through mutual support. American labor's position on global warming has been a tragic case in point of a failure to resolve this tension.

Most Americans want action on global warming and they want it fast. A new poll by Yale University Center for Environmental Law and Policy shows that 83% of Americans see global warming as a serious problem and some 70% think the government is not doing enough. The release of UN reports, including one this past week indicating that we are already experiencing the impacts of global warming, will likely add to calls for action.

The way we live and work will change radically in the coming years either as a result of action or inaction. Corporations are already launching well publicized “business friendly” approaches to global warming. Now, labor must develop a coherent response that meets the specific needs of its members at the bargaining table and the general needs of its members as human beings confronting a potentially catastrophic event. Labor must stake out a position if it is to remain a vital social and political force. Tackling the tension between the specific sectoral interests of unions and their more general class and social interest is the essential first step in that process.

Put “global warming” and “climate change” into the AFL-CIO website's search engine and what you discover is the story of labor's past involvement with the global warming issue.

Two recent entries indicate labor's growing concern with global warming. One describes a report by the Union of Concerned Scientists exposing Exxon Mobile's borrowing of tobacco-industry tactics to confuse the public about the threat of global warming. The other describes the recent formation of a “Blue-Green Alliance” between the Steelworkers and the Sierra Club to press for a labor-friendly environmental agenda.

But search further back and a far less environmentally-friendly history emerges.

In February, 1997, as negotiations began for what came to be known as the Kyoto Protocol, the AFL-CIO Executive Council issued a statement on the “U.N. Climate Change Negotiations.”

We believe the parties to the Rio Treaty made a fundamental error when they agreed to negotiate legally-binding carbon restrictions on the United States and other industrialized countries, while simultaneously agreeing to exempt high-growth developing countries like China, Mexico, Brazil and Korea from any new carbon reduction commitments. . . . The exclusion of new commitments by developing nations under the Berlin Mandate will create a powerful incentive for transnational corporations to export jobs, capital, and pollution, and will do little or nothing to stabilize atmospheric concentrations of carbon. Such an uneven playing field will cause the loss of high-paying U.S. jobs in the mining, manufacturing, transport and other sectors.

“Carbon taxes, or equivalent carbon emission trading programs, will raise significantly electricity and other energy prices to consumers. These taxes are highly regressive and will be most harmful to citizens who live on fixed incomes or work at poverty-level wages. . .

The AFL-CIO Executive Council further urges that in the ongoing negotiations to amend the Rio Treaty on climate change, the United States insist upon the incorporation of appropriate commitments from all nations to reduce carbon emissions; and seek a reduction schedule compatible with the urgent need to avoid unfair and unnecessary job loss in developed economies. The President should not accept and the Congress should not ratify any amendment or protocol that does not meet these standards.”

Subsequent actions by the AFL-CIO’s Executive Board reaffirmed opposition to the Kyoto Agreement.

The union opposition to Kyoto reflects the tendency of the American labor movement to represent narrow sectoral interests, rather than the interests of workers as a whole. It was spearheaded by a coalition of unions called United for Jobs and the Environment.

The UJAE describes itself as a “partnership” of unions. It lobbied, and continues to lobby, against the Kyoto agreement and against environmental legislation in the U.S. that it considers unfavorable to labor. While its concern with the possible negative impact that measures to reduce greenhouse gasses might have on the employment of miners and other workers is entirely legitimate, it has made little effort to explore ways that a “just transition” might protect them. And while its desire to include all countries in a global agreement reducing greenhouse gasses is laudable, keeping the United States out of the Kyoto protocol is hardly an effective way to encourage other countries to engage in international climate control cooperation. It’s hard to ignore the alignment of its position with mining, electrical, and other energy companies.

The twists and turns in the language of the most recent AFL-CIO Energy Task Force statement on “Jobs and energy for the 21st Century” indicates the difficulty the

Federation's is having coming up with a common policy on global warming. It acknowledges the scientific evidence that fossil fuels are contributing to global warming. It calls for "balanced measures" to combat global warming. Its only positive suggestion for combating global warming is to target revenues from any auction of carbon permits to finance "improvements in technology that will allow clean energy to be produced at prices close to what consumers pay for energy from conventional sources, and to encourage deployment of this technology in manner that promotes domestic production and jobs for American workers."

The Energy Task Force statement emphasizes, however, that "The Federation opposes extreme measures that would undermine economic growth, harm particular sectors, or placing ourselves at a disadvantage to other nations." And it argues that any mandatory tradable-permits program should initially seek only to "gradually slow the growth in greenhouse gas emissions" and should contain a "safety valve" cost cap "to protect the economy." Further, "U.S. efforts to address climate change should be conditioned on similar actions by U.S. trading partners and developing countries."

It is difficult to find on the AFL-CIO website any significant expression of concern about global warming and its impact on working people either in the U.S. or around the world. Nor have we been able to find any indication that the Executive Council has endorsed positive alternatives to combat global warming.

A search of "Global Warming" on the Change to Win website produces only the message "Sorry, your search was empty!" Asked about global warming, CtW's Andy Stern, however, has said "I think the air we breathe and the water we drink and whether the world we live in is going to sustain itself is a big union issue." SEIU recently sent out emails encouraging people to participate in the nationwide "StepItUp2007" actions April 14th calling for an immediate cut in carbon emissions and a pledge for an 80% reduction by 2050.

## **A Blue-Collar Union Goes Green**

Given the stereotypes about blue collar workers' attitudes about the environment, you might presume that the United Steelworkers would be one of the unions least likely to seriously address the problem of global warming. But in fact it pioneered a creative response that includes educating its members, creating a new strategic analysis, building a strategic alliance with environmentalists, developing public policy initiatives, and implementing a practical program of action. It could serve as a model for a broader labor response to global warming.

The 850,000 members of the United Steelworkers form the largest unionized sector in steel, aluminum, copper, pulp and paper, oil, chemical, glass, rubber and tire, and nearly all other North American manufacturing except auto assembly and aerospace. The overwhelming majority work for large multinational corporations that compete globally. A 2005 study of USW District 11 members found that 83 percent worked for companies that employed workers in similar occupations in multiple other countries. According to David Foster, former director of Steelworkers District 11,

An iron miner in Keewatin or Eveleth, MN today might work for US Steel of Pittsburgh, PA, or for Mittal Steel of Rotterdam and London or for Leiwu Steel of Shandong Province in China.

Steelworkers have a long history of environmental concern. In 1948, 20 residents were killed and 6,000 sickened around a zinc mill in Donora, Pennsylvania, 35 miles from Pittsburgh, leading the recently established USW to recognize the close connection between health and safety issues in the plant and environmental issues in the surrounding communities. In 1963 it supported the Clean Air Act and in 1969 held a national legislative conference on air pollution. In 1990 it created an executive board committee on environmental issues and issued a policy statement saying that global warming "may be the single greatest problem we face. Some have compared its possible consequences to the aftermath of nuclear war." The union cooperated with the Sierra Club and some other environmental organizations to oppose the WTO and demand that trade agreements include enforceable labor and environmental standards – an alliance made famous by the 1999 Battle of Seattle.

Last year, the Steelworkers issued a new environmental statement called "Securing Our Children's World." It brought together several themes that will be crucial for any attempt to forge a wider labor response to global warming.

First, it recognizes the reality of global warming. Visible evidence? "The 2005 hurricane season with 27 named storms, including three Category 5 hurricanes, is the worst on record."

It identifies the human causes of global warming:

Carbon dioxide results from the burning of fuels containing carbon, like petroleum, coal, natural gas or wood. One mile of driving a car, or one-half kilowatt-hour of coal-

generated power, releases about a pound of carbon dioxide. Altogether 18 billion tons are released every year.

It recognizes that the US is the largest producer of greenhouse gases, contributing over 25% of the world's emissions. "Most of the Earth's population contributes three tons per person to this total; North Americans contribute twenty tons each."

It recognizes the severity of the problem:

Over the last century, the carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere has risen by 25 percent. At the present rate, it could double in the next century, triggering massive changes in the global climate.

The Steelworker's statement notes several dimensions of the union's concern with global warming.

There is the impact of global warming itself. "We believe the greatest threat to our children's future may lie in the destruction of that environment. For that reason alone, environment must be an issue for our union." And of all those threats, "Global warming is the greatest environmental and economic challenge of our generation."

But there are also economic issues that are of direct concern to unions. For example, there is the competitive disadvantage the countries will face if they don't address global warming.

The future of manufacturing in the global economy will belong to those nations who solve the problem of the world's growing shortage of fossil fuels through energy efficiency technology and building redesign, mass transportation systems, and new forms of renewable energy.

There is the opportunity for new jobs created by economic conversion:

Renewable energies like wind and solar power and mass transportation systems can create millions of new jobs. In Germany, for example, 40,000 people are employed directly in its wind energy industry, which consumes more steel there than any other industry, except for automobile manufacturing.

There is the question of good union jobs. "A strategic response to environmental challenges like global warming is key to our union's long-term survival. The good jobs of the future will be based on principles of environmental sustainability."

There is the question of how the costs and benefits of efforts to address global warming will be distributed. "The programs to deal with global warming can differ widely. Conservative programs will force these costs off on consumers and taxpayers, while protecting corporate interests. We have no choice but to fight around this vital union issue."

There is the question of global economic justice.

A planet populated by 6.5 billion human beings, virtually all of whom share our own aspirations for a better life, cannot imagine a future of peace and growing prosperity without also imagining a global economy that lifts 2 billion people out of poverty in a sustainable fashion.

As David Foster explains, in the global economy “The USW has acquired the obligation to speak out for union members not only in North America, but across the world on fundamental issues of wealth, poverty, and the creation of sustainable economies across our ever-shrinking planet.”

Finally, there is the question of corporate power. “Our union faces powerful corporate interests that care more about the next quarter’s profit report while we care about saving our children’s world.”

"Securing Our Children’s Future" holds up as a model the global warming platform of the USW-supported New Democratic Party. It

promotes an alternative with a strong program to cut greenhouse gases by investing in new renewable energies, mass transportation systems and energy efficiency, thereby creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs in Canada. Workers who are adversely affected by the change in energy policy will be protected through well-funded “just transition” programs.

It advocates similar policies for the U.S. not only to combat global warming, but to provide a more secure economic future:

New environmental regulations, enacted through state and national legislation like increased CAFÉ standards (Corporate Average Fuel Economy) and RES (Renewable Energy Standards) that mandate increased use of wind, solar, biomass from waste wood and slash, and even landfill methane for generating electricity, and public bonding for mass transportation and clean energy development are critical for rebuilding North America’s manufacturing base. Continuing the Bush Administration policies of ever greater reliance on the shrinking pool of Middle Eastern oil guarantees that more and more manufacturing jobs will leave North America as industry tries to offset the rising costs of energy with the low costs of Third World labor.

It envisions massive, job-creating public investment linking environmental protection and good jobs. “Imagine a twenty-first century Clean Energy Authority whose mission is to bring renewable energy to our communities, much as the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Bonneville Power Administration brought electrification to millions of Americans during the 1930’s and 40’s with their hydroelectric projects.”

If American labor wants to chart a new path on global warming, it has a splendid model right in its own midst.

## The Blue-Green Alliance

The United Steelworkers, the largest private sector manufacturing union in North America, and the Sierra Club, the oldest and largest grassroots environmental organization in the U.S., have been partners for a long time. They worked together to support the 1963 Clean Air Act and the 1990 Clean Air Act amendments. They worked together to fight trade agreements that did not include enforceable labor and environmental standards. They cooperated on corporate campaigns against companies that combined bad labor relations and environmental practices.

The Steelworkers and the Sierra Club also shared a common analysis of globalization. As former Steelworker District 11 Director David Foster, now head of the Blue-Green Alliance, said in a recent speech at Columbia University in New York, the pivotal issue today is “how we exercise influence over a global economy that threatens the very framework of the regulatory systems that provided us with labor law, environmental protections, and human rights in the 20th Century.”

According to Foster,

Consumer markets are global. Capital markets are global. And labor markets are global. In such an economy it is not surprising that environmental standards, passed by one community or country, are under increasing pressure.

Their common solution for the Steelworkers and the Sierra Club is “linking the good jobs in a global economy with the expansion of the full range of labor, environmental and human rights’ protections that were achieved in the 20th Century in the US, Canada and the rest of the world’s industrial democracies.” Thus, “our Alliance represents the merging of environmental and economic advocacy and the heart of its argument is that the investments in our environmental challenges will launch the economic opportunities of the next century.”

While the Steelworkers already had joint projects with the Sierra Club in 15 states, the poor showing in the 2004 presidential election led it to seek a deeper strategic alliance with the environmental movement. While it hoped other unions would join later, Foster explained in an article in the New Labor Forum (Winter, 2007) why the Steelworkers decided to initiate the alliance on its own:

The failure of previous AFL-CIO efforts to develop a consensus on environmental issues led the USW to believe that the development of a strategic coalition between the two movements could be best facilitated by a single manufacturing union taking the lead, establishing an infrastructure and overarching message, and then inviting other labor organizations to join. This approach specifically rejected settling for a “least common denominator,” opting instead for direct engagement on issues like global warming that had stymied earlier labor efforts.

Last June, the Sierra Club and the United Steelworkers announced the formation of their strategic alliance under the banner of “Good Jobs, A Clean Environment, and a Safer World.” Their joint statement said “This alliance will focus its resources on those issues

which have the greatest potential to unite the American people in pursuit of a global economy that is more just and equitable and founded on principles of environmental and economic sustainability.” USW president Leo Gerard said, “Secure 21st century jobs are those that will help solve the problem of global warming with energy efficiency and renewable energy.” Sierra Club director Carl Pope said,

We have reached a point in the development of a global economy where we can either use our planet’s resources for long-term sustainability or to create an ever more dangerous polarization of wealth and poverty. Our new alliance allows us to address the great challenge of the global economy in the 21st century – how to provide good jobs, a clean environment, and a safer world.

David Foster set up shop in the USW headquarters in Minneapolis and began work in Pennsylvania, Minnesota, Ohio, and Washington, with plans to expand into at least ten more states in the next two years.

The Blue-Green Alliance immediately moved into action with a “Fair Trade and Smart Energy Solutions” tour of Ohio designed to dramatize “the connection between the trade-related loss of manufacturing jobs, and job creation through investment in renewable energy and efficiency.” The mayors of Cincinnati, Dayton, and Cleveland were recruited to join the 240 mayors who have signed the Climate Protection Agreement, pledging to reduce carbon emissions in their cities in line with the Kyoto Protocol. Foster comments: “The success of the Ohio tour confirmed the importance of focusing on the economic benefits of environmental investments in order to build a blue-collar constituency for environmental causes.”

In November, Pope and Gerard attended a forum at the St. Paul UAW local across from a Ford plant scheduled to be shut down in 2008. Together with Twin City mayors they launched a local “initiative on green manufacturing” to promote both good jobs and a healthy environment. It’s been proposed to redevelop the site as a green manufacturer of hybrid vehicles or to produce parts for wind mills, solar power systems, or other alternative energy projects. The UAW local presented a green production proposal to Ford, but the company wasn’t interested.

USW and Sierra Club leaders form a steering committee in each state and bring together grassroots union members and environmentalists for town hall meetings. The Ohio steering committee is focusing on production of renewable energy equipment and legislating a new appliance efficiency standard. The Minnesota committee has focused on developing the state’s considerable potential for wind power.

Last November, Gerard and Pope campaigned in the Midwest for Democratic candidates who supported the Blue-Green Alliance program, such as gubernatorial candidate Ted Strickland, who proposed investing \$250 million of Ohio’s tax-exempt bond money in companies working on alternative energy.

In the next election, the Steelworkers and Sierra Club will call on all presidential primary candidates to commit to:

- A 2% reduction in carbon emissions every year
- A 2% increase in manufacturing jobs based on a new energy economy
- Rewriting American trade laws to advance labor and environmental standards

David Foster says that the Alliance's message research tested its initiatives both for their public support and for their capacity to connect to the "larger message of building a positive movement for change." Their initiative indicates what a new labor approach to global warming might look like in practice.

## Global Labor and Global Warming

While most of organized labor in the U.S. has stood aloof or even opposed efforts to address global warming, labor movements in the rest of the world have taken a far different approach.

Last November, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC -- formerly ICFTU), representing most of the world's labor movements, issued a statement on "Trade Union climate change strategies." It declared: "Climate change is a global threat requiring urgent global action."

Few days go by without some further troubling evidence of the accelerating rate of deterioration of the natural environment brought about by climate change: relentless drought across East Africa, continuing destruction of forests, grasslands and wetlands, rapid melting of the Greenland ice cap, accompanied in 2003 by a European heat wave that caused some 30,000 deaths and \$13.5bn in direct costs -- and the list goes on.

It called for "new and stronger commitments" going beyond Kyoto "to ensure serious and long-lasting reductions in greenhouse gas emissions."

ITUC General Secretary Guy Rider told an international environmental conference in Nairobi, Kenya this February 6:

Trade unionists are firmly committed to sustainable development goals, in full knowledge that securing them will require very considerable churning of employment and disruption of labour markets; the disappearance of large numbers of jobs, which will need to be replaced by the creation of others. Trade unions are pointing to the need for "just transition" from current production and employment patterns to those we need -- processes which will engage working people and their trade unions -- make demands of them yes, but recognize too that decent work opportunities for all are also critical to sustainability.

While the AFL-CIO opposed U.S. signing of the Kyoto Protocol, The Canadian Labor Congress actively campaigned for Canada to join it. In 2005 it issued a statement called "10 reasons why Kyoto is good for workers and society." It argued that "Climate change needs to be addressed as a matter of urgency." Global warming is already having an impact on Canadian (and global) weather, doubling the number of national disasters, and affecting major industries such as insurance, tourism, inland shipping and agricultural production. "We have to arrest and reverse this trend for the sake of future generations."

It argued that "Kyoto is good for the Canadian economy." Canada's Kyoto target of a six percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels would generate "a large amount of economic activity," e.g., in the production of energy through alternative and renewable sources; greater use of natural gas; retrofitting and energy efficiency; energy conservation; mass transit; new regulations leading to the adoption of new technologies; waste reduction; and pollution control systems -- thereby creating "more jobs and more secure jobs." It would also cut down on pollution, creating "healthier workplaces and communities."

It added that "What is really important is Just Transition." It acknowledged that complying with the Kyoto targets for carbon reduction would mean some job losses. Therefore "a Just Transition program with alternative employment, changed work and retraining is essential for Kyoto implementation." But "If done properly, the costs to the community will be minimal."

Unions in industrialized countries other than the U.S. have been working closely with governments and employers to try to meet the Kyoto targets for greenhouse gas reductions while providing a "just transition" for workers and others affected by environmental policies.

"Trade Union climate change strategies" laid out key elements of their approach.

Public support for climate change measures requires "employment transition programs," including green job creation, re-employment programs, training, education, and bridging compensation.

Targets for CO<sub>2</sub> reduction should be placed in a "sustainable development framework" which "integrates national development and poverty reduction strategies" with environmental issues like biodiversity and desertification.

Responding to global warming must include mitigation and adaptation policies, particularly for vulnerable groups such as the poor, youth, the unemployed.

Industrial development must contribute to poverty eradication and sustainable natural resource management.

Policy on global warming must take into account the social dimensions of climate change and the distributive effects of mitigation and adaptation measures.

Participatory decision-making must be entrenched at the international, national, sectoral, and workplace levels to make sure that all affected groups, including workers, are involved in decision-making on climate change.

Participation requires the recognition of workers' rights and a meaningful role in joint decision making with employers.

Workers need new statutory rights to allow such participation, such as formal recognition of environmental duties and paid relief and training for environmental representatives.

Union-based educational programs should provide worker awareness of climate change issues and build capacity for meaningful worker engagement in climate change initiatives.

More than 160 countries, including all industrial countries except the U.S. and Australia, have now signed the Kyoto Protocol. All are developing national policies to meet targets

to reduce greenhouse gasses. Unions around the world are developing new roles to apply "trade union climate change strategies" within those frameworks.

In Spain, for example, the two major trade union federations, two leading business organizations, and the Spanish government agreed in 2005 to establish a "Framework to Institutionalize and Organize Social Dialogue, related to the Compliance with the Kyoto Protocol." It establishes a tripartite "Dialogue Table" with responsibility for monitoring and assessing the country's National Allocation Plan for Kyoto compliance. The agreement aims to "prevent, avoid or reduce the potentially adverse social effects that could result from compliance with the Kyoto Protocol, in particular those related to competitiveness and employment." The first round was held in 2006, with follow-on Dialogue Tables for seven industrial sectors, to review the mandatory greenhouse gas emissions reduction of the National Allocation Plan.

In Canada, the United Transportation Union, which represents railway workers, developed 18 hours of instruction modules on the Kyoto Protocol, climate change planning, government and union programs, and methods of union action on climate change, including a focus on transitional employment provisions. The plan is to train facilitators for each province who will then train union members in workplaces.

In Germany, the Alliance for Work and Environment joins representatives of unions, environmental organizations, employers, and government to renovate housing. It plans to renovate 300,000 apartments, create 200,000 jobs, and reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2 million tons a year. The project will also reduce heating bills for tenants, landlords, and government by \$4 billion, as well as lowering unemployment costs and increasing tax revenues. The German government will provide \$1.5 billion plus \$8 billion in subsidized credit over a five year period.

Belgium, in order to meet the 7.5% cut in greenhouse gas emissions required by the Kyoto Protocol, plans to purchase emission quotas from other countries with its Kyoto Fund, supported by an electricity consumption tax. Consultation between unions, NGOs, employers and government has led to the inclusion of "social criteria" for its purchases. Any project will require a letter of social responsibility, which includes compliance with the OECD's guidelines for multinationals, the eight ILO basic conventions, and its conventions on occupational health and safety and indigenous and tribal people. Project evaluation must include "social sustainability," such as employment, equality, and access to essential services. Projects must include plans for monitoring, and the Belgian government can cancel contracts if performance does not comply with commitments. Projects that receive advance funding must provide monitoring by local unions, local environmental organizations, and local and indigenous communities.

The ITUC's "Trade Union climate change strategies" also proposed a significant union role for fighting global warming in the workplace. "Since three-quarters of all greenhouse gases come from manufacturing, energy production or supply, transport and construction, workplace actions could be key to change in these sectors." It listed these "preconditions" for worker participation in that process:

Right to participate: Workers have the right to participate in decision making related to environmental concerns in their workplace, exercised through the joint health and safety committee or workplace safety and health representatives, or through new environmental committees.

Right-to-know: Workers have the right to be aware about the environmental hazards in the workplace, as they are identified and evaluated and information concerning these hazards is communicated to employers and employees through labeling, material safety data sheets and employee training. This standard currently applies to chemical manufacturers or importers of chemicals, but needs to be expanded to include climate change-related issues, i.e. the right to know about workplace emissions, technological choices, plans for energy saving, use and efficiency.

Whistleblower protection: A worker may not be held liable or be disciplined for reporting workplace practices that are honestly believed to pose an environmental risk.

Right to refuse dangerous work: A worker may not be held liable or be disciplined for refusing to perform work that he/she honestly believes may pose an immediate or serious threat to his or other workers' health.

Right to refuse work which harms the environment: A worker may not be held liable or be disciplined for refusing to do work that he/she honestly believes may pose an immediate or serious threat to the environment.

The ITUC argued that the 2.3. million collective agreements in force around the world could serve as possible tools for workplace action -- and a new workplace culture -- for addressing climate change.

Some examples of union workplace initiatives are already under way. At the Scottish Agricultural College in Edinburgh, members of the local union branch who had attended an workshop on energy saving persuaded the college's environmental committee to pursue a range of energy-saving strategies. First they focused on reducing lighting in public areas; switching off lights not in use; and switching off computers, photocopiers and other equipment at night. Electricity use was cut by 3 per cent. Next they promoted double glazing of windows and radiator thermostats. Then they promoted the recycling of waste paper, saving 57,200 liters of paper at just one campus.

While many U.S. unions still oppose the Kyoto Protocol, the ITUC is calling for developed countries "to commit to much higher emission reduction levels in absolute terms beyond 2012," which in turn will lead less developed countries to introduce their own measures under the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities." The E.U. has just agreed to such deep reductions. American workers now have the opportunity to join their brothers and sisters around the world in addressing the global warming threat to our common future.

## Global Warming: Markets and Democracy

The danger of global warming was recognized in the 1960s, and by the 1980s its effects were already becoming apparent. Yet significant action to limit it has only just begun. Meanwhile, the total amount of greenhouse gases emitted into the atmosphere continues to grow.

Why?

According to Adam Smith's analysis of the market -- echoed by today's neo-liberals -- each player, by pursuing their own immediate self-interest, brings about the common interest of all. According to Sir Nicholas Stern, former chief economist of the World Bank and author of the British government's "Stern Review" on global warming, "Climate change is the greatest market failure the world has ever seen." As corporations and individuals have pursued their own immediate self-interest, they have brought about a catastrophe of unprecedented proportions.

Nor is this just a question of economic ideology. Exxon and other energy companies spent millions of dollars promoting "environmental holocaust denial" not out of its economic principles but because it feared measures to limit the use of fossil fuels might cost it hundreds of billions of dollars in profits.

Market failures occur when the market is unable to capture the real costs and benefits. As David Foster wrote in New Labor Forum, "Acceptance that human impact causes climate change invites a radical review of the market-based orthodoxy around which the current model of globalization has been constructed."

Addressing global warming will be a long-term development, like the development of public sanitation measures in response to epidemics. It requires the emergence of a more collective response. The transition to a low-carbon economy will require a new level of social coordination. It will require much more social control of investment. And, if it is to be conducted in a just and equitable way with wide support around the world, it will require social allocation of costs and benefits.

Underlying the failure to address global warming is a "democracy deficit." Neoliberalism has largely dismantled the means for controlling our common life at a national level. And it has prevented the construction of new means to control our common life at a global level. As a result, at present we lack the social capacity to compensate for market failure. Those who are affected by global warming individually have far less power than those in a position to aggravate it. We have been left with no way to protect ourselves against devastating market failures.

Countering this democracy deficit is a central part of contesting global warming. After all, what can we expect of politicians, media, and a political system dominated by oil companies? Indeed, according to the famous NASA climate scientist James Hansen, one way the U.S. public can help fight global warming is by helping to "address threats to American democracy." People have the right to know the truth about climate change.

Effective campaign finance reform is needed for this. "As long as politicians are getting support from special interests, then special interests are going to have special privileges."

The problem of democratic control of threats to the environment is even more pronounced at a global level, where the means for popular governance have never been strong. Indeed, as David Foster puts it, "It demands majority decision-making on a global scale."

Guy Ryder, General Secretary of the ITUC, articulated the problem to a U.N. environmental conference:

You are called upon to address issues which can only be addressed globally, which can only be addressed at significant cost (in the short term at least) and where costs will only grow quickly the longer action is delayed; which can only be addressed by impacting on strongly entrenched vested interests and habits; and which can only be addressed by breaking radically from past practice and orthodoxies.

The fact of the matter is that consistently and uniformly the international system has underperformed, sometimes very badly -- in its task of exercising governance of globalization. Those failures extend well beyond the environmental field and I won't enlarge on them.

But I believe they reflect an underlying constraint. It is that individually and collectively Governments have rather fallen under the spell of the prevailing belief that the best thing they can do is to make themselves small "to unleash the forces of the market, and then get out of the way.

This is the era of small Governments and free market economics. And yet today we are faced with a critical situation which (according to a better authority than I) constitutes the biggest market failure in history, and which, self-evidently, requires assertive state and inter-state action which must include new and considerable international regulation and constraints on the way markets work and on those who act in them.

Establishing "majority decision-making on a global scale" will be the work of an era and will ultimately require a movement as powerful and pervasive as neoliberalism itself.

David Foster sees such a movement growing out of the convergence the labor and environmental movements.

We do need a powerful movement, but not one focused on retaining the isolated reforms that labor fought for in the 1930's or the landmark environmental protections of the 1970's. We need a movement, based in our separate histories, but focused on our common futures.

According to Foster, incremental legislative reform linked closely to electoral strategy has been the guiding doctrine for many unions and environmental organizations during the last several decades. But the Blue Green Alliance "is focused on restoring an

additional element to the relationship between public policy and electoral politics -- that of movement building." Indeed, "Without strong, well-organized social movements, mobilizing along a society's basic fault lines, meaningful change is unlikely."

## **A New Global Warming Policy for Labor**

By campaigning against the Kyoto agreement, and until recently remaining silent on the corporate strategy to bamboozle the American people into allowing carbon pollution to burgeon unabated, the U.S. labor movement will be widely seen as complicit in the growth of catastrophic climate change – unless it speaks out now.

Now that even energy corporations are admitting the reality of global warming, a serious “climate debate” is finally reaching the U.S. Labor is one of the few organized forces that can represent the interests of ordinary people in that debate. A constructive labor involvement is essential both for establishing the measures needed to counter global warming, and for ensuring a “just transition” in which workers and the poor are not forced to bear the burden while corporations and the wealthy further enrich themselves.

Both global warming and the effort to combat it will directly affect workers and unions. Global warming, if not halted, will lead to massive economic disruption and job loss. Some anti-warming measures will lead to job losses in particular sectors. At the same time, there are huge opportunities for job growth presented by many anti-warming measures.

Workers and unions will also be affected, directly and through their employers, by economic policies established to combat global warming. Those policies will change taxes; redirect investment; affect energy prices; and reshape much of our energy and transportation infrastructure.

Workers in workplaces can play an essential role in introducing, monitoring, and enforcing anti-warming measures. After all, who is in a better position to know whether a company is really reducing its carbon use than those who work for it? Unions are in a unique position to negotiate purchasing, transportation, and other company policies that affect global warming. But such a role raises the question of what does it mean to be a worker – are workers “hired to work not think,” or should they also play a workplace role as producer, citizen, and human being?

American labor’s political clout has greatly strengthened the energy companies and others who fought against the Kyoto Protocol and domestic efforts to cut carbon emissions and reduce global warming. Meanwhile, more than 140 countries joined the Kyoto Protocol, which set specific targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions to 5% below 1990 levels. In the decade since Kyoto was first negotiated, U.S. carbon emissions have increased 15 percent.

American labor, with its significant political clout, can play a crucial role in bringing the U.S. into the global effort to deal with global warming. Here are key elements for a new labor policy for an aggressive attack on global warming combined with a just transition to a sustainable global economy:

1. Support a steady, compulsory reduction in greenhouse gasses. The 2% per year reduction demanded by the Blue-Green Alliance provides a reasonable starting point.

2. Support U.S. participation in a global agreement providing similar reductions worldwide.
3. Insist on a “just transition” in which workers who bear the cost of efforts to control global warming are adequately compensated.
4. Pursue a global jobs program that addresses the global deficit in good jobs for all.
5. Resist greenhouse gas policies that redistribute wealth to the wealthy and support those that redistribute it downward.
6. Push for recognition of the right and responsibility of workers and their representatives to participate in the planning, monitoring, and enforcement of measures to combat global warming in their workplaces and communities.
7. Include these rights and responsibilities in legislation and collective bargaining agreements.
8. Take responsibility for educating workers and their communities on the threat of global warming and the ways workers can participate individually and collectively in reducing greenhouse gasses.
9. Establish environmental stewards and/or incorporate environmental responsibilities in health and safety committees.
10. Act through negotiations and directly against employers who fail to meet their legal and moral responsibility to reduce greenhouse gasses.
11. Participate in coalitions to combat global warming locally, statewide, nationally, and globally.
12. Research and initiate local projects that create jobs by converting production and consumption to environmentally friendly, low greenhouse gas, forms.
13. Demand public responsibility for the protection of those most vulnerable to the effects of global warming. No more Katrinas!

Will American labor part of the global warming problem -- or part of the solution?

## **Appendix: Labor Assembly on the Climate Crisis**

Global warming is becoming a huge issue – perhaps the greatest single threat facing humanity. It is forcing escalating reconsideration on every institution, from government to business, to religion. How has the labor movement in the U.S. and around the world responded, and what challenges does the issue of global warming present for it in the future? The North American Labor Assembly on Climate Crisis, sponsored by the Global Labor Institute of Cornell University May 7-8, provided a unique opportunity to find out.

The conference was attended by more than 200 trade unionists from North America and 50 more from the rest of the world, visiting New York for a UN conference on global warming. The presence of so many trade unionists from countries where the labor movement has been far more involved in addressing global warming was particularly significant for U.S. trade unionists.

While of course it is difficult to fairly summarize an entire conference, a number of themes echoed repeatedly. (Many of them are noted in the “Conference Statement” appended below.)

First, there was a widespread consensus that the “climate debate” is largely settled. Both scientific and public opinion accept that global warming is real, that it is largely caused by human activity, that the steps necessary to limit it are known and technologically attainable, and that taking those steps is essential to human well-being and even survival.

There was also a sense that this is a critical time for labor in relation to the issue of global warming. Working people are already being devastated by the effects of climate change – there were plenty of references to Katrina and the heat waves that have killed thousands in Europe. Further, the policies and practices necessary to reduce global warming and mitigate its effects will impact every worker, every job, every bargaining unit, every contract, and every set of work practices. Finally, the policy issues around dealing with global warming will affect working people in every their lives – from the price of gasoline to the insurability of their homes to the type of jobs available. If labor is not at the table when those policies are set, it will be unable to play its historic role as the defender of the interests of working people.

Perhaps more surprisingly, there was a strong sense that the issue of global warming provides opportunities for labor. The policies necessary to deal with global warming are likely to open a wide range of new jobs – from the manufacturing of wind turbines to the retrofitting of buildings to reduce energy consumption. The need of workers to affect the policies that will in turn affect them provides a basis for unions to appeal both to workers already in unions and to those they are trying to organize. And the issue of global warming provides an opportunity for labor to show that, working with its allies, it can be a force for progressive social change that is in the interest of all workers and indeed of society as a whole.

It was also acknowledged that responding to global warming can be a divisive issue for unions. While new jobs may be created for some workers, others are likely to be hard hit

by new regulations and policies. Limitations on the use of coal, for example, are likely to hit miners particularly hard. For that reason, there was wide agreement that labor must insist that plans for addressing global warming include provisions for a “just transition” that does not put the cost of combating global warming on the backs of those workers who happen to be in the adversely affected occupations.

Global warming raises other justice issues as well. Trade unionists from outside the U.S., and some from the U.S. as well, emphasized the necessity that policies addressing global warming not be made at the expense of the poor in underdeveloped countries around the world. And representatives from the environmental justice movement pointed out how much of current pollution in the U.S. is concentrated in communities of color, and how essential it is that such communities be at the table when policies and plans for new energy systems are established.

A major focus of the conference was on the emerging “blue-green alliances.” The best known in the U.S. and Canada – the alliance between the Steelworkers union and the Sierra Club – was well represented at the conference, with many delegates from both organizations. But there were less familiar examples as well. A union representative from the Netherlands described how two union federations and four major environmental organizations there had joined together to draft what may well be the most progressive anti-global warming legislation in the world – now under consideration by the Dutch government.

Representatives from the West Coast Longshoremen and the Teamsters described a successful alliance of unions and environmentalists who are successfully combating severe pollution produced in the Port of Los Angeles. They forced steamships to burn less polluting fuels and to turn off their engines in port; pressure from the coalition of unions and environmental and community groups prompted shippers to offer to buy new, less polluting trucks for the mostly immigrant Latino owner-operator truck drivers in the port; and the environmental and community groups are sticking with the unions who rejected the short term solution of new trucks to pressure the companies to go further and restructure work relations in the port so that truck drivers can have regular jobs and the employers will be responsible for maintaining a low-pollution trucking fleet.

There was plenty of information presented about policies for addressing global warming. A keynote address by climate change specialist Dr. Robert Socolow of the Princeton University Carbon Mitigation Initiative, for example, laid out the main areas in which the release of carbon into the atmosphere could be reduced. He argued that the pluses and minuses of various policy choices, such as carbon caps, trades taxes, and subsidies, usually depend on the specifics. He estimated that in order to stabilize greenhouse gasses worldwide the U.S. would require a 60-80 percent reduction. He stressed that the world’s two billion poor people could meet their basic energy needs without significantly increasing greenhouse gas emissions.

The broad policy issues of global warming were addressed in workshops on carbon trading; North-South conflict and cooperation; negotiations for the next global greenhouse gas agreement; environmental and safety issues for coal and nuclear energy; biofuels; sustainable agriculture; and regulation, taxation, and public investment.

Several workshops explored the ways in which particular pro-environment industries might create new jobs. One pursued the idea of creating green jobs through an industrial policy designed to promote reindustrialization. Another examined mass transit and smart urban growth as ways to reduce sprawl, cut greenhouse gasses, and provide new jobs. Others looked at energy efficient building; fuel efficient transportation; and labor education and membership involvement around the climate crisis.

Specific concerns of labor in relation to global warming policy were also addressed. One workshop focused on organizing in the renewable energy sector. Another examined the relation of unions to “green business.” Others looked at how jobs, work styles, and working hours might change in a low-carbon future; sustainability bargaining and “green reps”; and the role of the labor movement in addressing the climate crisis.

Sierra Club president Carl Pope noted that Washington is “still the capitol of trivial pursuits,” with action on energy issues stalled even in the new Congress. But he noted that there has been rapid change in public opinion in the past two years and even more radical change in the past six months. Cities and states are moving fast to address global warming, and at this point they are more important than Congress. He urged unions to see that they are involved in coalitions and at the table to affect policy decisions at these levels.

Senator Bernie Sanders, who had made a special stop in New York to address the conference, noted that “this is the issue of our time” and that “young people see this as the issue of their generation.” He pointed out the growing class gap in the U.S., and maintained that “fixing global warming” could produce “millions of good paying jobs.” Global warming is “not a technical or a scientific issue” but “a political issue,” he observed, and by addressing it “we can cleanse the soul of this country.”

## **Conference Statement:**

### **Background**

The North American Labor Assembly on Climate Crisis met in New York City on May 7th and 8th, 2007. The meeting was sponsored by 10 international unions and attended by more than 200 trade unionists from the U.S., Canada, Mexico and the Caribbean region, as well as 50 trade unionists situated in other regions of the world. Representatives from environmental community, and women’s organizations also participated in the conference.

The Assembly is one of a series of international gatherings that began with the First Global Trade Union Assembly on Labour and the Environment in Nairobi, Kenya, in January 2006. In April 2006 Sao Paulo hosted the first ever Trade Union Regional Conference on Labour and the Environment for unions in Latin America, and in July 2006 another Regional Conference took place in Johannesburg, South Africa. These events were co-hosted by the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) and the

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC) and organized by the Sustainlabour Foundation.

Consistent with the practice of these previous meetings, the North American Assembly adopted a non-binding statement, as follows:

#### Conference Statement

1. We are trade unions from many national and local unions from North America and additional countries. We join with unions all over the world in urging determined action to address the climate crisis, a crisis that threatens life on our planet as we know it.
2. Given the severe nature of the climate crisis, we urge governments, both individually and collectively, to take decisive measures to control and then seriously reduce greenhouse gas emissions to levels that provide the best hope of achieving climate stabilization and ecological balance.
3. We recognize that global warming is a global problem. Therefore all countries, as well as regional and local authorities, must assume responsibility for reducing emissions, with those countries with the highest per capita emissions levels showing the way forward. However, we believe the level of reductions needed require countries to create a framework of mutual assistance, including technological cooperation and capacity building.
4. Unions have long maintained that climate stabilization can only be accomplished if economic and social life is structured around the notion of sustainable development and fair trade. For unions, sustainable development requires a commitment to decent work, meaningful worker participation in important decisions affecting the workplace and economic life in general, and a universally recognized system of enforceable workers rights like that expressed in the ILO's Core Labour Standards and various conventions. It also includes the right to refuse dangerous work and access to information.
5. Along with unions around the world, we embrace the concept of "just transition" whereby no worker should suffer economic hardship or insecurity as a result of the changes required to address climate crisis or other environmental challenges. All proposed actions on the part of governments and employers must similarly recognize and act on the "just transition" principle and the need of workers for job or livelihood security.
6. To reach the target of an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, we demand that employers step up their efforts to reduce their own emissions and to partner with union representatives and community leaders in efforts small and large to seriously address global warming.
7. In line with conclusions reached by the Stern Review, we also recognize that any economic and social costs incurred in efforts to control greenhouse gas emissions will be minor in comparison with the economic and social costs of continuing to do little or

nothing about global warming. Inaction is a far greater threat to workers and communities than is taking decisive action now and in the years ahead.

8. We see the struggle against global warming as an opportunity to put a stop to unsustainable patterns of production and consumption, and to create new and well paying “green” jobs in renewable energy, the construction trades, public transportation, sustainable farming, and much-needed manufacturing. This conclusion is backed by major studies like those commissioned by the Apollo Alliance, Redefining Progress, Renewable Energy Policy Project and Union of Concerned Scientists in the U.S. and the European Trade Union Confederation.

9. We recognize the immediate threat climate change poses to the people living in the poorest areas of the world. In turn, this poverty makes its own contribution to global warming as workers and communities are forced to work and produce in ways that are dangerous, unhealthy and unsustainable. This Assembly therefore recognizes that actions against global warming are therefore also actions against global poverty, unsafe working conditions, and economic precariousness faced by hundreds of millions of workers, a disproportionate number of whom are women.

10. International agencies and institutions, like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, must therefore stop pushing policies (such as the privatization of public services) that undercut the kind of worker and social protections necessary to relieve and alleviate poverty and paralyze efforts to address the climate crisis. Specifically, we call on the World Bank, and all multilateral development banks and export credit agencies, to halt all loans for fossil fuel projects that result in unsustainable logging.

11. In the effort to play our part in the struggle to restrict greenhouse gas emissions, we encourage the greatest possible trade union unity and coordinated practical action. This will require ongoing education and mobilization around climate crisis and other pressing environmental issues, and connecting these at all times to the need for workers rights, decent work, environmental standards, and for sustainable communities.

12. As part of the NAFTA and CAFTA zone, unions in North America can work to develop a common approach to climate crisis and sustainable development, taking into account the points on sustainable development articulated in the Labor Platform for the Americas formally presented by the trade unions of the hemisphere to the fourth Summit of the Americas at Mar del Plata in 2005.

13. Finally, this Assembly recognizes the potential of “blue-green” alliances at the local, regional, national and global levels. These alliances between unions, environmental, and community organizations must be grounded in the understanding that the fate of workers, communities, and the biosphere are inseparable from each other. We reject the notion that we must choose between jobs and environmental protection. We commit ourselves to work wholeheartedly for both, and will strive to achieve durable and effective forms of solidarity and cohesion.