

Roundtable B-9: Can Workers and Communities Adapt to Climate Change - A North-South Approach

Discussion Leaders: Bheki Ntshalintshali, Congress of South African Trade Unions; Aminur Repon Chowdhury, Free Trade Union Congress-Bangladesh; Monica Onyia, Trades Union Congress-Nigeria; Barbara Byrd, Oregon State AFL-CIO, Jehan Decrop, Confederation des Syndicat Chretiens-Belgium, Sari Sairanen, Canadian Auto Workers; Jessica Bailey, Rockefeller Brothers Fund; Ted Glick, Climate Crisis Coalition

Facilitator: Maria Figueroa, Cornell Global Labor Institute

PRESENTATIONS

On the question of worker and community adaptation to climate change, **Bheki Ntshalintshali representing the Congress of South African Trade Unions** addressed the issue of development rights and the importance of inclusion in the decision making process. Observing that, if Southern nations felt excluded from the process, the response to climate change initiatives in these regions would in all probability be negative. He also discussed the efforts in South Africa to organize Trade Union and Environmental leaders around this issue.

Aminur Repon Chowdhury of the Free Trade Union Congress (FTUC) of Bangladesh focused on the necessity for joint cooperation between the Trade Unions and Global Corporations in tackling the challenges that lay ahead.

Nigerian Trade Union Congress panel member Monica Onyia stressed the need for poverty relief in her region, where the situation is presently so desperate that a solution to climate change seems a mere after-thought compared to the struggle to achieve a living wage, potable water, housing, electricity, education, and health care.

Barbara Byrd of the Oregon State AFL-CIO spoke on the formation of an Oregon Apollo Alliance and the obstacle of bringing together labor organizations and environmentalists who have differed in the past, reporting some success with recent Labor backed legislation receiving support from environmental circles.

Representatives from both the global North and the global South discussed the fear workers have about job security if climate change initiatives are enacted. Acknowledging the legitimacy of many of these concerns, the question of job loss and economic dislocation was brought to the forefront.

Jehan Decrop from the Confederation des Syndicat Chrétien's (CSC) of Belgium conveyed his country's advancement toward meeting their commitment to the KYOTO protocols and the trade union's promotion of investment in clean development mechanisms in Southern countries with distinct social criteria, as opposed to purchasing carbon credits on the international market.

Along with the many manufacturing concerns of her constituency, **Sari Sairanen of the Canadian Auto Workers** pointed out the necessity of educating young people as to the matters of our environment, citing the CAW's sponsorship of the Earth Day Program. Also discussed was the CAW's allocation of environmental representative's to work with employers on their mutual behalf for the purposes of achieving greener working environments as well as their work building coalitions with South African trade unionists in an effort to strengthen global partnerships.

Jessica Bailey of the Rockefeller Brothers Fund commended Labor's active participation in the search for alternatives and recognized the need to form broad coalitions to pressure government to take all necessary actions.

A co-founder of the Climate Crisis Coalition, Ted Glick echoed the need for activism beyond environmentalist borders, examining the North-South relationship to the climate crisis in terms of responsibility as to cause and effect, pointing out that social and economic justice must be considered critical components in devising a solution.

DISCUSSION

During the latter half of the dialogue **Jessy Tolkan, campaign director of the Energy Action Coalition** emphasized the potential of young people in bringing about the necessary changes, questioning what the various represented organizations were doing to harness that potential. Several respondents to this question spoke of an assortment of educational initiatives they were currently sponsoring. One program director from **AFSCME District Council 37** conveyed the union's intention to build a 'youth program', expressing renewed inspiration as a result of the conference.

A participant from the **United Steelworkers** highlighted the significance of linking the topic of climate change to other crucial economic issues in order to bring the matter to the forefront in the thinking of the working class. Relating the issues of world poverty and global warming, **Paul Geoffrey from the National Wildlife Federation**, called for accountability in regards to those who would be charged with the funding and execution of those measures deemed vital to the solutions, while assuring equitable procedures from North to South. Also examined were the effects of privatization and the need to bring multi-national corporations and financial institutions into alignment with a socially, economically, and environmentally, sound agenda.