

GOOD JOBS GREEN JOBS



Left to right: Sean Sweeney CGLI, Hilary French UNEP, Michael Renner Worldwatch, Philip Pearson TUC UK.

Hundreds of union leaders, environmentalist, business leaders, policy makers and government officials gathered in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania on March 13 and 14 2008 to discuss the economic and employment benefits of a clean energy future at Good Jobs, Green Jobs: a National Green Jobs Conference. Coordinated by the Blue-Green Alliance, a strategic partnership between the United Steelworkers and the Sierra Club, the event launched a nationwide dialogue about moving the United States toward a more sustainable economy. The conference addressed what kinds of policies, incentives and investments will help drive the green economy forward and create green, decent employment.

The Conference was mainly focused in the United States, but the international theme was not left behind. U.N. Environment Program (UNEP) advisor Hilary French moderated a break out session entitled *Green Jobs Around the World*. Panelists included Michael Renner of Worldwatch Institute, Philip Pearson of the United Kingdom's Trade Union Congress, and Sean Sweeney of the Cornell Global Labor Institute.

Hilary French opened the session by introducing the panelists and providing a brief overview of UNEP's work on green jobs. Michael Renner previewed preliminary findings of the UNEP Green Jobs report which is scheduled to be released in May 2008. He began his presentation by acknowledging that there has been increasing awareness of the green economy and green employment, but that this sector still represents a small fraction of the global economy. Renner defined green jobs as those that "contribute appreciably to maintaining or restoring environmental quality and avoiding future damage to the earth's ecosystems." These jobs can be found in manufacturing, agriculture, construction, engineering, administration and in a host of additional fields. He cautioned that we must not assume that all green jobs would be new ones. "It is more likely that in most cases low-key changes in day-to-day work practices and methods will predominate in existing companies and industries". He also spoke of the need for green jobs to also be decent ones. Jobs that fail to pay a living wage and do not provide necessary benefits should not be considered green. He used work on Brazilian sugar cane and Indonesian palm oil plantations linked with biofuels production as an example of employment that has been defined as green, but which should not be considered as such due to poor labor conditions.

Renner also gave a brief summary of the status of green employment in the alternative energy industries and transportation. Globally there are about 2.3 million jobs in the renewable energy sector. The percentage of transportation manufacturing jobs that could be considered green in the European Union, Japan and US are 7.5%, 6.3% and 1.2% respectively. This data underscores the point that although green employment is beginning to take shape, there is still a lot of work that needs to be done to green employment.

Following Mr. Renner, Philip Pearson spoke about transitioning to a low carbon economy. He said that a recent study initiated by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) revealed that job gains from climate change strategies would outweigh job losses overall – but managing the transition to a low carbon economy was critical. New green jobs wouldn't necessarily appear at the same time and place as jobs displaced. A range of measures were therefore required – not only investment in green jobs, but skills and training programs, economic diversification, and social protection measures. He spoke referred to the international trade unions' recent participation in the UN Climate Change Conference in Bali, where a key union demand was to secure *Just Transition* provisions in the new UN treaty. Because greenhouse gases do not respect international borders, international trade union involvement in the Kyoto process is vital. He outlined the TUC's "Greening of the Workplace" program. Workplaces burn energy, consume resources, generate waste and travel – key reasons why unions should be engaged in greening their workplace. The TUC's pilot projects were demonstrating how practical engagement of workers and management is securing real energy savings, and in the longer-term, boost membership and sustaining green working practices. Lastly, he spoke about Europe's new CO2 cap and trade system (EU ETS), with many similarities to the Lieberman-Warner proposals. Though unions had to remain vigilant, Pearson noted that since the system was implemented throughout Europe, there was little evidence to date of job losses.

Sean Sweeney also cautioned against an overly rosy view of the green jobs picture. He stated that 18% investment increase in renewable energy, \$66-85 billion in

2007, gives people the impression that everything is going in the right direction, but he stated that this investment needs to be ramped up. He acknowledged that investment in adaptation is just as important as mitigation. Mr. Sweeney emphasized his point by stating that the most affected countries of climate change were poor countries in the global south and more than a handful of investments are needed in that part of the globe. “The global spread of green jobs is absolutely critical from the point of view of preventing further natural resource depletion and for climate protection”. His talk focused on six serious obstacles to the creation of millions of green jobs at the global level; insufficient green investment, not enough technology transfer, the current market trends not being particularly green, the crisis in agriculture, the ferocious and uncontrolled pace of urbanization, and the growth imperative.

The break out session was followed by a lively question and answer session which focused on challenges to green employment, including globalization, agriculture and trade. Participants agreed that although this was a national conference that mainly focused on green jobs in the United States, the international dimension is imperative. The entire panel underscored the point stated by Mr. Pearson that because “greenhouse gases do not have national borders,” neither should solutions.

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