

## Special report: Just transition

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**JUST TRANSITION:  
PUTTING PLANET,  
PEOPLE AND JOBS  
FIRST**

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Unions everywhere are tackling the crises of inequality, injustice, the climate emergency and Covid-19 head on ”

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# ACROSS THE WORLD, UNIONS ARE FIGHTING FOR DECENT JOBS ON A LIVING PLANET

BY SHARAN BURROW, GENERAL SECRETARY OF THE ITUC



*On 26 June 2019, a Global Day of Workplace Action took place in 23 countries, bringing together thousands of workers to call on companies to climate-proof jobs.*

Unions are at the forefront of the challenges the world is facing today. Income and wealth inequality are at historic levels, driving people to despair, anger and protest. Too many people are excluded from the prosperity of the global economy because of race or gender.

Along with inequality, the convergence of crises pre Covid-19 included the failure to deal with an economic model that is driving the climate emergency. Seventy-nine per cent of people believe workers should have a right to know what measures companies are taking to climate-proof their workplaces.

2021 is the first year of the decade during which we have to stabilise the planet, or at least avert a huge escalation of climate devastation. To achieve this, we need to reduce global emissions by at

least 45 per cent, and this will require every sector to transition as we also address the enormous impact of Covid-19.

While the pandemic is primarily a health crisis, it was born out of the environmental breakdown caused by an overshooting of our planetary boundaries. We must deal with all of these crises as we build a just recovery.

For working people, this recovery must be based on a new social contract that is focused on job creation. Many good and decent jobs are needed to replace lost incomes. The International Labour Organization estimates

that the equivalent of 500 million full-time jobs have been lost in working hours due to the pandemic. We need a recovery that is founded on a floor of labour and human rights and environmental protection. A recovery that provides universal social protection so that people have resilience against further shocks. We cannot walk away from the challenge of climate- and employment-proofing our future.

Many unions around the world are picking up the challenge. You can read their inspiring stories in this report. For example, millions of families in Bangladesh have had their homes washed away by floods and eroding riverbanks due to rising sea levels, forcing people to migrate to cities and accept extremely poor working conditions for low wages out of sheer desperation. The Bangladeshi unions are fighting to protect these workers while adopting just transition demands.

“We need a recovery that is founded on a floor of labour and human rights and environmental protection...we cannot walk away from the challenge of climate- and employment-proofing our future”

Even prior to the Paris Agreement, Argentina was one of the first countries to support union demands to include just transition in the UNFCCC negotiations. With a progressive government taking power this year, unions have found new opportunities to participate in discussions on Argentina's nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions. They are doing this with a broad and holistic view, integrating demands on energy poverty, the impact of extractive industries, food security, democracy and informal work. They are also doing this work in collaboration with social movements.

Trade unions in Tunisia are active on another important aspect of just transition: the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewables. Through active involvement unions try to maintain public ownership of the energy sector to protect the interests of the citizens (as workers and as consumers) in the transition to renewable energy. A worker-led cooperative is being backed by the unions to support local industry development that is climate- and employment-proof.

While the impact of climate change on Senegal's fragile economy is significant, developing effective policy responses has proven to be a challenge. Nevertheless, Senegalese unions are incorporating climate and environmental issues into their union work, and are committed to building capacity, improving collaboration with civil society and scaling up government lobbying to advance the just transition agenda.

Spain is currently implementing one of the most ambitious and comprehensive just transition plans. With the creation of appropriate governance instruments, including a dedicated Institute for Just Transition, plans for the phase-out of coal and coal-fired energy are being set up. In this story we see the profound impact and – above all – the message of hope that just transition plans have brought to the affected regions. Regional transition agreements play a crucial role in preserving economic activity in former coal regions. Supporting mine workers who have lost their jobs is the priority, along with the urgent challenge to provide good jobs for the next generation.

Finally, there is also the story of Scotland, where the next climate conference (COP26) will take place in November 2021 in Glasgow. Scotland has ambitious plans and a multi-stakeholder commission that advises the government on just transition. The future of its North Sea oil and gas workers and the development of major offshore renewable wind sector are emblematic of the just transition debate. Unions are fighting for good jobs in the renewables sector and to keep the economic activity linked to the sector in Scotland, without overseas outsourcing.

Unions everywhere are tackling the crises of inequality, injustice, the climate emergency and Covid-19 head on. These issues are intrinsically linked: we cannot solve one without dealing with the others. People must raise their voices in solidarity to make sure that the all-new climate plans (the NDCs) are ambitious and include just transition plans and measures. We must ensure that by the time we get to the Glasgow COP in November 2021, all sectors and all governments understand that we must transition, and that it must be a just transition with people and the planet at the heart of recovery.

# NOW THAT THE MINES HAVE CLOSED, WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR SPAIN'S COAL COUNTRY?

BY MARÍA JOSÉ CARMONA



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*José González and Paúl Martínez, former miners from Fabero, recreate the work they did for years in the coal seams of Pozo Julia.*

*Spain is looking for new ways to breathe life into its mining regions following the closure of its coal mines in 2018. Just transition and social dialogue are key, but time is running out.*

It was once referred to as ‘Spain’s heater.’ Despite its small size, the far-flung town of **Fabero**, located in the mountainous region of Bierzo in the province of León, used to heat stoves in Barcelona and power factories and trains in Madrid. The town’s inhabitants have always boasted that they were the driving force behind the growth of Spain’s industry and large cities. None of that progress would have been possible without anthracite, a very primitive type of mineral coal with a shiny black hue that accumulated in the bowels of the earth in the region for millions of years.

Now a quiet town, Fabero was once a teeming hub of activity. Since the discovery of the first coal seams there in 1843, its foundations have been filled with shafts and galleries bustling with as

much life as the town above ground. If 8,000 people lived in the town, close to 4,000 were moving below it. In coal’s heyday, the 1960s, the mining companies needed much more labour than the region could provide and recruited miners from other regions and even other countries like Portugal and Cape Verde.

In those days, the bars were open 24 hours a day, the schools were full of children who graduated and went straight to the mines, seduced by an employment opportunity that at the time, long before the world understood the dramatic effects of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, seemed eternal.

But times are different now. With the future of our planet in jeopardy, Fabero has become one of the laboratories where Spain is

trying to prove that transition from fossil fuels to clean energy is possible.

Since taking office in June 2018, the socialist government of Pedro Sánchez has committed to achieving carbon neutrality by 2050, as set out in the newly proposed [Climate Change Law](#). This means that by that date, Spain will only be able to emit as much CO<sub>2</sub> as its carbon sinks are capable of absorbing.

Almost all of Spain's remaining coal mines, concentrated in the four provinces of Asturias, Palencia, Teruel and León, closed in December 2018. They were followed in July 2020 by the thermal power stations that until then had been burning coal. Both closures, the result of [a historic agreement](#) between the government, employers and trade unions, will mean the disappearance of about [6,700 direct jobs](#) between miners and employees of thermal power stations. This represents a true disaster for towns like Fabero, where coal has been the sole way of life for 175 years and people have no other way to make a living. To address this situation, Spain became the first country in the world to develop a [Just Transition Strategy](#), designed to do the just thing of preventing these territories from emptying out, ageing and dying off like the coal industry.

“Companies that have profited from coal for many years cannot simply abandon these regions, they have a responsibility. They should at least be responsible for implementing renewable energy there”

“For [a transition to be just](#) it must include measures for protecting workers, it must have stable planning and laws, propose alternatives and training, and provide hope and certainty,” explains Mariano Sanz, secretary of the environment at Workers' Commissions (CCOO), one of the trade unions that has signed the agreement, along with UGT-FICA and USO.

With a time frame of 2019 to 2027, the strategy provides for early retirement and incentive leave for coal workers who find it more difficult to re-enter the labour market, and commits to relocating the remaining workers, including subcontracted workers, to work in the environmental restoration of mines or the dismantling of thermal plants.

It also proposes the comprehensive transformation of mining regions, including attracting new employment niches such as [renewable energies](#), agro-industry and tourism in order to secure the present and above all the future of these areas.

“The number of workers who need to be relocated isn't so high, the problem is new jobs, the next generation, young people,” says Víctor Fernández, mining secretary at UGT-FICA. “The workers will ultimately find new employment, but they have children. Where will they go if there's no good conversion?”

Breaking from dependency on coal will be a complex process that will take time, but in towns like Fabero, where the mines have long been closed and life – both above ground and below – is no longer the same, the clock is ticking. The choice used to be coal or nothing. Now there's not even coal.

## THE END AND THE RESISTANCE

Every time a siren sounded in the streets of Fabero it meant one of two things: it was time to enter the mine or time to leave it. If the siren sounded at a different hour, in the middle of the morning or afternoon for example, it meant only one thing: there had been a tragedy, an accident, probably fatal. “Now when people hear it they're happy because they know that tourists have come,” says Chenchó Martínez. He is one of the tour guides at Pozo Julia, Fabero's first mining installation to be converted into a museum.

The mine's old headframe rises up from the wide dirt esplanade like a long iron limb, a lift connecting the surface with the vertical shaft by means of a system of pulleys. Both the miners and the anthracite, at least 100,000 tonnes a year, entered and exited the mine through this 275-metre deep passage.

Next to the headframe are the changing rooms, offices and machinery rooms, buildings that have remained the same since the shaft opened in 1947. Everything here is original, even the uniforms and boots, left behind by the last miners when the shaft closed in 1991 and today photographed by visitors. This authenticity has earned Fabero a place on the European Route of Industrial Heritage.

In 2020, Pozo Julia, along with other areas linked to the town's mining history – Pozo Viejo, Mina Alicia, the Diego Pérez neighbourhood – became *Bienes de Interés Cultural* (BIC), protected sites of cultural interest. In 2019, 5,000 tourists visited Fabero, attracted by the old charm of its mines.

“Anthracite is the coal that burns the best and has the least impurities,” Chenchó explains during the visit. “The layers are so compressed that they measure 30 centimetres to a metre,” he adds. This is significant, as it meant that the miners could not stand up straight and instead had to mine lying down for six or seven hours in 35-degree

heat, their uniforms drenched from the humidity. Today, visitors are unable to go underground to visit these incredibly narrow cavities, but the Cuenca de Fabero Miners' Association has reconstructed an exact duplicate on the surface. The experience is so realistic that visitors often think they are in the actual shaft.

"It was a selfless effort by all of the workers, we did it to make sure that our culture and way of life as miners would not be forgotten," explains Paúl Martínez, one of the last miners to take early retirement at the end of 2018.

He and his companions did all of the work themselves, only receiving financial support from the municipal council with the hope of receiving additional funds later on. At that time, in 2010, the government promised them a subsidy of €8 million to turn Pozo Julia into a brand-new mining theme park, but the money never materialised. Since then, the town has been suspicious of the 'just' nature of this transition.

Mining reconversion is nothing new for this area. Spain has been talking about it since the 1990s, initially more for economic reasons than for environmental ones.

A drop in the price of coal and an increase in foreign mineral imports led to the first closures and redundancies. The country went from employing 100,000 miners in 1960 to around 45,000.

It was then that the government began to promote a series of 'coal plans,' subsidies aimed at creating alternative employment and stemming the outflow of young people already taking place. Part of the money, as was the case with the Fabero theme park,

was never invested – some mining basins are owed **more than €500 million** – or was spent on projects that had nothing to do with job creation, such as water treatment plants and sport centres. According to **a report by the Court of Auditors of Aragon** covering the period between 2006 and 2017, many of these funds were managed inefficiently. There was no strategic plan or subsequent monitoring. Projects that were already funded never got off the ground and thus failed to prevent miners' children from leaving. Villages like Villablino, also in León, lost as many as half of its residents.

"We had almost 17,000 registered inhabitants and now it's down to less than 9,000. The early retirees have left, many decided to look for an alternative elsewhere because they don't see a future for their children here," says Mario Rivas, the town's mayor and president of the Association of Mining Regions (ACOM). The outlook was already bleak when 2010 arrived and the European Union set a date for the end of coal. The mines still receiving subsidies were set to close in 2018. But they didn't go quietly, and many resisted until the very end.



© Roberto Marín

A group of tourists visit the machine room at Pozo Julia in Fabero.

“Mining is more than a profession, it’s a way of life. We have always fought to make sure that it would be part of our future until one day we woke up and the closures were here. We weren’t prepared for that end,” admits Rivas. Over the following years, the mining basins organised protests, blocked roads and staged ‘Black Marches’ in 2010 and again in 2012, when miners marched all the way to Madrid. 2018 was still a long way off.

“One of the most serious problems has been the lack of acceptance. I think there was a lack of clarity and honesty on the part of the administrations and unions in saying this was over. It undermined understanding and the search for alternatives,” says Tatiana Nuño, head of energy and climate change at Greenpeace Spain.

“It wasn’t until 2018, when the government changed, that steps were taken in the right direction and it became clear that mining would shut down, that we were not going to prolong the agony. That was a turning point in acceptance of the situation.”

## ▬ A SLOW TRANSITION

Stacks of papers accumulate on the desk in Mari Paz Martínez’s office. All of them are proposals, projects, hopes for Fabero’s future. “We are trying to open doors that we didn’t need before,” says the mayor.

One of those is tourism. Her intention is to continue the commitment to Pozo Julia while restoring other mining facilities such as Pozo Viejo and Gran Corta, a huge open cast mine that occupies a quarter of Fabero and whose 750 hectares today remain covered in debris. The municipal council wants to turn it into a geological adventure park with a large zip line and a fossil trail. They say that it could employ about 20 people, nothing like the 500 who once worked there, but something is better than nothing. “These days we’re happy to create five or ten jobs,” explains Martínez.

“The country is historically indebted to us. The big cities of today are what they are because of the coal that used to come out of here. All that we are asking is that they don’t let us die”

The Just Transition Strategy has several avenues for reviving mining territories. There is a €250 million fund spread over five years to support business initiatives, as well as aid for environmental restoration and the promotion of renewable energy projects. But the most ambitious are the so-called ‘transition agreements.’

These are medium- to long-term plans, 13 of which are now in progress, for choosing projects that will truly transform the economy of these towns. Through a process of open participation, town councils, autonomous communities, associations and trade unions propose different ideas. Those that create the most employment, those that are the most viable, as well as those that

provide opportunities to women, historically displaced by mining, will be chosen. Funding will then be sought, including from the [European Just Transition Fund](#), which will allocate 4 per cent of its budget to Spain.

“We’ve been surprised by the high level of participation and the number of projects that are being submitted to us,” says Laura Martín, director of the [Just Transition Institute](#), the public entity responsible for receiving and evaluating proposals. “It’s an urgent matter in many regions because they are in danger of depopulation. In order to keep people there, we need to understand very well what their needs are.”

In the initial phase, 1,400 proposals were submitted with roughly 500 organisations providing input. “The process is very different from previous plans. There’s more control and co-responsibility. We begin by talking about projects, not money. The unions are very involved,” says Mariano Sanz of CCOO.

Trade unions are calling for large energy companies to get involved in the same way. “Companies that have profited from coal for many years cannot simply abandon these regions, they have a responsibility. They should at least be responsible for implementing renewable energy there,” says Santiago González, head of USO’s international department. [Precedents for this exist.](#)

While it’s true that renewables constitute a cornerstone of reconversion, anyone who thinks that another large company will be able to single-handedly save all the jobs lost in the coal towns is mistaken. As Cristina Monge, a political scientist and executive advisor to the Ecology and Development Foundation ([Ecodes](#)) explains: “If we close down coal and get a big renewable company to come along, we will have gained in employment and sustainability but we will not have gained in resilience. The dependence is the same.” Large companies are important, she adds, “but it is more important to create an economic fabric of small and medium-sized companies.”

In this regard, the ‘transition agreements’ are oriented towards creating a diverse array of projects, whether in tourism, livestock farming, the digital economy or care for the elderly. The biggest setback so far has been time: everything is moving slower than expected. The most urgent matter, the environmental restoration of the mines and debris sites, has yet to be set in motion.

“We’re concerned,” says Mario Rivas, Mayor of Villablino. “We should be moving faster. Our community needs to see that this works to believe it.” This view is common in all of the mining communities, who saw their way of life come to an abrupt end but have yet to see a ‘transition’ take place. “This time the process is going better, in previous years they didn’t even listen to us. But this is much more urgent for us mayors than it is for the government. Our citizens are making demands of us, we’re under a lot of pressure,” says Mari Paz Martínez.

“With the future of our planet in jeopardy, Fabero has become one of the laboratories where Spain is trying to prove that transition from fossil fuels to clean energy is possible”

“We have a time problem. But it’s also true that when we arrived in June 2018, nothing had been done to prepare for the work. We had a hard time talking about the future, we spent the first six months only talking about whether or not the mines should be closed,” explains Martín of the Just Transition Institute. That delayed the start of the strategy and that was before the arrival of [Covid-19](#) brought additional paralysis.

“The administration cannot do things overnight. We need checks in place to ensure that everything is done well. We are trying to be responsible so as not to make the mistakes of the past,” she says. “We know that we are not going to get back all the jobs that were here in 1980, that population has already been lost. The objective is not to lose the ones that were here in 2018 and in most of the areas we will be able to do this. I think that from now on we are going to be more agile. Now we are all talking about the future.”

## RECOVERING HOPE

Their names are Juan, José Luis, José and Paúl. The oldest is 61, the youngest 47. All of them have spent almost as much time underground as they have in their own homes. They know what anthracite smells like, what the mountain sounds like when it cracks, what it feels like to fit your body into no more than forty centimetres for hours. “If the sun shone inside the mine no one would dare to work there because they’d see all the rocks hanging over their heads,” says Juan Alegria, a veteran miner – “an endangered species,” as he puts it.

Pozo Julia is a way for these men to keep their history alive. That’s why, in addition to building the gallery for tourists, they also work as volunteer guides. Telling their stories and their struggles is their way of reclaiming what they’ve lost.

“The country is historically indebted to us. The big cities of today are what they are because of the coal that used to come out of here,” says Paúl Martínez. “All that we are asking is that they don’t let us die.”

As they speak, their frustration is palpable. Hopelessness eats away at their spirits, the transition has left them tired and without faith. Who is going to come now, they wonder, what companies will be willing to move their offices to this place in the middle of the mountains? They used to come because there was coal by the tonne, but without the coal, what else can we offer?

“Our basins are not like those of the Ruhr,” says Mari Paz Martínez. The [German mining basins](#), where universities and business incubators have been set up, don’t have the same problems that plague places like Fabero: small, poorly connected towns, often times without a good internet connection.

“We are where we are, so we understand that not just any company can come. We’ve asked for fibre optics to be installed and we are offering spaces to technology companies that want to develop here,” explains the mayor. “The problem is that we don’t know any companies, we need the government to support us in attracting industries.”

Another possibility is for the inhabitants of these regions to promote future projects themselves. But while it may seem obvious, this does not come easily in areas where inhabitants have been working for others for over 100 years. Changing this mentality, instilling entrepreneurial spirit in them, is no easy task. “Entrepreneurship is a cultural phenomenon and people in these towns haven’t learned it because we had the mine,” says Juan José Villanueva, a young entrepreneur from the Laciana mining valley, 47 kilometres from Fabero. A few years ago, he decided to buy an old mine and convert it into a craft beer brewery. In January 2020, his brand [Docesetenta](#) was awarded as the best beer in Spain. Today he employs six people, combining the brewery with the tourist operation of the mine.

“The recognition is very encouraging, it helps us demonstrate to the people here that it’s possible, that our main strength is our heritage, the mine. Without all our history, we would just be another beer,” says Villanueva. The future of Spain’s mining basins is still unknown, but if just one person in a single small town is able to brew beer where coal was once mined, there is still reason to hope.



# IN BANGLADESH, “WORKERS ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE BUT WE ARE THE ONES LOSING EVERYTHING BECAUSE OF IT”

BY AKRAM HOSEN



© Zakir Hossain Chowdhury

Labourers, many of whom are internal migrants forced to move due to the impacts of climate change, unload goods from boats in the Buriganga river in Dhaka, Bangladesh on 21 March 2020.

*Rising sea levels have forced workers to migrate to Bangladesh’s congested cities and accept extremely poor working conditions and low wages out of sheer desperation. The Bangladeshi trade unions are fighting to protect these workers while adopting just transition demands.*

Altaf Hossain’s life has been shaped by the repeated struggles he has faced ever since his village was swallowed by the mighty Meghna river in the southern Bangladeshi town of Mehendiganj in Barishal District. Although the 55-year-old carpenter has always managed to earn enough to survive, he has not been able to rise out of poverty because he has repeatedly had to start over from scratch.

“I was born and raised in a well-to-do family of farmers and fishermen. We had homes and land. But large boats now move over what was once my neighbourhood,” Hossain says as he finishes working on a wooden door at a construction site in the Jatrabari area of the capital city Dhaka, over 250 kilometres away from his hometown.

Every year, millions of Bangladeshis are adversely affected by unusually frequent extreme weather events like storm surges, intensified cyclones, flash floods, and droughts. Like Hossain, tens of thousands of people find their homes, livelihoods and lives washed away in the floods that sub-

merge large swathes of Bangladesh, or when the riverbanks and coastlines erode. Some move to neighbouring India or to the Gulf countries in search of work, but most become internal migrants, mainly moving to Bangladesh's congested cities to eke out a living.

According to World Bank data, [Bangladesh's rural population fell](#) from almost 95 per cent of the population in 1960 (when it was still known as East Pakistan) to just 62.5 per cent in 2019. Meanwhile the [total population has exploded](#), from 48 million in 1960 to an estimated 163 million today. But rural or urban, it is working-class people who are on the front lines of climate change.

According to the [Global Climate Risk Index 2020](#), between 1999 and 2018, Bangladesh ranked seventh in the countries worst affected by extreme weather events. Of the top seven countries, only Myanmar and the Philippines suffered a bigger death toll than low-lying Bangladesh. In addition, by 2050 as many as 13.3 million Bangladeshis could be forced to migrate because of intensifying climate impacts, according to a 2018 [World Bank report](#).

By 2050 as many as 13.3 million Bangladeshis could be forced to migrate because of intensifying climate impacts

Unlike most low-wage workers in Bangladesh, Hossain is a member of a trade union – the Nirman Sramik League – which is a part of the Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress (BFTUC). Thanks to the union, construction workers like Hossain get a daily wage of about 850 Bangladeshi taka (US\$10), which is considerably more than the average income of workers in the informal economy. But in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, finding regular work has been difficult. Hossain says he earned next to nothing for almost six months this year because of the Covid-19 restrictions.

He fears that with the increase in extreme weather events in Bangladesh, finding regular work may get even harder. “We are not the ones responsible for the rising temperatures, but we are losing everything because of it. We have to organise and demand changes,” says Hossain.

## JUST TRANSITION: FROM WORDS TO ACTIONS

Repon Chowdhury, the secretary general of the BFTUC, tells *Equal Times* that the workers who migrate from the countryside and coastal areas to escape the worst impacts of climate change simply encounter new problems in the cities, such as substandard living conditions and poorly paid, dangerous work. “In the cities they are also exposed to extreme pollution and have to work for long hours in the scorching sun. This can lead to heatstroke and other consequences, but the casualties go unnoticed.” Protecting these most vulnerable of workers is a challenge. “People in desperate need of work tend to accept poor working conditions and are in a weak position to negotiate for better wages,” Chowdhury says.

“Workers forced to transition [from rural to urban areas] mostly rely on friends and family for information and other types of resources to find new jobs,” says Professor Syeda Rozana Rashid of the international relations department at the University of Dhaka. Rashid was the lead researcher of [a recent Solidarity Center/USAID study](#) on the links between climate change, economic activities and internal migration in Bangladesh. “Very few newly displaced people become members of any trade union and they have a very low level of understanding about climate change and how it impacts their own livelihoods,” she adds.

Awareness about climate change among trade unions used to be low until quite recently, admits the BFTUC leader. “Unions used to think that climate change was not a labour issue or that trade unions didn't have a role to play [in the climate justice movement].” That position has shifted to some extent, thanks to the seminars, workshops and other events organised by the national union centre in recent years. “We have been able to somewhat reduce the gap in the communication between the government and labour organisations,” Chowdhury says. BFTUC has also invested in educating its members about just transition, particularly as it relates to occupational health and safety (OSH). “We encourage workers to engage in dialogue with their employers and policy-makers [about safer working conditions].”

Since 2011, Chowdhury says that the BFTUC has been committed to providing the government with research on the impact of climate change on workers' lives, livelihoods, OSH and social protection. Union leaders have also worked to establish a culture of holding national and sector-specific dialogues on environmental and industrial issues.

But when it comes to putting these ideas into action, BFTUC's work is constrained by several limits, including the lack of social dialogue between the government and trade unions on climate issues, poor collaboration between trade unions and the wider environmental movement, and financial constraints. “Even though the workers in Bangladesh are the people whose lives have been upended by climate change, the government's climate funds [*editor's note: Bangladesh has two national climate funds, the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund, and the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund. The*

*latter is donor funded*] has nothing for them. We have been trying for years to change that. But our interventions are limited. We are still far from our goal.”

“Bangladesh’s trade unions are calling for the government to help support “skills, retraining, and redeployment” for workers affected by the climate emergency

Trade unions have not been directly involved in developing Bangladesh’s climate policy, however, the BFTUC is advocating for the inclusion of just transition principles across all climate-related government policies. “We are lobbying and campaigning to get the mechanism of just transition integrated into the national agenda so that trade unions can participate in workplace dialogues. We want to achieve that in the next three years,” says Chowdhury.

## BEARING THE BRUNT, NEEDING INTERNATIONAL SUPPORT

Under the terms of the Paris Climate Agreement, Bangladesh has a commitment to reduce its carbon emissions by between 5 and 15 percent by 2030 in the power, transport and industry sectors. The country also has an action plan for adaptation and mitigation measures. In June, the BFTUC wrote a letter to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina calling for new measures in Bangladesh’s updated nationally determined contributions (NDCs) on reducing carbon emissions (which are due to be updated by 31 December 2020) to “provide support for skills, retraining, and redeployment for affected workers”. The letter, seen by *Equal Times*, also called for further research into possible new areas of green job creation, research into the socio-economic impacts of a just transition, increased mechanisms for the transfer of technology from countries in the Global North to the Global South, and responsible investment through mandatory sustainable practices and employer-worker dialogues about just transition.

The people of Bangladesh are amongst the least responsible for the emission of earth-warming gases into the atmosphere. “Bangladesh creates less than 1 percent, 0.3 percent to be exact, of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions,” says Ainun Nishat, professor emeritus at the Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research at Dhaka’s BRAC University.

Even if Bangladesh reduces its emissions to net zero, the difference will be miniscule in the global context, he says. “What Bangladesh should focus on is saving its people from the adverse impacts of climate change because they will be

one of the worst, if not the worst, sufferers.”

For that reason, Chowdhury says that industrialised countries have an obligation to assist Bangladesh with climate mitigation and adaptation measures. “We need funds for research into new technologies. We must employ the displaced people in safe and environment-friendly occupations.”

Floods this year occurred for an unusually long period and engulfed over one-third of the country by July, affecting five million people, according to the National Disaster Response Coordination Centre. Croplands were ruined and vital fish-stock and livestock was washed away. “This might be followed by a drought. We exported food last year. But this year we are having to import food. It’s taking a massive toll on the economy,” says Professor Nishat. “We suffered three major cyclones in one year. These events are getting worse. We need to take steps to cope with this.”

Professor Nishat says that there are funding provisions in the Paris Agreement to help countries like Bangladesh introduce mitigation measures, but “the world is not giving us the support that it owes us.” He admits the situation is not helped by Bangladesh’s challenges in capacity-building and financial transparency, but he says that sustainable solutions must be urgently implemented. The 130 million Bangladeshis caught between Covid and one of the worst years of climate emergency don’t have time to waste.



*A combination of a rapidly rising sea levels – 1.5 times faster than the global average – and river erosion is submerging entire villages and causing the forced displacement of millions of people in Bangladesh.*

# TUNISIA EXPERIMENTS WITH A GRADUAL TRANSITION TO MORE SUSTAINABLE JOBS AND BUSINESSES

BY MATTHIAS RAYNAL



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Afifa Najjar, who is 48 years old and has spent 25 years working with Sobref, is photographed here on 11 September 2020 at the UGTT headquarters in Mahdia.

*While some forward-looking members are trying to raise awareness about environmental issues within the UGTT, the trade union centre is already practicing just transition, whether they know it or not.*

Walking between the machines at the Sobref textile factory, Mohamed Ali takes a pair of scissors, cuts a piece of fabric and dips it into a cup of water. Poof! The magic of chemistry works immediately and the piece of cloth is transformed into a translucent, sticky paste. As it dries, it hardens and turns into plastic. "It's viseline," explains Ali, proud of his demonstration. Made using synthetic fibres, it is used to reinforce embroidery. "In the past, we polluted the environment with our discarded production waste. From now on, we're going to recover the scraps to recycle and reuse them."

Until 2016, dozens of workers at the factory, located in Mahdia, central-eastern Tunisia, worked night and day on the large precision machines that now sit motionless and desperately silent. While waiting for activities to resume, Ali has been sleeping here, upstairs on a simple sofa, to make sure there aren't burglaries. He keeps a watchful eye and a loving gaze on the company that now belongs to him and 40 or so other former employees who decided to buy their factory.

The idea of becoming their own bosses was suggested by the Tunisian General Labour Union (UGTT). The trade union centre has been supervising the project for several

months with the help of Spanish NGO *l'Asamblea de Cooperación por la Paz*, which also provided financial support in addition to the €250,000 contributed by the Valencian Autonomous Community (Spain). A total of €300,000 has been devoted to the project. UGTT has also provided legal support to the workers, who were able to obtain compensation from the previous owner who had decided, illegally, to close the business overnight. They chose to invest the money in taking over their working tools by creating a cooperative in which they are all majority partners. “So that we will never again experience injustice,” says Afifa Najjar – injustice linked, amongst other things, to pollution and environmental damage.

“While it may not be central, UGTT has always had an approach to the question of the environment,” says Chebbi. “Because it’s part of ‘decent work.’ Decent working conditions are how we get to ecology”

The embroidery sector, and the textile sector in general, has a significant environmental impact that directly affects workers. As Najjar a 48-year-old mother who has worked half her life at the Sobref factory, explains: “We suffer the direct consequences. The unbearable smells...they used to burn the waste not far from our houses.” Scraps of viseline were disposed of haphazardly. This will no longer be the case when the factory reopens at the end of the year, explains Karim Chebbi, a consultant for UGTT

## ■ AN ENVIRONMENTALLY RESPONSIBLE COMPANY

Chebbi is very familiar with these environmental issues, which is why he was chosen to coordinate the Sobref project. “There are important ecological as well as economic stakes involved for the cooperative. Part of the waste can be resold in a collaborative network in solidarity with other recycling factories to generate a small income,” he says. The future industrial site will also be able to generate 30 per cent of its own electricity thanks to solar panels. “We want to make it possible for the company to be partially energy-independent and reduce its dependence on fossil fuels,” says Chebbi.

On 11 September 2020, the tables at UGTT’s local branch headquarters have been arranged in a ‘U’ shape for a very special meeting. The workers of the Sobref factory are gathering for the first time since their meetings were interrupted by the coronavirus. Chebbi has invited a university professor, the director of Tunisia’s first master’s degree in management, treatment and reuse of waste, to speak on the occasion.

Professor Lotfi Soussia of the *Institut Supérieur des Sciences Appliquées et de Technologie* (ISSAT) of Mahdia was responsible for providing 20 hours of training, theory and practice. “Respect for nature is above all a culture! It’s our children’s future,” says the professor to his very studious audience” .

The phrases ‘ecological transition’, ‘green economy’ and ‘greenhouse gasses’ are not mentioned. While the factory’s staff may not be familiar with all of these concepts, it is of little importance: everyone knows that they are “doing something positive”, says Najjar.

All of them support the environmentally responsible aspect of the project, including Hedi Ben Hamza, 50, who spent the last 22 years with the company: “It’s new but now every company has to become a friend of the environment. It wasn’t possible before. Why? Because there was only one owner and he thought of nothing but making profits. With this transformation into a cooperative, we will be able to think about ourselves and nature first.”

The factory workers may not be familiar with the principles of just transition but they are applying them all the same. And while UGTT may not focus on the idea of decarbonising the economy while mitigating effects on employment and resources for workers in vulnerable industries, they have gotten there through an intermediate concept: for the union, the priority remains the improvement of working conditions.

“While it may not be central, UGTT has always had an approach to the question of the environment,” says Chebbi. “Because it’s part of ‘decent work.’ Decent working conditions are how we get to ecology.”

## ■ NEW IDEAS

Some members of UGTT, however, are working to advance thinking on environmental issues. One of them, Mansour Cherni, has been a pioneer in this regard. He is the national coordinator of the affiliates of Public Services International (PSI) in Tunisia, as well as the number two of the climate section of UGTT’s department of Arab and international relations and migration. He has been involved with the subject since the early 2000s, “especially since 2007, thanks to the former secretary general of the UGTT, who was interested in climate change,” he explains.

“Houcine Abassi, the Nobel Peace Prize winner, he was the one who pushed me and encouraged me. And we started to tackle the problem of the environment,” says Cherni. “We formed a small group of people who

are interested in the issue.” It’s been a year now since the climate change section was created. “It’s to raise awareness amongst the decision makers at UGTT, to say ‘pay attention, this is serious.’ It’s made up of five people but we don’t have the necessary means to really exert influence,” says Cherni.

Since 2014, Cherni has attended the climate COP every year at his own expense. And almost every year, he has been the only UGTT-affiliated trade unionist to participate. “It’s to better understand. There’s a very high level of discourse at the COP, but in reality it has no effect. But when you look at civil society, that’s where the work is being done, that’s where the discussions are, where the pressure is. I saw it when the climate agreement was signed in Paris. It was civil society, it was the unions essentially that took action.”

He is aware of the role that workers’ organisations have to play and he knows that the UGTT is lagging behind. Naïma Hammami was the first woman to join the centre’s executive board in 2017 and is also a pioneer in ecological transition within her union.

As deputy general secretary and head of Arab and international relations and migration, she helped to set up the climate change section in her department. “We are motivated to make progress on this issue, which has a significant impact on workers,” but “UGTT is just starting out in this area”.

Cherni looks forward to the day when the centre truly tackles this issue. “It’s my hope, but they’ve been timid so far,” says the soon-to-be septuagenarian. “It’s still not given importance.” As he explains, the union remains fixated on daily struggles instead

of coming up with a strategy to “save jobs threatened by climate change”. He explains: “It’s much more important in the long term. My children are the ones who will pay for it very dearly.”

While reversing priorities is difficult in a country that continues to spiral into an interminable social and economic crisis, Cherni would at least like to increase his union’s understanding of the concepts that he has come to understand so well. With the support of PSI, which helped him to secure funding, he was able to help organise four seminars. About 120 people attended these modules, one of which dealt with greenhouse gases produced by fossil-fuel power plants.

## GREEN ENERGY

The energy sector will be one of the most affected by the transition to a low-carbon society. While green energy is still struggling to get off its feet in Tunisia, authorities have an ambitious objective: increasing the share of renewable energy from 4 per cent where it stands today to 30 per cent by 2030. But delays continue to pile up, even as numer-



Mohamed Ali, a 37-year-old former machine operator, stands next to an embroidery machine at the Sobref factory.

ous projects have been announced in recent months. Tunisian authorities are highlighting job creation and the advantages it represents for the country's energy independence.

But UGTT remains sceptical. The trade union centre considers energy to be a public good and as such defends tooth and nail the quasi-monopoly of STEG (*Société Tunisienne de l'Électricité et du Gaz*), which dominates the production, transport, distribution and sale of energy in Tunisia. The General Federation of Electricity and Gas, the union's STEG branch, regularly denounces attempts to privatise the sector and what it calls the "commodification of electricity."

This summer, UGTT butted heads with the government, refusing to connect the Tataouine solar power plant to the network, a project resulting from a partnership between the state-owned *Entreprise Tunisienne d'Activités Pétrolières* and Italian oil and gas giant Eni.

“When you look at civil society, that's where the work is being done, that's where the discussions are, where the pressure is. I saw it when the climate agreement was signed in Paris. It was civil society, it was the unions essentially that took action”

In a Facebook post published in July, then Energy Minister Mongi Marzouk decried the union, referring to their actions as "sabotage": "Instead of standing on the side of clean energy, the Electricity Federation... is working to undermine initial achievements in this area in violation of the law. Their understanding of

the interest of the energy sector and the role of renewable energies is narrow and incorrect," he said.

Abdelkader Jelassi, secretary general of the General Federation of Electricity and Gas, who could not be reached for interview for personal reasons, gave his reaction through Cherni: "We are not against renewable energy," he says, "but against people who for 60 years have continuously fed off of the state. They take without giving anything in return. If the private sector wants to use the grid, it has to pay."

Depending on your perspective, UGTT is either an obstacle to the development of the renewable sector in Tunisia, or the last bulwark protecting public sector workers and consumers. Opening up to the private sector could have very harmful consequences, leading to job destruction and tariff increases. Once again, UGTT is applying the principles of just transition, whether they know it or not. It is difficult to predict how the Tataouine power station project will be managed in the future.

Since the legislative elections of October 2019, Tunisia has already had three governments and as many environment ministers. Each time, UGTT has to start from scratch and explain each project again.

"It can cause us to lose several months," laments Cherni, who believes that just transition can play a role in political stability. As he explains, by initiating a virtuous circle, creating jobs and new prosperity, it can represent an opportunity for Tunisia.

And UGTT will end up playing an essential role in this process. The union wields significant influence in Tunisia's political life. It played a decisive role in the first years of Tunisia's democratic transition and was awarded, along with three other Tunisian organisations, the [Nobel Peace Prize in 2015](#). Just transition in Tunisia will not happen without UGTT. This 21st century idea will need to be realised by this 20th century union. At the Sobref factory, the union has already begun to act. It must now give serious thought to an environmental strategy in order to replicate Mahdia's innovative experiment.

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Workers attend a Sobref information meeting held at the UGTT headquarters in Mahdia on 11 September 2020.

# TRADE UNIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ARE PUSHING FOR AMBITIOUS CLIMATE ACTION IN SCOTLAND

BY STEVE RUSHTON



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On 16 November 2017, hundreds of workers from the Scottish manufacturing firm BiFab marched to the Holyrood parliament building in Edinburgh to call on the Scottish government to protect 1,400 jobs after the company faced going into administration. On 21 October 2020, the Scottish government withdrew a £30 million financial guarantee to make offshore wind jackets at BiFab, in a move that will result in the loss of 450 jobs.

*For the Scottish labour movement, COP26 offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure that Scotland's world-leading emissions targets put a just transition for workers and communities at the centre of all policies, investments and implementation.*

As Glasgow prepares to host COP26, the UN climate summit in November 2021, Scotland will take centre stage in the global power struggle surrounding if and how the world takes urgent action to halt rising temperatures and accelerating environmental destruction. On one hand are the high-carbon corporations (just 100 multinationals are **estimated** to be the source of 71 per cent of emissions between 1988 and 2015) and governments who seem content to tinker around the edges of the current economic system, despite it having led to temperatures now on average **over 1.2 °C over pre-industrial levels**. On the other hand is a growing alliance of nations, civil society organisations, academics, activists and forward-thinking business leaders who are demanding

transformative change to secure a sustainable future for people and planet.

The stakes are incredibly high. COP26 was supposed to happen in 2020 as this year is the year when countries will present their emission reductions targets (also known as National Determined Contributions, or NDCs) based on the Paris Agreement pledges made in 2015. If the world is to "reach net-zero emissions as soon as possible", which is one of the stated aims of COP26, this meeting will need to harness extraordinary climate ambition to create and sustain unprecedented climate action.

For the Scottish labour movement, led by the Scottish Trades Union Congress (STUC), COP26 offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure that Scotland's world-leading



emissions targets put a just transition for workers and communities at the centre of all policies, investments and implementation.

Scotland has already committed to net-zero carbon emissions by 2045, five years ahead of the rest of the United Kingdom, which became the first major economy to write its net-zero emissions target into law. But for unions and civil society, the COP is a means to “exert real pressure from below to change the narrative,” [writes Francis Stuart](#), a policy officer at the STUC, in a February 2020 article for the Poverty Alliance, with a raft of interlocking policy ideas ranging from equitable emission reduction targets (both within nations and internationally) to universal public services and a global living wage.

When it comes to turning just transition talk into action, what happens now to North Sea oil and gas workers is of crucial importance. The total revenue of oil and gas produced in Scotland in 2018 was an [estimated £24.8 billion](#). In 2014, it employed 41,300 workers directly with an estimated 463,900 indirect jobs. By 2018, this [declined](#) to 30,400 direct and 259,900 indirect jobs. Due to Covid-19’s impact, in March 2020 direct employment plummeted further to 23,000, with no exact figures yet published of how many indirect jobs Scotland’s North Sea oil currently supports.

Scotland’s devolved government (the Scottish Parliament at Holyrood can pass laws on devolved matters such as education, housing and issues pertaining to day-to-day life in Scotland, while the UK Parliament at Westminster can pass laws on so-called ‘reserved matters’ of UK-wide or international significance, such as offshore licensing and taxation) describes the industry as “integral to a sustainable, secure and inclusive energy transition”. Although job precarity and frequent redundancies are built into the boom-bust cycle under which the industry operates, things took a dramatic turn for the worst this year with the double blow of 20-year-low oil prices and the devastating fall-out of the coronavirus pandemic.

In March 2020 alone, 3,500 people lost their jobs in the offshore industry, while a September 2020 survey of 1,383 oil and gas offshore workers (representing 4.5 per cent of the current workforce) conducted by environmental campaign groups Platform London, Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth Scotland (FoES) showed that 42.8 per cent of offshore workers have been furloughed or made redundant since March.

In April, the sector’s trade body, Oil and Gas UK, [warned that up to 30,000 industry jobs](#) could be lost over the next 18 months. And if, as some analysts are predicting, the collapse in demand for oil and gas seen this year due to global Covid lockdowns be-

comes a catalyst for the terminal decline of fossil fuel industries, then now is the time to implement the social, environmental and labour policies that will ensure that the transition to renewable energy leaves no-one behind.

Campaigner Gabrielle Jeliakov from Platform London spearheaded the survey and report titled [‘Offshore: Oil and gas workers’ views on industry conditions and the energy transition’](#) which was published on 29 September. It found that 91 per cent of respondents had not heard of the concept of just transition, demonstrating just how far there is to go before it becomes a society-wide process. But Jeliakov tells *Equal Times* that even if they don’t know the term, workers are intimately familiar with the impacts. As such, any truly just transition must be worker-led: “Oil and gas communities need to steer the way so that we can avoid repeating the disaster that was the phase-out of coal. Workers’ demands must guide policy, they have the lived experience and right to plan their futures. Anything less will not deliver a just transition.”

## ■ GREEN JOBS: HIGH ON AMBITION

One of the most important tools to secure workers a seat at the green economy table has been the Just Transition Partnership. Formed in 2016 by the STUC and FoES with other members including various Scottish trade unions and environmental organisations, the Partnership meets regularly to discuss how best to frame just transition in the areas it works on, as well as lobbying the Scottish government. It also offers a chance for the organisations to discuss their individual foci, while bringing other allies into the discussion on specific topics.

In September 2018, thanks to pressure from the Just Transition Partnership, [a national taskforce was announced](#) to advise how to decarbonise Scotland’s economy in a fair manner. The Just Transition Commission (JTC), headed by Professor Jim Skea, has 12 members with backgrounds ranging from climate science to business, unions, academia and environmentalism. In the lead-up to presenting its final report to the Scottish government early next year, taskforce members have met regularly while undertaking community engagement.

“COP26 offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to ensure that Scotland’s world-leading emissions targets put a just transition for workers and communities at the centre of all policies, investments and implementation”

On 27 February 2020 the Commission published [an interim report](#), which appealed for the Scottish government to use COP26 as an opportunity to promote its just transition approach. The report also called on the government to take decisive action before the publication of the final report. So far, Holyrood seems to be listening. For example, in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, the government announced [a £2 billion Low Carbon Fund](#) to deliver Scotland's transition to net zero, as well as a £100 million Green Jobs Fund to create 100,000 decent jobs over the next decade.

“The Scottish government has announced a £2 billion Low Carbon Fund to deliver Scotland's transition to net zero, as well as a £100 million Green Jobs Fund to create 100,000 decent jobs over the next decade”

However, one theme that seems to repeat itself is that the Scottish government goes further after pressure from trade unions and civil society. From the outset of the Commission, the STUC and its allies reiterated the importance of meaningful engagement with workers and unions.

For example, Platform London addressed the JTC during one of its regular meetings in late spring 2020. About this session, Skea told *Equal Times*: “One of the messages we got was that people that were working for the [oil and gas] industry are very keen to move into a world where there is more security around their job.”

To keep up the pressure on the Commission, Platform, Greenpeace and FoES are planning a nationwide series of workshops to enable “energy workers to draft policy demands for a transition that works for them”. Whether these findings will further guide the JTC's findings remains to be seen but speaking to *Equal Times* in September Skea said that the Commission “will be looking at it with a lot of interest”.

As a party to COP it will be the UK government that submits its NDCs to the international climate negotiations process, not Scotland. However, Scotland's Climate Change Act is effectively Scotland's pledge towards the UK's aims, and here it has shown much greater ambition. The UK's 2019 Amendment (focusing on its 2050 target) to its 2008 Climate Change Act, for example, does not reference just transition while Scotland's does, thanks to the [lobbying efforts](#) of trade unions and civil society. And while the UK has committed itself to net-zero emissions by 2050, Scotland

“How's: “Scotland has stretched the concept of just transition. In many countries it is about how you get out of coal. Instead, we are already looking at broader issues”

has set into law emission reduction targets of 70 per cent by 2030 and net-zero by 2045.

## ≡ BIFAB: A LOST OPPORTUNITY MARKED BY “POLITICAL FAILURE”

Scotland has been widely lauded for its successes to date, including [trebling renewable electricity generation](#) over the last decade. But so far this transition has not come with the promised jobs. Office of National Statistics data [shows](#) that despite earlier promises of 130,000 low-carbon and renewable energy jobs by 2020, between 2014-2018 green jobs actually fell from 23,400 to 23,100.

“Scotland has succeeded in terms of generating power from onshore wind energy, but the opportunities in terms of providing jobs for Scotland and the UK supply chain have been pretty dismal,” says Dave Moxham, the deputy general secretary of the STUC. Moxham, who also sits on the Just Transition Commission, says: “What is required is a transition plan that marries up the decline of offshore oil production with the predicted exponential growth of offshore wind.”

Environmentalists and unions have united behind Scottish companies in their attempts to make a green transition, but their ambition is not always matched with political will. One example is Burntisland Fabrications (BiFab), a Fife-based company that previously focused on the superstructures of oil rigs, but now also makes jackets for offshore wind turbines, as well as working on the decommissioning of oil rigs.

On 21 October 2020, the Scottish government withdrew a £30 million financial guarantee to make offshore wind jackets at BiFab, in a move that will result in the loss of 450 jobs. According to the Scottish government, EU state aid rules (restrictions to ensure that government resources are not used to distort competition between member states, an issue which has become a major sticking point in the Brexit negotiations) means they cannot guarantee work to a specific company. The GMB and Unite unions are demanding that the government makes the legal advice on which this decision rests public.

GMB Scotland secretary Gary Smith and Unite Scotland secretary Pat Rafferty described the collapse of BiFab as a “political failure” and [said in a joint statement](#):

“It looks like the Scottish government ministers have walked away from our best chance of building a meaningful offshore wind manufacturing sector, and in doing so has extinguished the hopes of communities in Fife and Lewis who were banking their future prosperity on it.” In late October 2020, the Just Transition Commission [wrote to the Scottish government](#) to do all it can to guarantee BiFab’s future.

Previously, BiFab faced administration in late 2017. Then, hundreds of BiFab workers, backed by Unite and GMB, [occupied three sites](#) and staged a work-in before [marching on to the Scottish Parliament](#) in a bid to save 1,400 jobs. In response, Scotland’s government bought a stake in BiFab, but the problems continued. Orders dried up again in 2019, so the Just Transition Partnership and social movements around it joined workers for more protests, including outside the French energy supplier EDF.

“EDF was going to ship all 54 jackets for an offshore wind farm – just 15 miles from the BiFab yard – from Indonesia,” explained Stuart of the STUC in September. After pressure exerted by environmentalists and unions, BiFab was granted a deal to build eight of the 54 jackets. However, it was this deal that collapsed on 21 October. The future of BiFab will again be decided by the Scottish government, which has left workers and local communities feeling betrayed and “absolutely furious”.

What’s more, another contract for 84 turbine jackets for an offshore windfarm project just a few kilometres away from two BiFab yards, has been won by a Chinese company, leading GMB Scotland organiser Hazel Nolan [to declare](#): “Scraps off the table

from our own offshore wind sector is bad enough but when billion pound fabrication contracts are wholly completed abroad and then shipped to the waters off Scotland, you know that any credible prospects for a green economic recovery are sailing by.”

In the UK, unions want to change Contracts for Difference, which is a UK scheme to support renewable energy generation, to ensure that locally made content is included. A similar battleground for Scottish unions surrounds Crown Estate powers.

Crown Estate Scotland, a devolved authority that manages public land and sea, will issue leases for new offshore wind farms in late 2020 for the first time in over a decade. This provides an opportunity for Scotland to meet its just transition ambitions by responding to recommendations in STUC’s report [Scotland’s renewable job crisis and Covid-19](#), published in June 2020. The report sets out how Scotland’s expansion into renewables has so far failed to create new jobs: instead multinational companies tend to dominate the Scottish renewables sector, using supply chains that rely on poor quality, largely overseas jobs.



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In 2014, Scotland’s oil and gas sector was responsible for 41,300 direct jobs. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, direct employment plummeted to 23,000 this year.

The STUC continues to lobby the Scottish government about utilising its Crown Estate powers. One success to come out of meetings with Roseanna Cunningham, Cabinet Secretary for Environment, Climate Change and Land Reform, is that companies must now write a supply chain statement to declare where parts and components are made. However, Stuart says the guidance needs to be strengthened and enforced to ensure that the majority are built in Scotland.

## ■ STRINGENT REGULATION AND PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

For Jeliaskov of Platform London, the September worker survey illustrated the dangers faced by offshore workers. “BP’s recent announcement that they are moving into renewables is frightening. Precarity, poor conditions and low pay will follow wherever BP or Shell go.” Jeliaskov says that more stringent regulation is the bare minimum to improve the situation, ideally with public ownership, demands echoed by the STUC and FoES.

Jeliaskov raises another regulatory issue: “One of the biggest problems for workers moving into offshore wind is having to repeat the same training they did for offshore oil. Almost every worker asks: ‘why should I spend thousands more pounds getting certificates such as embarking/disembarking from boats?’” On this point, Stuart of STUC says: “A lack of sectoral bargaining agreements means you have different conditions and training requirements. We need a more planned approach and are campaigning for just transition sectoral plans.” Technically, sectoral bargaining is a UK-controlled competency, but Stuart says there is room for creativity for the Scottish government, for instance only funding companies that recognise union bargaining agreements.

And speaking of training, the Offshore report revealed that 81.7 per cent of North Sea oil and gas workers said they would consider moving to a job outside of the industry, but if given the option to retrain more than half would be interested in renewables and offshore wind.

Another recommendation from the JTC interim report is that all training initiatives announced by the government – such as the [£100 million post-covid package for young people](#) (which is separate from the Green Jobs Fund) – should prioritise low and zero-carbon work.

The Just Transition Partnership is also calling for a publicly owned energy company, which the Scottish government has [agreed to establish by 2021](#). However, “they need more ambition,” according to Ryan Morrison a campaigner at FoES. “The aim is a retail and supply company. Instead we need a well-capitalised public energy company that could support offshore wind and renewables projects, support local supply chains and at the same time reduce energy prices to tackle Scotland’s fuel poverty.”

Trade unions and environmentalists have spelled out the small print they would like to see accompany headline changes, from public investment to public control to re-regulation. In response, Professor Skea says that the JTC does not want to produce “bland” high level recommendations that give no guidance. “We must keep the recommendations actionable, but we recognise our lim-

itations. We cannot get into the intricacies of making detailed recommendations about how specific regulations can be structured. It does create the issue of what happens after March 2021 [when the final JTC report is published] and that is going to be very much up to the new government that is elected next year after the [May 2021 Scottish] elections.”

But Morrison says that this pivotal moment is the time for great ambition: “This needs to be about a massive industrial transformation, where the government aligns every lever, all investment and every power at its disposal to take this forward.”

## ■ TOWARDS A TRANSITION THAT’S FAIR FOR ALL

Despite the challenges, Scotland has made progress. “Scotland has stretched the concept of just transition. In many countries it is about how you get out of coal. Instead, we are already looking at broader issues, such as what happens to oil and gas, and the consumption side of the economy. We are picking up retrofitting homes, investment in energy efficiency and low-carbon heat supplies for homes,” Professor Skea says.

One area of uncertainty is Brexit, which is the ‘elephant in the room’ for the Commission. “Manifestly Brexit has huge implications,” says Skea, “but it is a bit like Scottish weather and midges [small flying insects with irritating bites]: it’s there in the background. For Scotland, a big question is how are powers that come back from Brussels resettled and divided between the parts of the UK.”

And while the UK has been lauded for its climate ambition – it was the first major economy to sign up to the Paris Agreement – there is a growing chasm between Scotland and Westminster. As well as reigniting calls for Scottish independence, Brexit is an English-backed, London-centred project [underwritten by climate deniers](#), alongside those with interests in private healthcare and hedge funds.

Despite claiming to be a ‘green Tory’, the UK prime minister Boris Johnson’s cabinet is [populated with climate deniers](#), while during his leadership campaign he received a £25,000 donation from powerful climate sceptics. Given that his administration has been so willing to breach international law over Brexit, there are [danger signs](#) that

the UK, led by Johnson, could in the future abandon its climate change commitments. The inconsistencies in his approach can be evidenced by his recent pledge to make the UK a “world leader in clean wind energy” by 2030. Yet during the same week, his government failed to use its powers to block [a new deep coal mine in Cumbria](#), which would be the UK’s first such mine in 30 years.

All these moving parts in the UK mean a great deal of uncertainty for Scotland as its climate action depends on three levels of competencies: the EU, the UK and Scotland. The Scottish government, led by the pro-independence Scottish National Party, has shown its great willingness to diverge from Westminster, for example, [in its handling of Covid-19](#).

In contrast to Brexit, the pandemic has taken centre stage in the Commission’s work, including its [Green Recovery Report](#), published July 2020. One recommendation is that Scotland should spend the £500m that has been allocated for public transport, including buying electric buses for the Glasgow COP. Competition rules mean the JTC cannot advise what bus building company to contract. However, Unite the Union welcomed the recommendation as potentially good news for Falkirk-based bus builders Alexander Dennis, which has a partnership with the Netherlands-based green mobility leaders BYD Europe to build electric vehicles. It has been forced to make redundancies after Covid-19 reduced demand overnight, but winning a contract to build buses for the COP could turn its fortunes around.

Investing in electric buses would support jobs from manufacturing to driving. It could spur on a switch from fossil fuels to renewables, as transport constitutes the largest proportion of Scotland’s carbon footprint. Good public transport is also a place where social, environmental and economic justice meet, explains Ellie Harrison. She is chair of Get Glasgow Moving, (GGM) a campaign for decent public transport in the city where less than half of its households have cars, [according to the last census](#).

“Those on lower incomes, women, young and elderly people disproportionately rely on public transport and suffer from the city’s terrible public transport system. It is not just the fragmented nature [of the transport system], it is the cost and the unreliability of services. The poverty premium is really apparent,” Harrison explains. GGM is organising to change this. Its calls include public ownership and control as a means towards a fair shift from fossils to renewable power, including a publicly owned bus company for Greater Glasgow.

“If they spend £500m on a bus fleet it must remain in public ownership” says Harrison. “Since devolution, Scotland has been wasting public money on private bus companies. This must stop. We need complete control to deliver the public transport system we need to shift vast numbers of people out of cars and into public transport before 2030.”

Aiming further, GGM together with Glasgow Trade Council and other organisations, including Scottish Youth Climate Strike, have formed a coalition called Free Our City to call for free public transport, using the COP to pressure the government to put its money where its mouth is. The coalition is a microcosm of how just transition unites social and environmental struggles.

Moxham says the STUC is supportive of GGM, describing bus manufacturing, alongside renewables like offshore wind, as emblematic of decent work. “These two issues go to the heart of the just transition approach. With the right commitment from government, with buy-in from unions and environmentalists, they shine good spotlights on where the potential is. If companies like Alexander Dennis or BiFab no longer exist in five years, then you have failed. If these are both working facilities into the green transition, then we are on the road to success.”

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Over four-fifths of offshore oil and gas workers in Scotland would be interested in renewables and offshore wind if given the option to retrain, according to a recent survey.

# ARGENTINA AT AN ENERGY CROSSROADS: THE ROLE OF TRADE UNIONS IN BUILDING A JUST TRANSITION

BY NAZARETH CASTRO



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*Santos Guitan climbs a pipe that crosses the field belonging to his mother, Nieves Guitan. The pipes, carrying water with salt and lithium, go through the villages of Huancar and Susques (in Jujuy), near Salinas Grandes. Local lithium mining operations and the pipes that run through their fields have left some of the wells they use too salty for the vicuñas they raise.*

*Argentina's trade unions are faced with the challenge of putting a just energy transition on the agenda, a transition combining sustainability with the principles of social and environmental justice.*

Argentina is at a crossroads. The repercussions of the pandemic look set to worsen the socio-economic crisis already looming over the country and are having a huge impact on its currency: once again, the country is looking to the 'blue dollar', the unofficial US dollar rate, which is already twice the official rate. The situation is fuelling the pressing need to increase foreign currency revenues,

traditionally derived from mining and the exploitation of resources such as soya, gas and oil.

Whilst it is true that placing the green transition on the policy agenda is more difficult in the context of the economic and monetary crisis, it is also true that Argentina is experiencing a surge in the socio-environmental awareness that is permeating parts of the trade union movement, as well as **Peronism**, a political doctrine that emerged in the 1940s around the figure of Juan Domingo Perón. This renewed awareness

comes at a time when the need to tackle climate change is urgent, as is the need for a socio-ecological transition with clean energy as one of its basic pillars, along with the decarbonisation of the economy to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.

In Argentina, as in many other countries, trade unions have highlighted the need for a just transition, emphasizing that the pathway to sustainability cannot be built on the back of job losses or increased job insecurity. And it was thanks to pressure from trade unions that the reference to “the creation of decent work and quality jobs” was included in the preamble of the 2015 Paris Agreement. [The Trade Union Confederation of the Americas \(TUCA\) goes further still](#), arguing that a just transition must ensure “social justice, gender equality and equity, food and energy sovereignty, and the preservation of the commons”.

Under its legislation on renewable energies, Argentina is faced with [the task](#) of meeting 20 per cent of the country’s energy needs with renewable energy sources by 2025, which is not without its challenges in a country where 87 per cent of the primary energy matrix is fossil and the sector is a source of quality jobs. In 2019, the gross salary in the sector was [103,000 pesos a month](#), well above the average salary of around 35,000 pesos in the private sector. It also has quality trade unions and good collective agreements, whilst the emerging sectors associated with renewable sources are [generating much more precarious employment](#).

“It is estimated that 1,000 megawatts (MW) of wind power represents 10,000 jobs, but creating those jobs would require public policies that develop national industry through investment and training”

There is concern not only about the quality but also the quantity of jobs. It is widely thought that renewable energies generate fewer jobs than fossil fuels and, although experts argue it is a mistaken belief, there is in fact cause for concern among trade unionists and workers. “It is estimated that 1,000 megawatts (MW) of wind power represents 10,000 jobs, but creating those jobs here in this country would require public policies that develop national industry through investment and training,” says Joaquín Turco, climate change advisor at the Central de los Trabajadores de la Argentina-Autónoma (CTA-A).

There is also the concern that redeployment – jobs lost in certain sectors being replaced in others – will not happen without adequate state intervention, as suggested by engineer Pablo Bertinat of the Interdisciplinary Group for Critical Research on the Energy Problem ([GECIPE](#)):

“Thinking about transition implies identifying which sectors should disappear and which should be diminished or promoted, and how to intervene to couple the transition with social justice. To achieve this, it is essential that the state and trade unions break with the conventional view that identifies work with employment and undervalues care work.”

Under the government of Maurizio Macri (2015-2019), wind energy was given huge impetus through the call for tenders promoted under the [PlanRenovAr](#) programme, aimed at supplying electricity through renewable sources. “Within four years, renewables had increased fivefold, although we started from a very low base, 0.6 per cent of the matrix,” explains Enrique Maurtua, a climate change specialist from the Environment and Natural Resources Foundation (FARN). But this commitment to clean energy was not accompanied by a policy to promote technological development.

By offering major incentives to big corporations in the bidding process, the Macri government also failed to promote the participation of small local initiatives and to take advantage of opportunities that renewable sources offer when decentralising the energy system.

The strongest reaction to its macro-economic management in the energy sector was nonetheless triggered by the huge tariff hike: [domestic electricity bills increased by 3,500 per cent between 2015 and 2019](#), and just short of that in the case of gas. Energy poverty, which applies to households that spend more than 10 per cent of their income on energy, increased from 1 per cent to 20 per cent within four years, going against UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7: to ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

## — FERNÁNDEZ, BETWEEN PRODUCTIVISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS

In December 2019, Peronism returned to the Casa Rosada with the election of Alberto Fernández. He took office just a few days before the austral summer holidays. The pandemic struck the region when the school year was just about to begin and, amidst a strict lockdown, the economy came grinding to a halt, including projects to advance renewable energy.

During those initial months, the only significant measure in the energy sector was the launch of the ‘Creole barrel’, which puts a local price on the barrel of crude oil. At the end of August, a new energy secretary, Darío Martínez, was appointed and the government set out its priorities: the develop-

ment of local production and a favourable energy trade balance. So far, however, these general principles have not given rise to policies that go hand in hand with the energy transition.

The extent to which countries will be expected to comply with the content of the Paris Agreement remains to be seen, in light of the economic scars left by the pandemic. On 19 November 2020, [several trade unions and civil society organisations met with Argentina's Secretary for Climate Change](#). It was a lengthy meeting, during which the steps to be taken were outlined and discussions were held on issues such as the national priorities for the implementation of Argentina's nationally determined contribution (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. The NDCs adapt the international community's commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) to the national context. As this report went to press, the details of Argentina's NDCs had not yet been worked out but its structure had been outlined.

If, as Marta Pujadas of the UOCRA construction workers' union points out, a genuinely just transition implies "involving the social partners in NDC discussions", the reality is that their inclusion is still a source of contention. It was only after the CTA-A expressed its dissatisfaction to the Secretariat for Climate Change over the failure to include the trade union centre in the talks that it was invited to the meeting on 19 November. "I think the idea was not to open up the game to other players until the end, to avoid delaying the process, but this has limited the influence civil

society will ultimately have over the content of the NDCs," says CTA-A's Turco. The trade unionist nonetheless agrees with the overall direction of the NDCs being put together. The guiding principles of the just transition include human rights, intergenerational equity, public participation and federalisation. "We let them know the importance, in our view, of replacing 'food and energy security' with 'food sovereignty' and 'energy sovereignty'," adds Turco.

For Marta Pujadas of the UOCRA, the involvement of civil society actors is fundamental to "ensuring a genuinely just transition". Is that likely to happen? Turco has his doubts: "This is only the beginning, and good intentions need to be backed up with actions".

The truth is that, historically, Peronism has a tradition of being sensitive to the plight of workers but has steered away from environmental activism. "Peronism finds it difficult to get away from a developmentalist vision that fails to understand the importance of the environment," says Felipe Gutiérrez Ríos, a journalist and researcher at the [Ob-](#)



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*A meeting of Indigenous communities in Tusaquillas to debate the impact of lithium mining on their territories. The lack of information and decisions taken behind their backs led them to organise an assembly (held in 2019) to coordinate their response.*



servatorio Petrolero Sur. And the same seems to be true for much of the trade union movement, which has longstanding links with Peronism.

Whilst TUCA has a clearer view of the energy transition and its urgency in the context of accelerated climate change, when it comes down to the trade union organisations that fight for workers' rights on their own terrain, it is much harder to place socio-environmental problems high on the agenda. For many trade unions, the protection of the environment and employment are still conflicting goals, and if a choice has to be made, they opt for employment. For Turco of CTA-A, this is a false dilemma: "There are no jobs on a dead planet"; that is one of the ideas we are trying to put across. And the transition is a matter of speed: it is a matter of ensuring that no one is left behind."

But for the unemployed and informal workers, who have no work or who work in very precarious conditions, saying "there will be no employment on a dead planet" is no answer.

CTA-Trabajores (CTA-T) has been unequivocal in this respect, insisting on the need to include the most vulnerable, such as "migrants, rural workers, street vendors and the disabled" in the fair energy transition project. The CTA-A, for its part, published an official communiqué underlining the need for "our own collective concept of a just transition, starting first of all with the weakest and most marginalised in this society, who are the hardest hit by climate change and are paying the highest price for its consequences, without being responsible for the carbon emissions".

"We have to develop a logic of life that goes beyond consumer society, and we have to build it from below, from the grassroots"

Despite the obstacles to placing this issue on the agenda, something is changing: the expansion of grassroots movements championing food sovereignty and the mass mobilisations against extractive business activities – such as the plans to set up a mega pig factory farm to export pigs to China – are inserting ecological issues within the grassroots struggle and making their inclusion in the Peronist government's agenda inevitable. "New spaces for dialogue are opening up. I believe there is room for discussion, and that what happens will be decided, on a case by case basis, within the context of the issue at hand," concludes Gutiérrez.

The change is visible in three projects, involving trade unions, that are broadly connected to the socio-ecological transition. One is the National Manifesto for Work, Sovereignty and Production, better known as the May Day Manifesto, signed by the CTA-A, the CGT and a number of organisations on the political left. Another is the Human Development Plan, drawn up by a number of organisations including the UOCRA and the UTEP union representing workers in the people's economy.

In both cases, the documents are fairly generic, setting out framework principles, such as food and energy sovereignty, rather than concrete proposals for their deployment. They are nonetheless valuable examples of the emergence of joint initiatives, involving trade unions and social movements, organised around ideas linked to a just transition, such as food and energy sovereignty.

The third is the Fishing, Maritime-River and Port Sovereignty project launched by CTA-A, one of the trade union centres most in tune with environmental concerns. "It is an interesting transition proposal, from the South, bringing together the port of La Plata, a shipyard factory and trade unions in the name of fishing sovereignty," says Cecilia Anigstein, a doctor in social sciences and a member of GECEPE.

## DEAD COW, OR THE POSSIBILITY OF A TRANSITION WITHOUT SLAUGHTER

The Vaca Muerta (or Dead Cow) oil and gas field is a key player in this tug of war between developmentalism and environmental preservation. The exploitation of the unconventional reserves it holds, through the controversial technique of fracking, is one of the few projects both Macri and Fernández agree on, despite the fact that, even in purely monetary terms, it is not the panacea announced, due to the huge state subsidies it requires. "The Peronist government places more emphasis on job creation and the local development dimension, but both see Vaca Muerta as a lifeline in the form of foreign currency revenues," summarises Turco.

Whilst Vaca Muerta represents the 'fossilist' model that the energy transition must leave behind, the lithium deposits in northern Argentina point to a key mineral in the transition: "Mass electrification presents the challenge of energy accumulation, and for now, that relies on lithium batteries," explains Maurtua. For Pujadas, "lithium reserves can be a great opportunity if we promote the development of local technology and we understand the impacts on ecosystems and indigenous peoples as a matter of priority."

Indigenous communities in the north of the country have, however, reported that they have not been informed about the development of the activity, which affects water resources. Employment and foreign currency generation cannot be at the expense of sacrificing certain areas,” concludes Turco.

“There are no magic solutions, because no technology is 100 per cent harmless,” says Maurtua, for whom the solution does not lie in electrifying the car fleet, but in rethinking the transport system, which is responsible for 51 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions in Latin America. Similarly, the energy transition implies building more energy efficient housing and rethinking the agri-food system, which causes 70 per cent of global deforestation, according to the FAO. The underlying problem, then, is cultural: “It is a matter of knowing what resources are available to us and adapting the development model to those limits. That implies a cultural shift: we have to develop a logic of life that goes beyond consumer society, and we have to build it from below, from the grassroots,” says Bertinat of GECIPE.

One key to a just transition lies in the ability to decentralise a highly concentrated, centralised and opaque energy system and open it up to participatory decision-making processes, anchored in the realities on the ground and based on dialogue.

With this in mind, trade union centres such as the CTA-A and CTA-T have been working to build alliances with the academic sector, socio-environmental movements and NGOs. Examples of

the outcomes of these endeavours include an [energy sovereignty forum](#) and a [production and energy transition working group in the province of Rio Negro](#).

But there is still a very long way to go. Social movements and trade unions that support the idea of an energy transition are calling for the state to play an active role in building consensus. Because, as Turco argues, these are not decisions that can be left in the hands of technocrats: “The energy transition implies deciding *for what and for whom* we produce energy, and our society as a whole needs to think about this, through consultation frameworks that are built from the bottom up. Energy is a common good, not a commodity, and should therefore be under social control. For this to happen, society must take ownership of the issue: people don’t get involved because they believe that energy is a matter for experts, and no one can defend something they don’t know about.”



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Lithium mining in Salinas Grandes, on national route 52 in the province of Jujuy.

# FACED WITH CLIMATE CHANGE IN SENEGAL, HOW CAN UNIONS SUPPORT EFFORTS TOWARDS ENERGY TRANSITION?

BY MOMAR DIENG



© Sean Sprague/Alamy

Senegalese fishermen stand on their boats in the port of Saint-Louis, Senegal, in April 2017.

*Torn between its international climate commitments to promote industrial projects that create clean energy sources and its reliance on still dominant polluting industries, Senegal must find a model of transition that is both just and capable of maintaining a balance in its progress towards development.*

In the coastal city of Bargny, located some 30 kilometres south of the capital city of Dakar, a new government-sponsored coal-fired power plant stands in stark contrast to Senegal's stated climate ambitions, including plans to increase its share of clean and renewable energies to 30 per cent by 2025. Commissioned a year

ago, the Bargny power station was financed by a consortium of investors including the African Development Bank (AfDB) for 118 billion CFA francs (around €180 million).

The choice of coal has sparked controversy and the Bargny station has been a source of misunderstanding and conflict within the local community. Already threatened by rising sea levels that continue to demolish coastal dwellings and displace populations, the region now finds itself confronted with the negative impacts of this new infrastructure. Local associations, such as the Association of Women Fish Processors, the No

to the Coal-Fired Power Station Association, members of the municipal council, and the Collective for the Defence of the Environment, supported by foreign partners such as the Catholic Committee Against Hunger and For Development (*CCFD-Terre Solidaire*), have criticised “forced land grabs” by the state to pave the way for this public-private project, displacements of entire families, the disruption of the activities of women fish processors (in an area where fishing is the primary economic activity), and above all the waste and pollution emitted by the plant and their impact on health and the environment.

## ■ SOLAR POWER PLANTS ARE MULTIPLYING, BUT GAS AND OIL ARE ON THE WAY

When it comes to securing its energy needs, Senegal faces a difficult choice between taking advantage of its rich fossil fuel resources and demonstrating its commitment to the climate. The exploitation of its oil deposits, one of the largest in West Africa, is expected to take off again starting in 2023 with a project of cooperation between local companies and British Petroleum (BP) currently in the works, while 450 billion m<sup>3</sup> of certified gas promises a significant source of future revenue for the country. The ability of the Senegalese authorities to anticipate and prevent the risks inherent in the extraction of these offshore hydrocarbons, specifically threats to the marine ecosystem, is already being questioned.

At the same time, Senegal remains committed to transitioning toward renewable energies and is constantly striving to increase the share of clean energy in domestic and industrial consumption by promoting private initiatives alongside public action. In addition to the brand new Taïba Ndiaye wind farm located roughly 100 kilometres from Dakar, which now provides 15 per cent of Senegal’s electricity (supplying nearly two million people out of a population of 15 million), four new solar power plants have been operational in rural areas since 2016. These initiatives make Senegal a leader in the field of renewable energy in West Africa.

“When it comes to securing its energy needs, Senegal faces a difficult choice between taking advantage of its rich fossil fuel resources and demonstrating its commitment to the climate”

Senegal must also respect the international commitments it has made within the framework of the 2015 Paris Agreement, particularly those relating to the reduction of greenhouse gases (GHGs). The country has pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 5 to 9 per cent through its own means, though this could be increased to as much as 17 to 27 per cent with the expected help of the international community. One of the planned measures is to better monitor emissions from existing infrastructure. “The quantities of greenhouse gases likely to be emitted by heavy infrastructure

will have to be measured and evaluated. Emission standards aim to minimise pollution. This applies to all industrial projects in Senegal before they are approved by the relevant governmental departments,” explains Cheikh Ndiaye Sylla, director of environment at the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development.

For its first Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) planned for 2023, Senegal has singled out sectors such as industry and construction for the reduction of greenhouse gases. The transport sector has also been targeted for reductions. In 2021, the country will launch its Regional Express Train (TER) and a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system (linking 14 suburbs with the capital of Dakar), which are expected to reduce pollution generated by motor vehicles. While the energy supply for these transport systems has raised questions, a Strategic Environmental and Social Assessment (SESA) carried out by the AfDB states: “The emissions thus avoided are likely, in a future phase, to be combined with traction energy supply from an emission-free renewable energy source.”

## ■ TRADE UNIONS WANT A SAY IN SENEGAL’S NDCS

“Senegal is current considering the commitments it will make in its NDCs, which remains the basis for the country’s commitment to global mitigation and adaptation efforts,” says Babacar Sylla, in charge of environmental and climate issues for the National Confederation of Senegalese Workers (CNTS), the country’s largest trade union centre. However, he adds, “unfortunately the most ambitious measures contained in this reference document are conditional options, and thus subject to financing.”

Sylla is one of many actors frustrated by these ‘conditional options’ (which each country lists in its NDCs), which they consider to be a roadblock to voluntary action on the part of the public authorities. For example, the Senegalese government has made the substitution of 40 per cent of its coal production by natural gas conditional on obtaining international financing. This is what it proposes for the Bargny coal-fired power station. But, as Sylla explains, “we believe it is imperative that coal and gas power stations be shut down and that mas-



© Massimo Lama

*Farm workers harvest peanuts in Senegal's Siné Saloum delta region.*

sive investments be made in renewable energies." There are about ten coal-fired power stations in Senegal, half of which are located in the Dakar region. All of them belong to Senelec, Senegal's national electricity company.

But in order to influence the content of the NDCs, trade unions need the attention and sympathetic ear of the public authorities, which has not always been easy to come by. "The government listens to us intermittently on climate change issues. We believe that the Ministries of Environment and Labour should move toward formalising the contribution of workers to inclusive and relevant NDCs. But for the moment, despite all our reminders to the authorities, the process of involving the trade union centres has not run smoothly," says Elimane Diouf, secretary-general of the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions (CSA). "The CSA has referred the matter to the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development and we have even placed a priority on setting up dialogue, because we believe that this ministry is a pivotal department for all concerns related to climate change and energy transition." The Senegalese trade union centres want the commissions that have been set up to be integrated as full members in order to better prepare Senegal's NDCs.

As Diouf explains, this will require establishing a "real social dialogue" between the state, employers and trade unions. Sylla of the CNTS agrees: "With the trade union struggle severely tested by climate change...we must adopt a purely inclusive approach based on social dialogue with our traditional partners, the state and the private sector."

## ■ INCLUDING WORKERS IN ENERGY TRANSITION

Union leaders believe that trade union centres will be able to make stronger contributions to the NDCs if affiliated workers are present at all levels of the national economy potentially impacted by climate change. This will allow them to make useful contributions to identifying ideas to be taken up by the authorities. According to Diouf of the CSA, this includes a wide range of proposals such as projects and programmes favouring the protection of coastal areas from Dakar to [Saint-Louis](#) against marine erosion, making the [Great Green Wall](#) a reality, revitalising the [fossil valleys](#) for the benefit of agriculture, market gardening, livestock breeding and fishing, for example.

"The country is trying its best to develop highly beneficial initiatives in the field of energy with solar and wind power plants, the entry into force of the law on plastics, and efforts being made in the transport sector. However, we have seen that the implementation of some of these measures is leaving many workers behind. This non-inclusive method distorts the principle of just transition that the CNTS continues to pro-

mote in its approach,” says Sylla, who is also an engineer in urban and environmental planning.

At the same time, the CNTS is working internally to implement its vision of a comprehensive approach to climate change in a country like Senegal. “We remain convinced that the best way to support our fellow workers is first to educate them on the new reality we are facing, then to make sure that they have the ability to take full advantage of the energy transition with transition plans that will take into account their individual experiences, or lack thereof, the criterion of seniority, the benefits already acquired, etc,” says Sylla. That’s why “the CNTS has been working to anticipate developments so that its members do not miss the boat on energy transition”.

At its 2016 congress, the CSA created a department of the environment and sustainable development to address issues related to climate change. The youth and women’s movements developed several activities to “raise awareness among the population and workers in coastal areas such as Mbour, Kayar, Rufisque, Bargny and Saint-Louis,” says Diouf. Even without the Covid-19 health crisis, which led to the initiative being suspended, the challenge remains immense.

“The concept of just transition is relatively difficult to grasp, especially in companies where workers are used to only focusing on their daily livelihood, their income and their salary level. At the same time, workers in many companies have been introduced to other concepts such as corporate social responsibility and health and safety. This has enabled them to look around them to see how to develop clean production practices and establish societal relations with the people in their milieu,” explains Diouf.

By targeting coastal areas, the young people and women of the CSA are addressing two major concerns: waves of emigration, with more and more young people leaving for Europe in makeshift boats; and rising sea levels. “With the concept of energy transition, our aim is to convince young people and workers in general that the promotion and development of so-called ‘green’ jobs is now within reach through various environmental projects and programmes. In the face of challenges that threaten our vital spaces, we try to show them that opportunities exist to get by where they are, wherever possible,” says Diouf.

Working with Italian partners, the CSA has initiated projects to train its members for work in sectors with high labour potential such as agriculture and agribusiness. This vision is being put into practice with “consultations with the managers of *Industries Chimiques du Sénégal* (ICS) and with the managers of the Bargny coal-fired power plant to encourage them to take better account of the health and safety of workers and local communities.” Diouf hopes that these initiatives will regain momentum once the coronavirus health crisis improves.



© Anton Ivanov/Alamy

Workers install solar panels near the city of Thiès in Senegal.

## “HISTORIC PARTNERSHIP”

The CNTS’s declared willingness to work with other actors has led to a partnership with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) in Dakar. According to FES programme director Ismaïla Diack, the issues related to energy transition include the defence of principles such as social justice and the need to provide concrete responses to populations affected by climate change. “The concerns

“With the trade union struggle severely tested by climate change...we must adopt a purely inclusive approach based on social dialogue with our traditional partners, the state and the private sector”

of young people and their associations in this area, particularly the desire to find employment and the need to protect their immediate environment, can be better taken into account by public authorities. We are helping them to do so. For our first task, we are focusing on a major subject: coastal governance,” says Diack.

The German foundation is a stakeholder in a **working group involving five Senegalese trade union centres** and some 20 environmental players working in several parts of the country, a “historic partnership” as Babacar Sylla describes the collaboration.

“On the climate issue, the FES, which has helped us over the years to participate in major summits and high-level trade union meetings, has found it necessary to organise action at the national level. This is a vision that we welcome. But since the CNTS will not be able to achieve this effectively alone, we wanted to diversify the actors involved by opening ourselves up to the sister centres of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).”

These trade union centres are the National Union of Autonomous Trade Unions of Senegal (UNSAS), the National Confederation of Workers of Senegal-Forces of Change (CNTS-FC), the Democratic Union of Workers of Senegal (UDTS) and the Confederation of Autonomous Trade Unions (CSA). According to Sylla, it was CNTS general secretary Mody Guiro, “as president of ITUC-Africa, who put forward the idea of involving the other Senegalese trade union centres in increasing training and developing strategy.” Over the coming months, the working group plans to produce a strategic orientation document and a plan of action addressing the impacts of climate change – and to demonstrate that trade unions are working together to support the country’s efforts for a just transition.

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