

Trade Union Program for a Public Low-Carbon Energy Future

***Explanatory Note:** The following “Trade Union Program for a Public, Low-Carbon, Energy Future” (“Program”) is the result of the work of a Trade Union Task Force consisting of more than 30 unions. Focusing mainly on the power sector, the Program is an attempt to rally the international trade union movement behind an ambitious political effort to bring about a fundamental shift in climate and energy policy. This shift is needed both to correct the failures of the market model and to ensure that the energy transition is socially just, economically viable, and effective in terms of reaching climate goals.*

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TRADE UNION PROGRAM FOR A PUBLIC LOW-CARBON ENERGY FUTURE

RECOGNISING THAT:

- Access to a healthy environment has been declared a human right by the UN Human Rights Council, in recognition of the interconnected human rights crises of environmental degradation and climate change¹
- Lack of adequate access to energy remains a major source of poverty, inequality and insecurity, in violation of human rights and contrary to the aims of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals
- Widespread electrification of many energy-dependent processes will be necessary to meet agreed, science-based decarbonisation targets
- Ensuring access to affordable, safe, secure, reliable, low-carbon electricity will therefore be essential to meeting most future energy needs
- All known methods of capturing, transforming, and distributing energy for use involve some degree of environmental disruption
- Neoliberal climate and energy policies — which are tied to privatisation and commodification — have failed to halt the rise of greenhouse gas emissions
- Privatisation, marketisation, and liberalisation of electrical power systems have led to price increases, falling levels of service quality, and inadequate investment
- The transition required to meet decarbonisation targets will entail substantial changes affecting workers, especially in many energy-related areas of employment, and many of these changes may be very disruptive if their impacts are not addressed
- Many countries in the global south continue to face a crippling legacy of colonialism and debt, constraining their ability to procure the technologies and resources needed to ensure universal access to electricity

¹ UN News, "Access to a healthy environment, declared a human right by UN rights council," 8 October 2021, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/10/1102582>

THEREFORE, the signatories hereby endorse and agree to promote the following **Trade Union Program for a Public, Low-Carbon, Energy Future** as a framework for the energy transition and for future energy systems.

1. FULFILL THE RIGHT TO ENERGY

- a) Recognise access to energy as a human right and a basic need
- b) Ensure the provision of electricity on a public goods basis
- c) Restore the obligation and the capacity of public agencies to eradicate energy poverty and precariousness

2. REVERSE NEOLIBERAL LAWS AND DIRECTIVES AFFECTING THE POWER SECTOR

- a) Dissolve wholesale, retail and capacity markets for electricity
- b) Remove privileges and legal protections for privately-owned Independent Power Producers (IPPs), including by potentially renegotiating and cancelling long-term power purchase agreements (PPAs)
- c) End public subsidies that “de-risk” investment and thus guarantee profits for private interests
- d) Restore the right of public bodies to regulate user prices in ways that promote fair treatment and energy efficiency

3. ENFORCE A NEW PRO-PUBLIC MANDATE

- a) Establish clear requirements and guidelines for public power companies to drive the energy transition in ways that meet the needs of people and protect the environment
- b) Stop the further privatisation of power sector assets and services
- c) Reclaim power sector companies to public ownership where they have been privatised
- d) Fully re-integrate (“re-bundle”) power generation, transmission, distribution, and grid management functions
- e) Ensure that all resources and essential energy-related technologies are publicly owned and managed in a manner consistent with a global public goods approach
- f) Ensure that energy-related R&D, waste management, treatment, recycling and all related services are under public ownership
- g) Seek to develop, in conjunction with indigenous peoples, in order to obtain their free, prior and informed consent, a vision and plan for their relationship to public energy systems that protects indigenous laws and treaties

4. ESTABLISH A PUBLIC, PLANNED APPROACH TO ENERGY TRANSITION

- a) Demand that national governments and multilateral bodies conduct a rigorous and ongoing assessment of decarbonisation technologies and pathways, informed by clear environmental, societal and social criteria
- b) Diversify production of technologies across countries and regions in order to create jobs by developing local industrial capacity
- c) Mandate ambitious economy-wide energy efficiency and conservation targets
- d) Implement national, regional, or municipal public works programs to achieve energy efficiency and performance objectives
- e) Assess the potential and/or need for distributed generation on a case-by-case basis

5. INTRODUCE DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE AND CONTROL

- a) Involve workers and users in democratic decision-making processes with the statutory duty to operate in a manner consistent with the long-term interests of people and the environment
- b) Maintain an ongoing democratic public debate on subjects around the energy transition
- c) Ensure formal representation of workers, users and elected officials on the boards of directors of reclaimed public companies
- d) Create user rights councils to keep public companies accountable for achieving social and environmental objectives
- e) Ensure that proposed new infrastructure projects comply with strict environmental standards and contribute to the well-being of local populations

6. PROVIDE A HIGH LEVEL OF COLLECTIVE GUARANTEES FOR EMPLOYEES

- a) Require public energy companies to be adequately staffed and funded in order to ensure quality service
- b) Value the professional skills of the workforce and continuously invest in education and training
- c) Ensure that operations and working conditions meet the highest safety standards
- d) Guarantee whistleblower protections for employees

7. PUBLICLY FUND THE ENERGY TRANSITION

- a) Make full use of public spending power to finance the transition as a public good
- b) Undertake direct public procurement on the best terms possible
- c) Cancel all public debt that inhibits the ability of former colonised countries to pursue an energy transition and to meet basic needs within a framework of energy self-determination
- d) Establish or improve multilateral financing mechanisms to ensure access to essential energy-related components and equipment for countries facing financial, material or other resource constraints

8. ESTABLISH A GLOBAL PUBLIC GOODS FRAMEWORK FOR MULTILATERAL COOPERATION

- a) Abolish intellectual property restrictions adopted under the WTO, Energy Charter Treaty, and other bilateral and multilateral trade agreements that currently impede a just energy transition for many countries
- b) Build “public-public partnerships” to strengthen skills and knowledge sharing, technical cooperation, etc., between public power sector entities on a not-for-profit basis, including to disseminate technologies and skills globally
- c) Ensure that multilateral development banks provide sufficient support to public entities in developing countries to enable the delivery of universal low-carbon electrification with reliability of service