

## **Roundtable C-19: Blue-Green Alliances: The Global Experience of Union-Environment Coalitions and Campaigns**

Discussion Leaders: Jerry Van Den Berge - Abvakabo-FNV - Netherlands; Dave Foster, United Steelworkers; Joe Radisich, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU); Jim Rogers, President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys, United Auto Workers; Ron Carver, International Brotherhood of Teamsters - Ports Division; Joe Uehlein, Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES); Cecil Corbin-Mark, WE ACT

Facilitator: Kate Bronfenbrenner, Cornell ILR

### **PRESENTATIONS**

**North Western Regional Director of the United Steelworkers, Dave Foster** shared that his support for Blue-Green alliances came directly from his 31 years of experience as part of the American labor movement. Explaining that after years of watching labor lose political ground in the U.S. culminating in the results of the 2004 presidential election, he became convinced that labor must reposition itself as part of a larger more progressive movement. Recognizing that to overturn right-wing corporate politics here in the U.S. and challenge the rise of global economic forces, labor must ally itself with other factions seeking to reform the global economy. Noting that the most effective of such groups has been the environmental movement, **Mr. Foster** pointed to some of the shared assumptions of both labor and environmentalist experience; that market solutions to capitalist economic systems do not work, markets are imperfect at best, and that markets need to be restricted and reformed in order to assure the consideration of workers' interests. Having a history of working with the environmental movement for short-term political purposes, in 2005 the Steelworkers leadership met with leading national environmentalist groups for the purpose of forging a more concrete coalition. The **Blue-Green Alliance** that came about as a result of these efforts is currently pursuing a broad political agenda promoting carbon reduction, green chemistry, job creation, and global trade reformation.

**Joe Uehlein from the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies (CERES)** spoke to the question of organizing, emphasizing the need to understand and address self interest while engaging in broad organizing. Having learned from his experience as an **AFL-CIO** representative to the **United Nations Commission on Global Warming**, he expressed the significance of speaking in clear plain language, understanding the issues and present realities while operating any organizing campaign. The necessity for labor leaders to broaden their agendas beyond the shop floor was eloquently illustrated with a quote from **Walter Reuther**.

**Joe Radisich, International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU)-West Coast**, reported on the **ILWU's** recent campaign against air pollution targeting West Coast shipping, trucking, and railroad industries demanding that they lower their emissions.

Pointing out that the number one source of air pollution in Los Angeles is the port; the **ILWU** has been working in conjunction with Los Angeles **Mayor, Antonio Villaraigosa** to assure 'greening' of the port.

**Jerry Van Den Berge of Abvakabo-FNV-Netherlands** spoke about the Dutch Blue-green coalition, **Green for Sure**, consisting of the public services union **Abvakabo**, and the private sector **Federation of Dutch Trade Unions (FNV)**. The environmental side to this alliance consists of **Green Peace**, the **World Wildlife Foundation**, **Friends of the Earth**, and the **Dutch Society for Nature and Environment**. Currently **Green For Sure** is endeavoring to build an energy plan for the Netherlands. With a target date of 2030, this Blue-green alliance is aiming for a CO2 emissions reduction of 50%, avoiding an excessive production of nuclear energy and seeks a pragmatic approach to the issues of job loss, dislocation, re-education, and job creation. The group has devised an all encompassing **Climate Bill** which would budget carbon emissions, double charging individuals or industries that go over-budget while offering proportional rebates at a doubled rate for those that stay under-budget. The Bill also seeks to impose an obligation for the use of renewables by power companies which would be stepped up incrementally over time as well as calling for standardization of various energy consuming products and subsidization of 'greening' technologies focusing on job creation.

**Jim Rogers, President of the Association of Legal Aid Attorneys, United Auto Workers** referred to the relationship between the **Association of Legal Aid Attorneys** and the industrial sector of the **UAW** as one example of a cross-sector coalition that works, citing a recent occurrence where the **UAW** mobilized in conjunction with the **NRDC** to keep funding earmarked for **NYSERDA** from being monopolized by the state legislature. Exposing the opinion that blue collar workers are environmentally 'unfriendly' as myth, this steering committee member of the **APOLLO Alliance** reminded the panel that the blue collar workforce stands to bear the most adverse economic effects if any systemic transformation does not take their interests into consideration.

**Cecil Corbin-Mark, West Harlem Environmental Action Inc.-WE ACT**, a member of the Blue-green **Just Transition Alliance** and the **Environmental Justice Movement**, whose work has been primarily in low income and minority communities, expressed concern for the economic effects of transition. Amplifying, that the dependence of these communities on effected industries for sustenance raises the question as to how to achieve sound environmental practice balanced with just economic policy. Based upon the **Six Principles of the Environmental Justice Movement** several global alliances seeking just transition alternatives were presented to the discussion.

**Ron Carver, International Brotherhood of Teamsters-Ports Division** spoke of the **Teamster** campaign to organize high polluting owner operated trucks transporting cargo from ports to distribution centers. Emphasizing, that alliances made with environmentalists have been paramount in getting the drivers of these vehicles designated as employees, allowing them to be unionized. Reporting that many of these drivers live in the highly polluted neighborhoods surrounding the ports and that the children in these communities suffer from asthma at a rate twice the national average. The **Teamsters** are

currently working in partnership with the **NRDC** to ensure these trucks are replaced with vehicles that meet **EPA** standards. The issue of cross-boarder strategies and tactics was addressed with a focus on bringing labor to the foray as an equal partner articulating the potential power of coalition bargaining.

## **DISCUSSION**

Facilitator **Kate Brofenbrunner** emphasized the need to build a collective vision. The Netherlands carbon budget system was questioned as to whether or not credits could be sold. Pointing to the deficiencies in the European system **Jerry Van Den Berge** explained that the supported **Climate Bill** proposes that government control the auctioning of excess credits while reducing their availability each year raising the cost of carbon credits to create a financial incentive for decreasing emissions. **Cecil Corbin-Mark** stressed that Blue-green alliances must promote policies for the funding of communities and workers displaced by transition, reiterating that government has to take a proactive role as private enterprise can not be trusted to ensure social and economic justice.

Advances in the formation of pragmatic international unions intent on engaging massive multi-national corporations on both economic and environmental issues was addressed, with **Dave Foster** citing the recent formation of the **United Steelworkers** merger committee exploring an amalgamation with two British unions and their strategic alliances with seven other unions in Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, and Europe. Much was offered with regards to promoting solidarity within the labor movement, often plagued by conflicts of interest, finding themselves at odds not only with environmental objectives, but within their own arena as well.

The need for further inclusion of representatives from the Global-South was proclaimed an integral ingredient for forming effective global Blue-green alliances.