

# The globalization of Just Transition in the world of labour

## The politics of scale and scope

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One of the most visible successes of global labour over its history has been the placement of just transition at the center of global climate politics through its inclusion in the Paris Agreement of 2015 (Rosemberg, 2020). This can be considered as both a turning point in the development of global labour environmentalism and a surprising one. It is a turning point because it mainstreamed one of the most proactive strategies developed by labour. During the last several years just transition language has been adopted by a variety of stakeholders while think tanks are producing a plethora of studies and proposals (Stevis, Morena & Krause, 2020). It is surprising because by the time just transition rose on the agenda of global labour (2006-2007) it had fallen into decline within its country of origin – the USA – and was, in fact, strongly opposed by most unions there. Ever since, a network of visionaries within global and select national unions managed to nurture just transition to its present centrality in global climate and labour politics with many hopes being placed on the upcoming Glasgow COP to turn it from a vision to an operational part of global climate governance.

There are many angles from which to examine just transition. For example, how far has it been adopted by governments, corporations or civil society? Or what kinds of just transition have various stakeholders adopted? How do various kinds of just transitions fuse the social and the ecological (Stevis & Fellli, 2015; Ciplet &

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Harrison, 2019). In this article I will focus on the diffusion of just transition within the world of labour. How broadly has just transition permeated the world of labour since it became a central strategy of the Ituc in 2006? First, what is the *scale* of just transition's adoption? Has it been adopted by many unions around the world? Are there some patterns in that diffusion and what are the likely explanations and implications of these patterns? Second, what is the *scope* of just transition within the world of labour? Has it moved beyond climate and energy into other environmental transitions? Has it moved beyond environmental transitions? What are the likely explanations and implications of any patterns and developments? Is broadening the breadth of just transitions desirable and how should it take place?

In the first part of the paper I clarify the scale and scope of just transitions -their breadth- and comment on their political implications, individually and combined. This will be followed by a mapping of the politics of scale and scope of just transitions, identifying patterns and elaborating on causes and dynamics. I will close by commenting on the expansion of the desirability and challenges of expanding the scope of just transitions.

### The politics of scale and scope

Many years ago Raymond Williams warned against 'militant particularism', i.e., the examination of a campaign or event outside of its broader context (Harvey, 1995). This becomes all the more problematic if that event has negative impacts upon other places and people who are connected via global divisions of labour, whether manifested in commodity chains or production networks (Gough, 2010). A just transition for coal workers in Australia, for instance, may be purchased through the exportation of coal to India or other countries. Or, campaigns for labour rights may be limited to particular categories of workers, marginalizing weaker groups. For example, the USA National Labor Relations Act of 1935 – the cornerstone of US industrial relations- purposefully excluded farmworkers and domestic workers, largely African-American or Latinx, as well as subcontractors. In short, it is important to pay attention to the scale and the scope of a proposal or policy, in our case just transition.

Scale refers to the spatial and temporal reach of a proposal, practice or policy. Is it local, national or global? Is it short or long term? Scalar politics is particularly contested when there are multiple levels of governance and power at play with their own jurisdictional rights and historical dynamics. Why is there a just transition policy in the state of Colorado, USA, but not a national one? Why does the national just transition policy of Canada not include the main product of the Alberta Province –

oil from tar sands? And why does Scotland have a just transition initiative but not the UK? As various analysts have pointed out scales are the result of institutional paths as well as strategic choices (Bulkeley, 2005; Sassen, 2005; Holifield, Porter & Walker, 2009; Bridge *et al.*, 2013) and have constitutive implications for social relations.

By scope I refer to who or what is covered by the proposal, practice or policy. Is it only some of those affected or all of them? The scope or inclusiveness of policies is equally contested (Stevs & Felli, 2020). The USA National Labor Relations of 1935, mentioned above, did not ‘forget’ to include farmworkers and domestic workers, mostly African-American. Rather, it did so as the price for support by racist Southern states. Why is just transition mainly connected to climate change and energy? Why not toxins or occupational health and safety, as it was at its origins? The scope of a policy is also a significant political issue, particularly as jurisdictional scales and methodological nationalism sever people that work within the same commodity chains and production networks (Young, 2006; Wimmer & Schiller, 2002).

It is not only in themselves that these dimensions are important. Equally important are their intersections. A policy may be national, as is the case with Canada’s just transition, but limited to one fossil-fuel. And within that fossil-fuel it may privilege formal workers and marginalize subcontractors as well as those working further along the supply chain and communities (Mertins-Kirkwood & Deshpande, 2019). On the other hand a policy may be narrow in scale – let us say cover a city or a state- but affect a much wider swath of stakeholders (Hughes & Hoffman, 2020). The growing trend towards ‘smart cities’ is an example of particular places trying to improve their local conditions and place within the world economy through selective inclusion and gentrification that dispossesses the poor, in order to attract leading industries (Datta & Odendaal, 2019).

A warning is necessary here. A proposal or policy may be global in scale and comprehensive in scope. Does that tell us what its social purpose is likely to be? Social security and labour laws that are national in scale and comprehensive in scope have been adopted by authoritarians and fascists in order to contain and weaken the *voice* of radical socialists. Financialization is one of the most global and comprehensive dynamics but the *choices* it allows are neither egalitarian nor ecological. In this article I focus on scale and scope with the clear understanding that they are not technical issues and that they reflect particular voices and choices. A number of analysts, including this author, have pointed out the different political approaches towards labour environmentalism and just transitions (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2012; Felli, 2014; Stevis & Felli, 2015; Sweeney & Treat, 2018; Just Transition Research Collaborative 2018). While the variability in the social purpose of just transitions is in the background it is not developed further in this article.

## The scale of Just Transitions

As used here the scale of just transition within the world of labour varies in two ways. First, in terms of the spatial or temporal scale of the just transition envisioned. Second, in terms of the scale of its adoption by unions, from the global to the local. Accordingly, we may find that all unions around the world have adopted just transition but the spatial and temporal scales of their visions may vary. Stated differently, they may all focus on spatial or temporal scales that are of immediate importance to them, such as dealing with particular coal plants or mines. Such fragmentation does not necessarily result in protecting the climate because local just transitions may be purchased by particularistic policies that allow the extraction and exportation of coal.

How did the scale of just transition become associated with global climate politics? The first explicit just transition strategy was developed by the Ocaw, a small USA union, in the late 1980s and focused on chemicals and toxins and related occupational health and safety (Ocaw, 1991; Leopold, 2007). Its erstwhile Canadian branch quickly adopted the strategy and Canadian and US unionists collaborated closely. So the original scale was binational. These same unions, in collaboration with unionists from a few other countries, also moved to place just transition on the global agenda and, as a result, the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (Icem) adopted the first just transition resolution (1997)<sup>1</sup>. Chemicals and toxins, of course, remain a global issue which is largely discussed within the Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM), a multistakeholder forum that does not address just transition as explicitly as climate negotiations.

During that same year the Kyoto Protocol propelled climate change to the forefront of global labour politics. How did that happen? Early on a number of farsighted unions, such as the Ocaw and Steelworkers in the USA, the Comisiones Obreras (CCOO) in Spain and continental European unions, realized the significance of climate change for workers and work. Belgian unions and environmentalists, for instance, formed *Arbeid en Milieu* as early as 1987 (for more cases of early labour environmentalism, see Barca, 2012). In the USA the first connection between climate change and just transition was developed from 1996 on in the course of deliberations between unions and environmentalists, an initiative of the AFL-CIO. In 1997 the representative of global unions made a statement at the COP that included just transition. After the AFL-CIO publicly rejected the Protocol, in 1997 as well, the global labour comments at the various COPs stopped referring to just transition,

1. Icem became part of IndustriALL in 2007.

focusing on the promise of green growth. In fact, much of the work of global unions focused on the UN's Commission on Sustainable Development (Gereluk & Royer, 2001; Silverman, 2006). However, while just transition went into a rapid decline in the USA it had already been picked up by Canadian unions who collaborated closely with the Ocaw, UK unionists, as well as the Comisiones Obreras and a few other unions in the industrial world (Trades Union Congress, 2008; Hampton, 2015; Rosemberg, 2017, 2020). The strategy was discussed at the January 2006 Trade Union on Labour and the Environment (Unep, 2006 and 2007) while the 2007 conference in Bali may be considered as a turning point because the US delegation was enlarged to include unionists interested in climate policy and not opposed to just transition (interviews). These unionists, in collaboration with the Ituc representative, were instrumental in starting the process that eventually led to including Just Transition in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

One can argue that the existential threat of climate change was the reason behind this choice but that is a partial explanation. In fact, then and now, some unions attend the climate COPs to prevent policy. Rather, this choice was a strategic one and reflected the work of labour environmentalists as well as a shift in the priorities of key manufacturing unions that were concerned about the impacts of climate changes on their membership, had developed environmental sensibilities and saw climate policy as an opportunity rather than a death knell (interviews). In short the emergence of climate and energy as the primary focus of global unions has to do both with the significance of climate change and the strategic shift of key unions.

As international relations scholars have argued venue-choices are strategic choices. And, in this and other cases, choosing a venue with great visibility enhances the ability of an otherwise weak network to exert influence back home (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Fifteen years later this 'boomerang effect' has certainly motivated many national unions to consider just transition. In fact, it has gone well beyond that in generating the broader adoption of just transition by social forces with distinctly different priorities and views.

Throughout these years, global union organizations and their national allies worked to spread labour environmentalism and just transition throughout the world. A critical actor in this effort was Sustainlabour, a labour NGO created by the Comisiones Obreras in 2004 and supported throughout its existence by Unep (Martin Murillo, 2013). The creation of Sustainlabour was consistent with the CCOO's earlier turn towards labour environmentalism (Gil, 2013). From the very beginning it sought to nurture a labour environmentalism that was not limited to the Global North. During 2005, for instance, it organized regional conferences in Latin America and Africa, while the first global trade union conference on the

environment took place in Nairobi in January of 2006 and addressed labour environmentalism and just transition along a number of central themes (Unep, 2006, pp. 7-8). The momentum from that meeting most likely contributed to the inclusion of the environment in the Ituc's constitution. Subsequently global unions focused their attention on climate COPs with just transition as a central goal (for more see Rosemberg, 2010; 2017; 2020; interviews). From then on the various COPs became a gathering ground for global unionists while Sustainlabour continued its work to globalize labour environmentalism and just transition, including the second Trade Union Conference in conjunction with Rio+20 (2012). From its inception through its closing in 2016, Sustainlabour, in collaboration with the Ituc, Unep and the ILO, played a critical role in promoting labour environmentalism and just (e.g., Renner *et al.*, 2008; Sustainlabour & Unep) joined by the ITF, IndustriAll and PSI amongst Global Union Federations. Since its inception in 2017 the Just Transition Centre has continued efforts to diffuse just transition, largely in the Global South but also the USA, through workshops, projects and reports, often in collaboration with labour NGOs and think tanks funded by national unions and parties. As a result of the work of all of these actors thousands of unionists in both the Global North and the Global South have been exposed to labour environmentalism and just transition. The adoption of just transition strategies by national unions, however, has been much slower and uneven.

As we look closer at the Global North it becomes apparent that very few national centres have adopted actionable just transition programs while in those countries in which some sectoral unions have adopted the strategy, others have not or are opposed to it. Amongst the leaders in adopting just actionable just transition programs are the CCOOs, the Canadian Labour Congress and Etuc. On the other hand major centres, such as the AFL-CIO and Rengo, have not adopted just transition platforms while others have done so tentatively. This may be explained by the fact that these are often weak confederations that have limited power over their affiliates. Even more so, very few sectoral unions, especially in the fossil-fuel economy, have adopted a just transition strategy and, frequently, it may be a local chapter that does so. One of the local unions of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (USA), for instance, negotiated a just transition agreement for the closure of the Diablo Canyon Nuclear Plant but the national union is both in favor of continuing nuclear power and coal plants and opposed to just transition. The Canadian Labour Congress has not been able to persuade its affiliates, however, to support just transition from tar sands oil or nuclear power. In the case of Europe, the support of just transition by the ccoo, the Etuc and some other unions, as well as the coal transition in Germany also create the impression that there is a wave towards just transition in the continent.

That is not the case in Eastern Europe, however, not even universally supported within leading countries, such as Spain. Overall, then, while the strategy of just transition emerged in the Global North, and has been supported by unions in the Global North, it does not enjoy consensus. In fact, a lot of the opposition, as well as support for weak and slow just transitions, comes from unions in the Global North.

Even so, just transition agendas are still less common amongst unions in the Global South even, though, many unionists from the Global South became familiar with the strategy as early as the middle of the first decade through the work of Sustainlabour and the Ituc, including the labour gatherings at climate COPs. This continued during the second decade with the Just Transition Centre replacing Sustainlabour in 2017. The regional arms of the Ituc provide an active venue for the discussion of climate change, other environmental issues and just transition. For instance, Ituc-Africa has an active climate group and organized a Just Transition Consultative Meeting (22-24 May, 2018) to discuss just transition in the African context with the participation of unionists from 12 countries. The Trade Union Confederation of the Americas has been even more active and has made just transition a central part of its Platform for the Development of the Americas (Anigstein & Wyczykier, 2019; Tuca, 2020).

Some early engagements with the strategy took place in Argentina and South Africa and unions in both countries continue to support it, despite difficult developments in the South Africa (Union to Union, 2020, pp. 27-30). More recently unions in Colombia (Union to Union, pp. 38-40), Brazil (Ituc, 2019, p. 14) Nigeria (Just Transition Centre, 2019, pp. 9-10, and Union to Union, 2020, pp. 36-37), Philippines (Union to Union, 2020, pp. 30-32), Bangladesh (Union to Union, 2020, pp. 32-35) India (Just Transition Centre, 2017, pp. 13-14; Union to Union, pp. 40-42; Roy *et al.*, 2019) and a few other countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago, have also engaged the strategy. There is also research about just transitions around the world that seems to identify the need for and opportunities for just transition (see Hirsch *et al.*, 2017; TUDCN, 2019 which also provides information for some of the cases above as well as additional ones).

In general, then, the strategy of just transition is fairly widely known within the world of those labour union leaders and activists that participate in or follow global labour politics. However, few unions in the Global South have developed and adopted just transition agendas. In some cases this may be due to lack of resources but that is not an explanation for unions in the industrial and industrializing world – as well as energy unions in the less industrial world. An equally plausible explanation here is opposition to the transition from fossil fuels, itself. Another important reason, as we will see below, may be that the focus on energy excludes workers and unions in other

sectors of importance to the Global South, such as agriculture, forestry or mining. The limited diffusion of just transition through the Global South, however, does not mean that it is popular and well developed in the Global North. So, it is true that the origins of just transition are to be found in the Global North and the centrality of social dialogue reflects the continental European social democratic industrial relations. Moreover, most of the projects promoting just transition, whether in labour or not, are from the Global North. In that sense it is a Global North strategy. On the other hand, the deep opposition to it by a significant number of Northern unions in the fossil fuels and the silence or opposition of similar unions in the industrializing world, suggest that political cleavages over green and just transitions are equally or even more profound.

### The scope of Just Transitions

In the minds of many people, unionists or not, just transitions are associated with climate change. Even more people, including analysts, do not know that just transition was created by labour unions and that, from early on, it was intended for all workers affected by any environmental policy. In what follows I will trace the history of the scope of just transitions in order to accomplish three goals. First, to unsettle its exclusive connection in much research and media, to climate change and, even more so, fossil-fuels. Second, to affirm that its connection to climate policy and energy is privileged. Third, to explore whether and how the scope of just transition is stabilizing, narrowing or expanding.

The earliest version of a just transition policy that I am familiar with – even though it did not use the name- was adopted during the late 1970s and it had to do with workers in logging (Agee, 1980). The full development of just transition during the late 1980s and 1990s was associated with chemicals and toxics and occupational health and safety. The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (Ocaw) and its erstwhile Canadian branch had been strongly affected by automation in the sector, as well as various environmental policies to minimize toxics, from the 1970s on (Ocaw, 1991). The platform of the Labor Party Advocates, created by Ocaw, called for a just transition in response to any environmental policies and as a part of a very comprehensive democratic socialist agenda (Labour Party, 1996). During the same decade just transition was also associated with the reorganization of military bases in the USA as a result of the end of the Cold War. As discussed earlier, by the late 1990s energy had surpassed chemicals as a major issue at the global policy level and, by extension, for the unions in the energy industry. While most fossil fuels unions were apprehensive and opposed, manufacturing and infrastructure unions

with environmental sensibilities so climate change as a both a challenge and an opportunity.

The impacts of climate policy on fossil fuel workers, whose numbers had already been affected by automation, is existential and attention to them is necessary. But for many analysts and unionists the connection between climate change and just transition is exhausted at the edge of fossil-fuel energy. The rationale is that a just transition policy will motivate the frontline<sup>2</sup> workers in that sector to accept the shutting down of their industries. Even if we accept this narrow scope there is good evidence that a just transition from coal cannot be limited to those workers directly extracting coal or running coal-fired plants – let us call them frontline workers (Mertins-Kirkwood & Deshpande, 2019; Just Transition Listening Project (JTLP, 2021). Its scope must be expanded to include all ancillary workers, including those along the supply chain, as well as whole communities depending on these activities. In short, the scope of a coal transition can be narrower or broader. A narrower scope will end up transitioning very well paid, mostly male workers in both the North and the South, leaving behind the most vulnerable amongst them. Those left behind can very well be turned against unions by capital and conservative politicians but there is very good reason to believe that such resentment will take place on its own, whether in coal or other fossil fuels (JTLP, 2021).

The broader focus on the uses of energy will bring into the mix workers and communities in fossil-fuel based industries, such as transportation and buildings (Galgoczi, 2019; Stevis, 2019). The frontline labour force in these industries has also tended to be male – I have not seen a woman public bus-driver in Greece over my life time and only a few women taxi-drivers. However, in many parts of the world this is changing and, in any event, many of the people keeping transportation moving and buildings working are already women. Just transitions that do not take a whole-industry approach in dealing with the uses of fossil-fuels will also breed despair and resentment.

From its inception, just transition was associated with a vigorous green industrial policy (O'caw, 1991; Barrett & Hoerner, 2002). It is not the point here to discuss what an appropriate green industrial policy would look like but there are various visions (Jacobs, 2012; Tienhaara, 2014). I should note that claims that workers in the fossil fuel industry will be, automatically, employed by the renewable energy industry are misleading. Some of those workers may need support until they retire;

2. The term “frontline” refers to workers that directly do the mining or run coal plants. The pandemic has shown us that for every doctor and nurse there many more health workers without whom hospitals could not operate.

others may find employment in renewable energy; some may find employment in other industries where their skills can be applied; and still others will have to be transitioned to another industry. In all cases a just transition policy must be generous and long term. With that in mind, the scope of a just energy transition must cover renewable energy, as well. A green renewable energy sector that only hires males for the better paying jobs is not very just (Zabin *et al.*, 2016; Pearl-Martinez *et al.*, 2016). Nor is it just if it is not unionized - compared to the high unionization rates of fossil-fuel utilities in many parts of the world. Expanding the scope of just transition within renewables must also address their environmental impacts. Renewables that depend on dirty and dangerous supply chains, and do not adopt a circular economy approach, are breeding long term social and environmental harm (Mulvaney, 2014; Takeda *et al.*, 2019). Unions in a number of European countries as well as the Just Transition Centre are aware of the problematic social and environmental practices of the renewable energy sector and hopefully the connections to just transition will receive more attention. In some cases, for instance, the Danish move towards wind energy is heralded as an example of social dialogue-driven just transition. However, one of the major players in this process – Vestas – has left very bitter workers behind in the UK and remains non-union in my home state of Colorado where it has all of its North American production facilities and employs over 4,000 workers. In South Africa, the privatization of the renewable energy sector is one of the reasons why unions supportive of just transition have turned against it.

Global unions are aware of the need to broaden the environmental scope. The first Trade Union Assembly discussed just transition in conjunction with each one of its themes - climate and energy, chemicals, access to resources and services, corporate responsibility and accountability, and occupational, environmental and public health (Unep, 2006, pp. 7-8). Later work by Sustainlabour highlighted the need to focus on biodiversity as does the ILO currently. In fact, the absence of just transition with respect to biodiversity speaks volumes despite efforts by some environmental organizations to link with labour. Unjust transitions in the agricultural and forestry sectors have long been the subject of deep contestation, including in parts of the Global North (Just Transition Listening Project, 2021). The Ituc is open to a broader view of the environment even though there is no sustained focus on other issues, such as food, biodiversity or water, as there is for climate (e.g., Ituc, 2018, 2017; Carrau, Forero & Wel, 2020). This is more evident in its 2021 guide to action (Ituc, 2021). Its *Equal Times* carries many stories and opinions that address a broader set of environmental issues and perspectives. The work of the Just Transition Centre is also touching upon non-energy transitions, albeit less centrally. A recent publication by one of the labour NGOs it collaborates with, for instance, refers to just

transitions in agriculture in Nigeria and waste picking, in India (Union to Union, 2020). Tuca's approach to just transition, in fact, reflects this broadening of just transition to include sectors that are important to the Global South – as well as to the Global North. Access to clean water, for instance, has become a major issue in the USA. The spread of Covid-19 has highlighted the need for a just transition in occupational and environmental health and safety towards a safer workplace.

Despite the fact that global union organizations are active in broadening the scope of labour environmentalism and just transition they do not have comprehensive environmental worldviews or these are not readily available on their websites, e.g., in the case of ITF. An examination of formal statements as well as the websites of the various global union organizations shows that, where they deal with the environment, they largely focus on climate change or energy or specific issues of significance to the organization. It is reasonable to argue that global union federations, and all unions, will address those aspects of the environment that are of significance to their members. However, there are no developed policies on biodiversity by the Building and Workers International, toxins by IndustriALL, or the oceans by ITF. The PSI's worldwide projects in the Global South are wide in their aspirations but include only two that deal with climate and none on the environmental quality of any other public services. This does not mean that the labour environmentalists within those organizations and collaborating unions are not aware of the gaps or not trying to expand the scope. The PSI, for instance, has a pilot project on just transition and public services in the Global South. Hopefully it will expand to cover water and other public services. The ITF is actively trying to connect just transition with public transportation, also in the Global South, much of which is precarious, but male, and will be affected by decarbonization.

More recently, IndustriALL as well as the Ituc, the Etuc and other unions in the Global North have connected Industry 4.0 and sustainable industrial policy to just transition as part of their Future of Work initiative (IndustriALL, 2021a and b). This broadening of the scope of just transition is an important development and requires a more comprehensive socio-ecological platform. The need for such a broader synthesis was evident in the Etui/Etuc's February 2021 conference entitled 'Towards a New Socio-Ecological Contract.' In line with the analysis, so far, one must ask whether this approach is more appropriate for industrial and newly industrial countries. A comparison with the ILO's (2015) and, even more so, Tuca's (2020) broader vision of just transition suggests that this is the case.

An examination of the work of global union organizations and their close allies in the Global South does show that unions in these countries are pushing for a broadening of the scope of just transition to include biodiversity, agriculture and

other activities. Such pressures are generally connected to strong and active unions in those sectors. But the focus on energy is not only a North-South issue. Frontline, formal energy workers in much of the Global South are unionized and amongst the best paid workers. Focusing on climate change and, even more so, on energy, also leaves the majority of workers in the Global North outside the scope of just transition. Like scale, therefore, the examination of the scope of just transition, as it currently stands, reaffirms that there is a North-South dynamic built into it but, also, highlights that the hegemonic scope cuts across the North-South divide to privilege and marginalize workers and communities in both the Global North and the Global South.

## Closing comments

### Scale and scope

Despite the gaps identified global and regional union organizations and supportive national unions have been successful in shaping the global debate, within the world of labour and the world of global governance, with respect to just transition and climate change. This is a formidable accomplishment. Why have they not been able to promote the adoption of Just Transition strategies by affiliates further? The self-evident explanation is that global union organizations remain weak confederal entities (Stavis, Morena & Krause, 2020). During the last two decades a number of people within and close to global union organizations have sought to make them 'more like unions' – as in the case of Global Framework Agreements- as well as promote global agendas that could have a boomerang effect at the national level -as in the case of labour environmentalism and just transition. The slow diffusion of just transition cannot be laid at their feet as if they had the authority and resources but made poor choices. Rather, their confederal -rather than federal- nature limits their effectiveness.

There is good reason to argue that global union organizations ought to be more federal, at least with respect to climate change. More so than any other global policy, climate policy has momentous domestic and international implications in terms of its impacts on domestic and transnational policy and in terms of resources. It can be considered as a prefigurative element of a global state in the sense that there is a complex but identifiable locus of decision-making and authority. That is not the case with respect to financialization, which is even more pervasive, because there is no central locus of regulation – other perhaps than the US Federal Reserve Board and Treasury. There is a good argument to be made that stronger global union organiza-

tions will be better situated to create a stronger common policy based on what they have already accomplished with very limited resources<sup>3</sup>.

In addition to the weakness of global union organizations it is tempting to explain the slow diffusion of just transition in terms of the limited resources of many Southern countries and unions. But this explanation is less compelling when dealing with the Brics as well as unions in countries members of the G-20 or the OECD. Unions in those countries have been prominent in other fora and campaigns, are well developed politically and organizationally and many of these countries have significant resources – enough to have space programs or build nuclear reactors or host large multinationals. A blanket explanation that unions in the Global South have not adopted JT strategies because of resources or poverty requires closer examination. This may be the case for the poorest and most export dependent amongst them but not for the ones mentioned above (Rosemberg, 2015). But even in those cases, manufacturing and energy unions are amongst the stronger and more influential, where capital and states allow them to organize, and they have similar concerns about the future of fossil fuels as similar unions around the world. In short, the positionality of workers -and communities- is a factor that also modifies the dominance of North-South dynamics (Cumbers *et al.*, 2008).

### **Towards a Just Transition for All?**

Should the scope of just transition be broadened beyond climate energy or would this dilute its impacts? Evidently climate change affects everything on earth, a fairly compelling argument. Such an approach, however, also ends up narrowing the scope of the environment and environmental harm by rendering other existential concerns heteronomous or derivative values. In practical terms this marginalizes those workers and communities directly dispossessed by agribusiness, water enclosure, automation, relocation, toxins in products that they use to make a living, and the collapse of ecosystems. It also obscures the fact that many workers and communities in those sectors benefit a great deal and, like fossil fuel workers, will resist an ecological transition, particularly an unjust one.

Yet, the mechanistic addition of environmental problems next to each other will complicate things as every separate union, each from its own ‘position’, calls for recognition. A comprehensive socioecological synthesis, however, can actually

3. This does not mean that if they were federal organizations their policies would have been better in quality. Nor does it mean that confederal organizations do not have an impact. Confederal organizations have and are being used to promote particular approaches and priorities favored by the dominant affiliates.

help identify the common drivers underlying ecological harm and the key strategies to address it. It can arguably simplify things. Gender provides an example that can help us understand that such an ambitious shift is not impossible or new - and global unions have played a leading role here. Unions that are serious about gender do not simply allow some women to join their ranks nor reserve some skills for women. Rather, they adopt a more profound commitment to both a membership that is gender-free and a society that is so. The goal of gender equality is to change the values of societies and organizations to the point where equality is taken for granted rather than being applied episodically. The same applies with respect to ethnicity, color, sexual preferences and citizenship (on gender and just transition see Women's Environment and Development Organization – Wedo, 2016).

This approach is even more appropriate with respect to the expansion of just transition beyond environmental transitions, such as Industry 4.0, sustainable industry, health care or precarity. One of the two people to first use the term recently pointed out that universal health care in the USA will also require a massive just transition for workers in the sector.<sup>4</sup> The other made the case in IndustriALL's connection of Just Transition and The Future of Work (IndustriALL, 2021a). Are there any grounds on the basis of which we can avoid this expansion? In my view just transitions are necessary for all transitions but their scale and scope must be inclusive across North and South and across categories of workers and communities. Simply adding non-environmental just transitions to environmental just transitions will in fact complicate things by creating a highly fragmented set of policies. As I noted with respect to environmental transitions we need a socio-ecological synthesis. There are a number of examples of this, including the Ocaw, the CCOO, the Etuc, the ILO, Tuca, Nums and others. These syntheses are neither easy nor the same. They reflect different world views and contestations. But they are steps in the necessary direction. The starting point will have to be the realization that every social practice is environmental and every environmental practice is social. As Rätzl and Uzzell (2012, 2013) have written we are long overdue to mend the breach between nature and labour. A just transition that does not do so actively reinforces the inequalities and power relations that this breach obscures and reinforces.

4. Les Leopold in webinar on history of just transition organized by Just Transition Listening Project (July 22, 2020). At <https://www.labor4sustainability.org/just-transition-listening-project/>.

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### **Abstract**

*The globalization of Just Transition in the world of labour: the politics of scale and scope*

Just Transition has become the major expression of labour environmentalism at the global level and global union organizations have played a central role. My goal in this article is to provide an analytically informed account of this trajectory. The first part of this contribution, therefore, clarifies the analytical scheme. In the second and main part I will use this analytical scheme to trace the role of global unions in the globalization of just transition within global labour. In particular I will argue that the globalization of just transition within the world of labour remains a work in progress while it reflects both North-South and sectoral dynamics. I close by commenting on the causes behind these findings and the prospects and challenges of broadening just transition.

Keywords: Just Transition; Global unions; Labour environmentalism.

### **Resumo**

*A globalização da Transição Justa no mundo do trabalho: políticas de escala e de escopo*

O artigo trata da chamada “transição justa” enquanto principal expressão do ambientalismo trabalhista em nível global, e mostra como as organizações sindicais internacionais têm desempenhado um papel central nessa discussão. O objetivo da contribuição é fornecer um relato analiticamente informado dessa trajetória. Em sua primeira parte, esclarece o esquema analítico utilizado; na segunda e principal parte, emprega tal esquema para traçar o papel dos sindicatos globais na globalização da “transição justa”. Em particular, argumenta-se que a globalização da “transição justa” no mundo do trabalho continua sendo um processo em andamento, na medida em que reflete tanto as dinâmicas Norte-Sul quanto as setoriais. Conclui-se com um comentário sobre as causas por detrás desses achados, bem como sobre as perspectivas e desafios para ampliar a “transição justa”.

Palavras-chave: Transição Justa; Sindicatos globais; Ambientalismo trabalhista.

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