

Climate Action Must Be Local and Inclusive

By Nigel Barriffe, Carolyn Egan, Felipe Nagata, and John Cartwright on behalf of the Good Jobs for All Coalition

Last Friday, 25 million people worldwide marched for climate action, and this Friday, tens of thousands are expected to march in Canada. It's never been clearer that people from all walks of life want immediate, meaningful action to drastically reduce greenhouse gases.

It is well past time for Toronto to declare a climate emergency. Dozens of Ontario municipalities like Ottawa, London, and Sudbury have formally acknowledged the urgency of the climate crisis. Toronto has not. Yet.

Climate change is the key issue of our time. While it is incumbent on all individuals, corporations, and governments to do more, Toronto is uniquely positioned to "think globally, act locally." As Canada's largest city and North America's fourth largest municipality, Toronto must act responsibly, even ambitiously, in this critical fight.

The Good Jobs for All Coalition calls on Toronto City Council to do the right thing. Declaring a climate emergency is just the first step; we need a comprehensive plan with resources and collaboration baked in. Toronto's climate action strategy TransformTO setting us on the right path, but its greenhouse gas reduction target of 80 percent by 2050 must be much stronger. Every City department needs a supporting strategy.

There are human considerations to take into account. A shift to a low-carbon future is inevitable, but it is our hope that Toronto can plan to make a socially-just transition. The good news is that there are excellent strategies in practice elsewhere, and in some cases, are already a part of Toronto's vernacular.

The "just transition" approach comes from the labour movement. The goal is to minimize the impact of environmental policies on workers in affected industries and communities and to involve workers in decisions about their livelihoods. The costs of environmental adjustments should be shared across society rather than shouldered alone by those most affected by them. We don't need to look far for an example: the Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses du Québec has been doing this work for years.

Recently, Toronto City Council approved a community benefits framework for all future development, and this is another key component of a just climate plan. Community benefits agreements play an important role in ensuring that, when large infrastructure developments take place, the investment is leveraged to create good union jobs, local hiring especially among low-income and racialized communities, youth training, affordable housing, and typically with a focus on carbon reduction.

Toronto has had a Poverty Reduction Strategy since 2015. This all-division anti-poverty lens helps evaluate policy implications for everything from public services to taxation. That lens must be a critical feature of any climate action plan.

The Good Jobs for All Coalition challenges Toronto to develop more “good, green jobs.” More than just environmentally-focused, this means employment that is viable, that allows every family to sustain themselves and that contributes significantly to protecting the environment.

We may all owe our planet’s future to the earnest determination of Greta Thunberg and the millions of other youth activists who have answered the call to action. Our young people are worried about a future that many of today’s decision-makers won’t see.

Similarly, people whose lived realities are far from centres of power – Indigenous communities, racialized people, forced migrants – are most likely to be bearing the brunt of climate change. It will take a concerted effort by legislators to ensure that these perspectives and experiences are taken into consideration.

We can choose real solutions and reject the dogma of politicians who lack the vision to take us into the future. Never mind carbon tax cuts; there are no jobs on a dead planet.

We call on the City of Toronto to demonstrate true leadership: declare a climate emergency, collaborate with youth, workers and their unions, and racialized communities to develop a well-resourced and integrated plan for climate action, and speak forcefully to other levels of government. The time is now.

The Good Jobs for All Coalition is an alliance of community, labour, social justice, youth and environmental organizations in the Toronto region - goodjobsforall.ca

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