



# **Just Transition:**

**Latin American Debates  
for the Energy Future**

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**T**he world is facing a major environmental crisis for which the prevailing energy paradigm—a 72% of which consists of fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas)—is mainly responsible due to greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions. Not only pollution but also unequal access to energy and corporate capture are the central pieces of the global energy mix that is the foundation of the model of accumulation.

As a response to this complex picture, the concept of "energy transition" has had an increased presence in the agenda of different types of bodies in recent years. However, the most widespread perspectives are almost exclusively focused on the shift from fossil to renewables sources. This view, which we consider partial, does not question the current model, where energy is taken as a commodity instead of as a right. Similarly, strictly technical perspectives do not question another fundamental aspect of this problem—the future of energy generation. In short, these approaches leave aside a necessary reflection on the link between energy and the mode of production that has shaped its current form and which they contribute to reproduce.

Nonetheless, since the end of the 1970s, in the context of diverse social struggles, different sectors have tried to consider the transition as a much wider problem than the mere replacement of energy sources. Thus, they began to imagine the consequences that such a transition could and should bring in terms of environment, work, ethnicity, gender and, finally, at a systemic level.



**Transition** (*Transición Justa Popular* in Spanish). With a similar appraisal of the situation as that of the social dialogue, those who uphold this position understand that the energy transition is only possible if the social relations of production as a whole are put into question.

- In Latin America, unions have a strong influence in these debates. Although they have a long history in the region, these notions began to be discussed through institutional channels after milestones such as the creation of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA-CSA) in 2008. In 2012, the affiliation of several of its members to the Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) also allowed for an advance in the debates regarding Just Transition.
- Since 2015, the advance of right-wing politics redefined the priorities of union activism in the region, and the centrality of the debate about Just Transition diminished.
- Different sectors from labor, union, social and indigenous movements in Latin America highlight the need to consider Just Transition both regionally and systemically. This includes taking into account the complete set of inequalities that the present mode of production reproduces, whether of class, gender, race, or any other kind.
- In this sense, another important element is the need to establish the specificities of Just Transition in the Global South, in order to differentiate it from its counterpart in the North, since every territory has its own characteristics, even within the peripheral countries themselves. During the last decade, there has been an emergence of spaces of encounter and debate that seek to dialogue taking each difference into account.



## 1. Why “Just Transition” and Not Simply “Energy Transition”?

**T**he world is facing an environmental crisis of vast proportions, for which the dominant energy mix—72% of which are fossil fuels (coal, oil, and gas)—is mostly to blame. According to the World Meteorological Organization, record levels of greenhouse gases (GHG) were found trapped in the atmosphere—an increase of 147% for carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>); 147% for methane (CH<sub>4</sub>), and 123% for nitrous oxide (N<sub>2</sub>O). Not only does this put into question the possibility of living up to the goals established through global agreements against climate change that are still in force, but it is also telling of the palpable risks posed by a speedier increase of global temperatures in the short term, which could potentially endanger the different forms of life in the planet.

In spite of, and to a large extent as a result of, this somber picture the concept of “Just Transition” has been increasingly present in the media agenda of national governments and a diverse variety of multilateral spaces. But there are a series of difficulties and limitations with the way in which the notion of Energy Transition is being used. The most basic of such complexities lies in the variety of meanings given to the notion depending on who is speaking, and most importantly, what their intentions are. Generally associated to a change from energy mixes based on polluting sources to others based on renewable generation, in more visible public discourses Transition is often used from a technical and commodified perspective, focused solely on the environmental aspects of the issue. That is, understanding energy as a tradable good devoid of context, which can be bought and sold according to the rule of “laws” of supply and demand.

Yet this is a limited approach that sidelines the complexity and multidimensional nature of the energy issue, which far from being reduced to mere aspects of generation, transmission



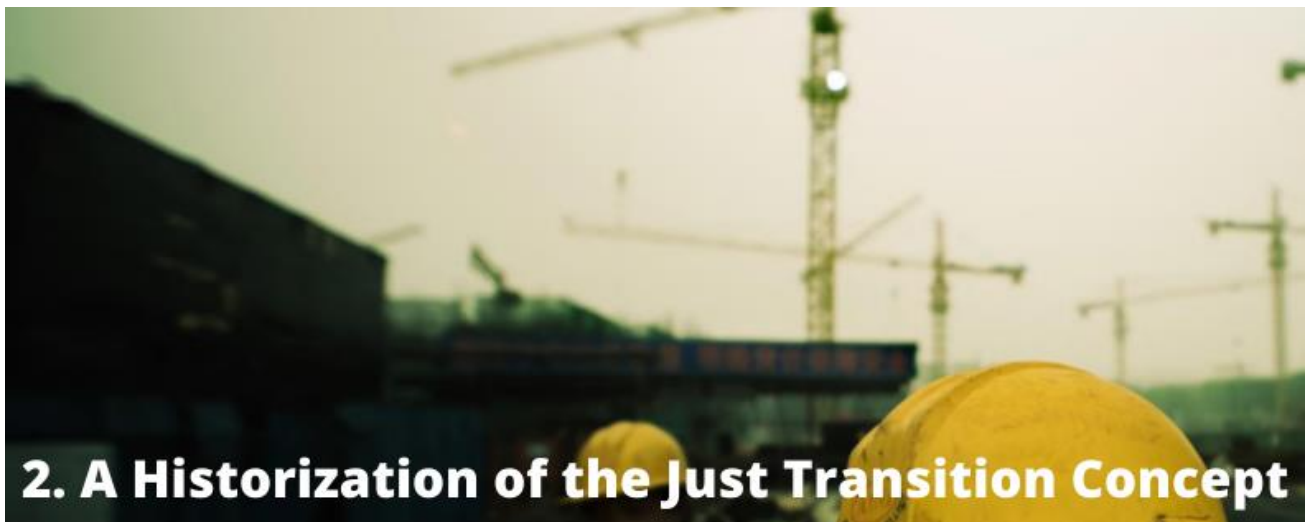
and trading, finds its most basic logics in the entrails of the dominant mode of production and its contradictions, its modes of accumulation and dispossession. Ultimately, the persistence of the fossil-based pattern—the forces of which were a driver of capitalist expansion with its exploitation of populations and territories—does not depend on purely technological matters, but on how power is controlled and managed. This power is concentrated in a few companies, mainly dedicated to oil, which push to keep the current system in place even at the expense of technical modifications. The problem of how we conceive transitions is therefore inherently linked to the need for a reconsideration our wealth generation and distribution modes and their implications for the metabolism of society-nature.

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**From the late 1970s to the early 80s, in the heat of diverse social struggles, different sectors have tried to understand the energy issue and the idea of transition as a much wider problem, beyond mere source replacement. They began pondering on the consequences that a transition should and could have in environmental, labor, ethnic, gender and finally systemic terms. Thus, the notion of Just Transition was brought forth by activists from multiple backgrounds.**  
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Here we will review the origins, evolution and discussions around the meanings of Just Transition. The first part is dedicated to glossing over the origins and history of this notion, especially in its geographic cradle—Europe and the United States. Our journey will begin with the analysis of the trade union, social and political discourse from the late 70s to recent years. In the second section, the notion of Just Transition will be traced back in the rhetoric of the labor world, social and political movements in Latin America. Finally, through conversations with actors from the unions, social struggles and the world of scientific research we will try to understand how Just Transition is currently being thought about and defined in the region.



It is not our purpose to introduce final definitions and rigid concepts, but to contribute to the debate around Just Transition, especially from the viewpoint of those who understand it in a wider sense. That is, not just as a simple shift away from a concentrated fossil paradigm to decentralized renewable sources, but as a possibility for a systemic change that challenges the foundations of the capitalist mode of production and its injustices, giving energy the status of a basic human right, democratizing management decision-making, and persistently asking for what and for whom it is being produced.



**E**ven if environmental movements have been questioning the predominance of ecologically problematic patterns of energy production such as nuclear generation as early as the 1960s, the Just Transition notion was born between the late 1970s and the early 80s. And it emerged from the struggles of the US labor movement represented, in this case, by the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) and their leader, Anthony “Tony” Mazzocchi.

With a history of struggles denouncing workplace health conditions at refineries of the Anglo-Dutch Shell in New Jersey—against which they organized the “first environmental strike” in 1973—the OCAW would go a step further in the mid-80s when it became involved in the events surrounding the closure of Ciba-Geigy, a chemical plant also in New Jersey. The plant’s shutdown—resulting from the actions of environmental activists and government authorities who deemed the plant’s toxic footprint generated by its production to be unsustainable—posed a question as to the future of 650 jobs that would be lost. Against that backdrop, OCAW began negotiations where, agreeing with the environmental unsustainability diagnosis, they sought extraordinary compensation for the employees and training to allow them to readapt to the new environmental regulations.

In short, Mazzocchi and the union’s argument was that even if a transition away from polluting production patterns was essential, it should not be carried out to the detriment of the working class and their immediate needs, especially jobs. Any socio-productive transition, therefore, should also be a just one. Stemming from that union struggle, and always underscoring the multidimensionality of the kind of transition needed, the OCAW

began building ties with different trade union, environmental and social organizations in the US and Canada, and it became more relevant toward the early 1990s. In particular, its strategic alliance with the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union of Canada (CEP), which led to the adoption and dissemination of the principles of Just Transition by the Canadian Congress of Labour in 1997. That same year, the Just Transition Alliance (JTA) was founded in North America, bringing together not only trade unions but also environmental groups from the 80s and 90s with a long-standing involvement in labor, social and environmental issues. With a view to building bridges with diverse organizations, and an internationalist approach, in previous years the OCAW and its allies had participated in discussions about the negative impacts of the 1994 NAFTA agreement. They were present, for example, in the 1999 anti-WTO protests in Seattle and they had forged ties with various NGOs and notably with the AFL-CIO, the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations.

Following this trajectory, it was in the late 1990s and early 2000s when Just Transition became part of the agenda of the international trade union movement. For instance, in November 1999 the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions (ICEM) adopted Just Transition in their second international meeting as a desirable horizon. Earlier, the concept had made it to the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), who in turn took their concerns around energy transition to the Third Climate Summit (COP3) in Kyoto, Japan, in 1997. Such concerns would be reflected in the Summit's final declaration, which called for an equal distribution of the social and economic costs of GHG emissions mitigation policies, in particular with the aim of securing the redeployment of jobs in affected sectors so they could be transferred to areas less harmful to the environment.

In the second half of the 2000s, the Just Transition notion acquired greater visibility and was incorporated into the agenda of multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN). It was also adopted by emerging initiatives like the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), founded in 2006. By the 2000s, the concept became more widely known on a European, and even global, scale, as seen by the fact that the Workers Commissions in Spain, the Trade Union Congress (TUC) in the UK and the Australian

Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) all incorporated Just Transition's core guidelines, especially in terms of workplace environmental safety.

Building on its increasing presence and the leverage provided by the UN and the ITUC, Just Transition would become an almost mandatory debate in meetings organized by institutions such as World Trade Organization (WTO), the different European Union commissions for sustainable development, and global climate meetings such as the COP15, celebrated in 2009 in Copenhagen or the 2012 UN Conference on Sustainable Development in Rio de Janeiro, known as the Rio+20. Likewise, the original concerns of the Just Transition proponents gave way to the creation of major international organizations of mining and energy workers such as the IndustriALL Global Union, born in 2012. The issues around Just Transition were also adopted by workers that are key in any transition project, as is the case of those grouped in the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF).

One of the main concerns as to the concept's dynamism was the need to discuss job creation in low emission sectors, also known as "green jobs". In that sense, a series of experiences in core countries reflect the concrete difficulties of a just energy transition. Perhaps one of the most illustrative cases is Germany.

By June 2018, the German cabinet had heeded the conclusions of the Climate Action Report issued a year earlier, and it announced its plans to achieve a 32% reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2020 from 1990 levels. This decision, which in principle seemed positive, was in fact a regression from the initial 2014 projections that estimated a 40% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 2020, from 1990 levels, inspired by the spirit of the *Energiewende* (energy transition).

One of the major obstacles to production based on clean sources in Germany is posed by the coal industry, accountable for around 40% of the country's power generation. The attempts to move forward with the *Energiewende*, and its "collateral effects", reveal its complexities when we look at the general unemployment rate and we compare it to regions like the Ruhr, Germany's main producer of lignite coal. For instance, by August 2018, while

the nation's unemployment rate was 5.2%, it was 9.2% in the Ruhr. And despite that evident reduction, in the same period the region kept 20,000 direct jobs in the coal industry and 56,000 indirect jobs. Delays in the complete phasing out of coal-fired power generation are a sign that the problem is unsolved—it was postponed until 2028 by a law passed in July 2020, mainly resulting from union and corporate pressures that caused unease among environmental activists.

The German Federation of Unions (DGB, per its German acronym) agreed on the need to shift the energy mix from polluting sources to clean ones, but at the same time it stressed that their biggest concern is the protection of jobs in sectors such as coal production.

In that sense, the set of competing interests means that the debate around how to bring together the environmental concern with the future of jobs in the polluting sectors is still to be settled. However, far from it being a reason to abandon such debates, it is precisely these issues that allow us to reflect on the ultimate basis of the current society and the incompatibilities that make it imperious to conceive alternative dynamics. Seen from that perspective, Just Transition could be assessed not only as a step in the decarbonization of energy mixes and the reconversion of the tasks that certain portions of the working class perform, but rather as a vehicle to overcome the accumulation and reproduction logics that underpin the capitalist mode of production fueled by the current fossil pattern.

That being said, it should be highlighted that together with the global dissemination of Just Transition, the concept underwent changes from its initial meanings, almost exclusively related to concerns about work safety and the protection of jobs. Thanks to this shift, propelled by increasingly “green” public policies and the drive of social struggles, the Just Transition concept became increasingly associated to the idea of a wide and comprehensive environmental justice, often with blurred limits. Thus, as the 2010s progressed, heterogeneous groups like governments, indigenous organizations, philanthropists and green businessmen, different sectors of the feminist movement and NGOs, political organizations, as well as the unions, all appropriated the concept, making it even more complex to define and decidedly polysemic. In short, it became a sort of mantra where different sectors looked for and found definitions in accordance with their current or long-term needs.

Even if widely diverse, we could group these understandings into three main nodes: Corporate Energy Transition, Just Transition for Social Dialogue, and Grassroots Popular Transition.



**T**he sectors associated with this view usually understand the transition from purely technical and 'economist' perspectives. Acknowledging climate change as well as the need to transition to a renewable energy pattern, those who support these types of formulations tend to see the transition as a business niche, that is, the continuity of the commercial supremacy in the energy production logics, in this case "green".

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These groups, usually organized in business chambers, and business representatives who are part of some governments argue about their positions within the framework of what they call "green economy", and prefer to talk about a transition towards "low carbon" societies instead of a Just Transition. The latter appears in some business-oriented multilateral spaces and also in some national political frameworks, as in the case of Chile.

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One of the stances on the future of carbon intensive jobs that these groups repeat the most is the need for a "reconversion" from "old" to "new" jobs, which would imply a constant training by the governments, but with the commitment of the labor force during the process. The use of voluntary retirement schemes with extraordinary compensations for senior workers is usually wielded by those who adhere to a mercantile view of the energy transition as an argument when they elaborate their projections about future energy mixes.





## 2.2. Just Transition for Social Dialogue

**T**he starting point for the proponents of this notion is a dual diagnosis. First, they acknowledge the severity of the climate crisis, resulting to a large extent from fossil fuel combustion, and demanding an immediate response through the replacement of polluting sources by clean ones. Second, they note the need for a Just Transition that considers the life and rights of workers and their families, as well as those of the communities that could end up paying the cost of transforming the energy generation patterns. Thus, one the main conclusions is that there will be no social justice horizons without a progressive redistribution of income, which they consider to be outrageously concentrated in a few hands. In spite of all this, the advocates of this version of Just Transition do not disavow the private sector's activities, although they would subject them to the state's strategic management.

This is the position adopted by organizations such as the IndustriALL or the ITUC and enshrined in WTO documents. The focus is exclusively on how the transition will affect employment sources and how to tackle and reduce the negative impacts that such a transition—together with automatization—will have on the lives of workers. One of the preferred vehicles to raise these concerns is what they call "Social Dialogue"—the direct participation of the labor world organizations on the business, government, and multilateral roundtables where the future dynamics of the Just Transition are defined.

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Seeking to reduce the potential negative effects of the energy transition on the working class, the advocates of the Social Dialogue argue for the creation of “sustainable industrial policies” that take into account economic growth and ask how it will be reconciled with society and the environment. An additional key concern is linked to workplace health in future jobs since they will have to respect the ways of life in the communities where the new industries are settled. In the same vein, in this form of transition it is fundamental to discuss the number of jobs that will be created and how they will coexist with the progressive technification and automatization of factory activities. For that purpose, they say, existing collective bargaining agreements will have to be updated.

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Ultimately, the big question—together with the place workers have in the discussion about the different modes of Just Transition—is how the transformation of the labor market will be financed and who will pay the costs. In that sense, one of the most repeated formulas in the documents produced by these sectors is the need to establish funds for workforce training, readjust workplaces and celebrate prompt meetings to discuss the elaboration of adequate legislative frameworks.



**T**he grassroots variety of Just Transition begins by evaluating the environmental harms generated by fossil combustion and deems the shift toward more sustainable generation options to be essential, also paying especial attention to the consequences that such a shift could have for the workforce and communities. However, unlike Social Dialogue advocates, they understand that any transition must happen together with a deep structural change of the way the economic and political relations that dominate energy are produced and reproduced. In short, they call for a systemic change in every aspect of life.

Adamant about including in their transition horizons the conclusions arising from working groups made up of businessmen and other corporate sectors, trade union organizations of global reach such as Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) advocate for a Just Transition debate from a labor perspective, more connected to the concerns of the working world and the communities affected. Their basic and first diagnosis—one that is not shared by the Social Dialogue group—is that not only is the energy transition *not* unavoidable, but it is also not happening. For TUED, exceedingly positive evaluations of timid increases in energy generation from renewable sources in some core countries and the slight rise in “green” jobs could obscure the deeper analysis that the current crisis calls for, one whose main conclusion is that no transition will be possible without a radical socio-economic and cultural change.

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In lieu of a Social Dialogue, the trade unions grouped in the TUED advance a Social Power based on the premise that a Just Transition cannot be achieved if it is not through a profound restructuring of international political economy beyond the dominant mercantile and energy-hungry trend. According to the grassroots view of Just Transition, energy should begin to be valued as a common good, and in its generation the lives of communities and territories should not be at stake. Access to energy should be a basic human right.

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International gatherings coordinated, for example, by the Translational Institute (TNI) have been instrumental in pushing a dialogue on aspects rarely considered by the original Just Transition alternatives, but which are neuralgic in thinking how a radical transformation of the way we understand energy should be achieved. One of those aspects is the need to situate our reflections in the historical background of each concrete territory, observing the strong inequalities that exist between the North and Global South, and even within the different regions in each country. Thus, they understand that any transition that calls itself “just” must be underpinned by communal struggles for the access to energy and the conservation of sources, and at the same time it should react against all attempts to commodify social life.

Under this logic, Just Transition should be concerned with the reduction of class divides, paying attention to who controls the resources and to what end. The gender issue must also have a salient role in the transition, which should help overcome present inequalities where women and dissident identities are marginalized even within their own family unit while having greater risk of suffering from energy poverty and being the most affected by environmental disasters, making up 80% of all people displaced by natural catastrophes.

Likewise, according to this view, the transition should not reproduce existing racial discrimination patterns nor environmental racism, which allow those holding political and economic power to decide that certain ethnic and cultural subalternized groups are to be sacrificed and dispossessed to feed capitalist accumulation. The latter should not happen either at the level of Global North and South dynamics nor within the different national

spaces where such unequal dynamics are often reproduced at a smaller scale. Finally, grassroots proposals for Just Transition must be open to conceptions that go beyond Western instrumental rationality, in particular indigenous epistemologies, as stated by the Environmental Indigenous Network.

The aforementioned challenges to power lie at the center of a grassroots Just Transition and lay the grounds for a democratic transformation of decision-making processes in the management of public resources and the social appropriation of natural goods. According to this proposal, if such precautions are not taken and current inequalities remain in place, transition projects run the risk of being at the mercy of corporate interests under a so-called “green economy” or of other commodified solutions that make life precarious for most of the population in terms of labor, environmental and vital rights in a wide sense.



### **3.1. The Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) and the drive for a Just Transition**

To trace the unfolding of the Just Transition concept in Latin America it is necessary to contrast it with its development at a global scale. As mentioned in the previous section, toward the mid-2000s the notion began to expand from the trade union and socio-environmental movements universe in core countries to increasingly wider sectors in terms of activity and origins as well as geographic location.

Although there had already been in Latin America demands for a change in the energy mix, such as those expressed at the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, labor organizations at the continental scale did not adopt Just Transition principles until 2008, with the creation of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA). As a branch of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the TUCA brought together already existing networks like the Regional Workers' Organization (ORIT-CIOSL) and the Latin American Confederation of Workers (CLAT-CMT), which included trade unions that held contradictory views on environmental matters. Latin American unions have been historically focused on the struggle to keep and improve working conditions and wage standards, and by the 2000s they had tackled the environmental issue only in passing and always subordinated to the central concern of preserving the quantity and quality of jobs.

However, the concept gradually gained a footing in Latin American unions as their members began participating in global encounters and regional forums where the issue

joined the long term demands of organizations like the international peasants' movement La Vía Campesina, the World March of Women, Friends of the Earth, among others. Thanks to this, by the late 2000s the trade union world was more receptive to the environmental concerns.

So much so that in 2009, TUCA's member unions adopted Just Transition as their linchpin. Specifically, the Confederation began by acknowledging in its declaration the complex ecological scene resulting from fossil fuel dependency. In a deeper analysis, the document points to differentiated strategies that should be applied in the future for the Global South, of which Latin America is part, as opposed to those applied in the Global North, represented by the United States and Western Europe. A factor that explained the need for different tactics was Latin America's lower level of relative economic development, which awards the region an equally lower level of responsibility in global GHG emissions.

Taking that caveat into account, but paying attention to the decarbonization scenario, the TUCA acknowledged the Latin American right to economic development under the perspective of the limits of natural resources and the worsening of the global climate situation. In that sense, the TUCA's proposal consisted in abandoning the consumption patterns of the Global North and called on Latin American States to play a proactive role to that end. From that perspective, the TUCA expressed the need to avoid what they called commodified "false solutions" to fix structural problems associated to the accumulation pattern that are based on the premise of the "green economy" and put profit over the destinies of the workers and the populations affected either directly or indirectly.

Insisting on the imperative need to shift current consumption logics, which the TUCA considered to be imposed from the core countries, the organization insisted on strategies to progressively mitigate the emission of pollutant substances. The policies would revolve around the understanding of the environmental issue as an encompassing one that includes not only the replacement of energy generation sources but also the protection of flora, fauna, the oceans, and the soil. In addition, the TUCA acknowledged the high cost of the transition and reckoned it was key to accept the historical debt of the Global North countries with Latin America, which could be honored through funding aid at low or zero cost.



Finally, the structuring element of the premises mentioned above was the need to create “green jobs” in the region. Attending to the social justice and climate justice demands of Latin American peoples, they set forth the proposal of creating green jobs under “dignified” conditions: social protection, adequate pay, and the right to unionize, among others.

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A milestone in the TUCA’s history and allied sectors in the path to consolidating the acceptance of Just Transition was the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development/Rio+20—in fact, the “People’s Summit in Rio de Janeiro”, a counter-summit celebrated by social and trade union organizations. Together with indigenous peoples, peasant organizations, movements of people affected by hydroelectric power plants and other groups, the TUCA put forward its concerns about the way in which global governance bodies led by the UN were approaching the climate crisis, in particular, the strategies proposed to tackle it. The decisions taken so far were described as excessively beneficial to market interests, if not openly neoliberal.

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A new edition of this type of coalition of organizations critical to the state of affairs, and joined by the TUCA, was celebrated two years after Rio+20, at the Lima Climate Summit of 2014; it was organized amid powerful demonstrations like the +15,000 people’s march through the city toward the San Martin plaza on December 10<sup>th</sup>, for the International Human Rights Day. Their slogan was “Let’s change the system, not the climate.” Taking into account the initial expectations, the observers considered the conjuncture ripe for making structural modifications to the dominant productive patterns and the situation of the energy labor world. However, official negotiations at the Lima Summit were once again centered around purely declarative, non-binding statements. A disappointment in the eyes of the TUCA.

Notwithstanding that, the coming together of Latin American trade unions belonging to the TUCA and their international peers was instrumental in including Just Transition in the

preamble to the 2015 Paris Agreement against climate change. Specifically, the preamble stressed that any transition from polluting sources to sustainable ones needs to prioritize the redeployment of the workforce to provide quality jobs in accordance with each country's development priorities—a shy nod to the different realities that separate the Global North from the Global South.

In spite of such efforts, Latin America's economic lethargy by 2014 as a result of a generalized drop in the price of primary commodities, added to the institutional instability stemming to a large degree from the advance of the right, meant that a considerable part of the TUCA's proposals and projects for a Just Transition had to be postponed, prioritizing strategies that would safeguard existing jobs.

TUCA's representatives, nonetheless, kept participating in different global climate summits, encounters, and forums. Such participation is reflected in the resolutions of its Third Congress, held in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in April 2016. In it the TUCA recovered and updated its observations for the 2014 Development Platform for the Americas (PLADA)—resource extraction methodologies that plunder nature are still in place, chief among them fracking, which is highly contaminating, harmful to the health of communities and workers, and with uncertain economic results in the long term. The TUCA called on the states of the region to establish a moratorium on the controversial technique and include all the affected sectors of society in the discussions of its use.

For a deeper understanding of the future horizons at stake in the face of a possible transition, it should be noted that, according to TUCA's estimates, one million jobs could be created in Latin America in areas such as efficient construction, renewable energies, and sustainable supplies manufacturing. However, projections also indicate that the transition would entail the loss of around 350,000 jobs, especially in sectors like oil and gas extraction, and coal mining. It is also worth noting that there will be problems of location and sector associated to the "equation" between jobs created and lost—where those jobs are created and where they disappear, and the fact that they cannot be transferred automatically from one sector to another since some workforce transitions could be unfeasible. On the other hand, estimating the number of new and old jobs is not an automatic solution to the question of how to deal with preexisting labor vulnerability under

precarious conditions, informal economy, and the relationship with indigenous peoples, women, the youth, and sexually dissident identities, among other groups.

In that sense, TUCA's basic tenet for reflection on these issues and implementation of a Just Transition is based on the notion of Social Dialogue. In line with the arguments put forth by the organizations mentioned in the previous section, for the TUCA any transition project must take into account workers' voices. In a dialogue with governmental representatives from different levels and the business sector, the workers will have to define the core points at the discussions, with the aim of facilitating wider participation through a democratic process. It is from that guiding principle that we can understand TUCA's repeated rejection of commodified transitions rooted in corporate profit, which they do not completely overrule but think it needs to be subordinated to the interests of the workforce and affected populations.



**T**UED was born out of an “Energy Emergency, Energy Transition” roundtable that was organized in New York in October 2012, and it build mostly on the mobilization experiences around the People’s Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Made up strictly of energy trade unions, the TUED’s main argument is that the current energy and climate emergency hitting the world results from the excessive dependency on fossil fuels and its subsequent GHG emissions. In that sense, according to its members, governments have failed to negotiate a climate agreement at previous climate summits and meetings, and multilateral lending agencies and other similar bodies kept favoring the continuity of a contaminating and privatized global energy pattern.

It must be noted that the TUED does not work as a third-degree union (i.e., a trade union association), but as an international sectoral federation or an energy-specific global network. That means that some of the TUCA member unions are also part of TUED. That explains why some of TUED’s transition proposals and projections have been mentioned above when TUCA’s activities were discussed. However, despite that dual belonging, it is important to stress that the TUED’s strategy for a Just Transition is through Social Power.

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Let us remember that TUED's understanding of Social Power stems from the idea that it is impossible to reach a Just Transition if it is not thought a deep transformation of the economic and geopolitical fabric, that is, forgoing the dominant productivist logic. For the Social Power notion, energy should be considered as a common good, not a commodity, and as a basic human right. Moreover, its production should be managed in a profoundly democratic way.

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Following that guiding principle, the TUED participated in multiple encounters to think what kind of energy transition Latin America needs. Chief among them was the International Meeting on the Energy Mix and the Commons, held in Buenos Aires in September 2017. The discussions began with an initial description of the global energy situation and in particular the Latin American context, which they considered critical due to the privatizing trend and the repression of communities by hydrocarbon and mineral extraction companies.

Workers of the Rio Turbio coal mine, located in the southern Argentine province of Santa Cruz, were also present. They related their struggle against the adjustment policies of Mauricio Macri's administration (2015-2019). Beyond the debates in the Meeting, it is interesting to underline the fact that union representatives of the Yacimientos Carboníferos Río Turbio (YCRT) coal workers and the State Workers' Association (ATE) have spoken about their own contradictions. While unions and their members understand the harms that coal burning poses for nature, they are also concerned about their scarce redeployment possibilities. It is suspected, due to the conflict dynamics of recent years, and especially during the Macri administration, that the mine has been going through a silent and progressive divestment process aimed at buffering the impacts caused by its potential direct and definitive shutdown.

Going back to the topics discussed at the Meeting, it is worth stressing that the current contradictions in hydroelectric energy production in Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay were also present and made visible by union representatives from ATE Sur Misiones, ATE Neuquén and the Movimento dos Atingidos por Barragens (MAB) from Brazil. Other issues

such as nuclear generation were discussed, together with a deep analysis of the features and contradictions of unconventional renewable energies in Argentina, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. The groups also debated the unfeasibility of unconventional hydrocarbons and fracking, both in the Argentine geological formation Vaca Muerta and in potential locations such as Colombia.

In conclusion, a call was issued to establish an energy mix articulated around the needs of workers and populations, to reject the pillage of Latin American natural resources by Global North powers, and to insist on the urgency of decommodifying energy, which should be conceived—and included in public agendas—as a common good.

Despite that platform, where statements around the desired horizon for a Just Transition converged, in a 2019 TUED global meeting addressing the possibilities of implementing a set of policies called the Green New Deal, Latin American energy unions reported a worsening of the regional situation. Improvements had been scant, and recent years have seen the deepening of labor rights and human rights violations, land evictions and contamination resulting from the activities of hydrocarbon companies, mostly from core countries.



## 4. What Do We Currently Understand by Just Transition in Latin America?

Latin America's energy mix is based mainly on fossil fuels. In 2018, 34% of energy consumption in the region came from natural gas, 30% from oil, 8% from hydroelectricity, and 6% from coal. If we look more closely at what type of needs all that energy satisfied, we find out that the biggest slice of the "cake" went to transport, which accounted for 38% of total consumption; followed by 30% consumed by industry; 16% by homes, and 5% by trade and services.

Even if the region is strongly dependent on sources with high GHG emissions, it is important to highlight the fact that in 2018 it had only a second-rate responsibility for world generation of substances harmful to the atmosphere, such as CO<sub>2</sub>, which accounts for approximately 10% of the total. We can find evidence of that subordinated place in relative terms by comparing the numbers for Latin America with the emissions of countries like China, which emitted 6 times more CO<sub>2</sub> than our region (10,065 megatons). Same goes for the US, which emitted about 3 times more CO<sub>2</sub> (5,416 megatons) than Latin America. For an even more complex picture, it should be observed that within our region, GHG emission levels are not homogenous either. Of the total 1,675 megatons of CO<sub>2</sub> generated in 2018, only two countries accounted for more than half—México, with 477 megatons; and Brazil, with 457.



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Far from being a negligible piece of information, those numbers shed some light on one of the main difficulties in finding a common program to define what we understand by Just Transition—the heterogenous nature of the realities to which different actors seek to apply the concept. Indeed, just as is the case on a global scale, Latin America has diverse energy realities, with historically divergent trajectories and internal disputes about the current situation.

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However, while such disputes lead to differentiated—and even sometimes contradictory—assessments, in recent paths taken by trade union, social, and environmental movements we can find increasingly more communicating vessels due to the inequalities and threats currently being faced on multiple levels. By following those paths, this section focuses on reviewing and contrasting the way different sectors describe their limitations, and the answers offered. First, we will outline the main areas of common ground and main disagreements among trade union and social movements. Then we will briefly describe a few experiences that could be considered as rehearsals of energy transitions. Finally, we will include different perspectives given by workers in their own words. To that end, a series of interviews to social and trade union representatives from Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico were conducted.



**A**s a result of the convergence of meetings, forums and other events that open up dialogue, we have a growing number of documents gathering the experiences, fears and resistance modes of the different sectors that, each with their particularities, are pushing for a Just Transition. A patchwork of those realities can be found in the report “Energy Transition in Latin America”, edited in 2019 by CENSAT Agua Viva - Friends of the Earth Colombia. The document contains contributions in diverse formats from environmental organizations, social movements, and people affected by different productive activities. It was born out of an effort to rehearse possible answers to two fundamental questions: what type of energy is produced, and for whom.

To bring some clarity to those questions, the document outlines the main problematic nodes of the Latin American energy reality, where the dominant fossil pattern is compounded by features like the ongoing patriarchal and class-based system together with productive logics that lead to squandering and inefficiency. Despite agreements among multiple organizations regarding the incoherencies of the current model, it is interesting to note that several points of disagreement—which render common visions problematic—are also included in the same document. Some of the differences in opinion have to do with the treatment that should be given to extractive companies depending on their foreign or national origin, how to carry out a transition in GHG-intensive sectors or the present and future role of mining activities.

Another key area of disagreement, which is especially delicate in the face of future scenarios, relates to the idea of development. The traditional meaning given to this notion

is usually linked to hard economic variables, socially expressed in the unchecked increase of goods and services consumption. Its critics point out that such an understanding ignores the Latin American social, ecological, and cultural background. In that sense, one of the features most criticized by development's naysayers is that it deepens environmental unsustainable dynamics, which seek to imitate consumption patterns from Global North realities, very different from the Latin American context. Acknowledging the difficulties of undoing certain ways of engaging with commodities in capitalist societies, sectors that are critical of the association between development and endless economic growth understand that the meanings given to the notion of development in our territories should take into account its specificities, with sustainability as a guiding element.

It is worth highlighting that the trade union movement has formulated its own proposals as to what we should understand by development and what its relation to Just Transition is. A noteworthy element in this sense was the creation of the Development Platform for the Americas (PLADA) by the TUCA in 2014. Drawing on some of the tenets laid out by the International Trade Union Confederation in its 2009 declaration titled "Trade Unions and Climate Change"—but with a regional approach—, the PLADA structured its work around the questioning of the current development models, which they linked to the dominance of neoliberal policies. Specifically, the PLADA called for a rejection of dynamics that help to advance productive patterns that favor profit over any social, environmental or labor consideration. Thus in a more radical reformulation of several UN "sustainable development" proposals, the TUCA's document suggests understanding and organizing the central aspects of social life from a new approach based on a program built by and for the people.

According to that approach, and always marked by the labor issue, one of the document's main concerns was the reflection around the wider environmental issue and the energy aspect in particular. The TUCA's starting point was that there is no acceptable development without the supremacy of environmental justice. The demand for a framework that would find paths to solve existing development imbalances at the national, regional, and above all, international levels between core and peripheral countries was also a top concern for the TUCA. Thus, the organization insisted on setting a "principle of common but differentiated responsibilities" that contemplates the different territorial possibilities of responding to the urgencies of climate change.

With some anxiety to find ways to redress long-standing historical injustices where some countries and regions draw upon the resources of others for their own benefit, the PLADA elaborates on the need to think about sovereignty in a deeper sense. That is why it champions the understanding of natural resources not as mere commodities but as common goods that include biodiversity, water, seeds, forests, and energy, among others. People should have the right to self-determined management of those common goods, and this should be facilitated through state-sponsored democratic participation.

As for the energy issue the PLADA points out the need to establish a fair transition, understood as

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A set of policies designed to ensure that the transition and the road to low GHG emissions production offers at the same time the opportunities that workers and affected communities need. The goal is that it will not be the workers the ones who pay for the negative consequences resulting from changes for which they are not the main culprits (PLADA, 2014: 46).

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Based on that primary understanding, and always taking into account the past and present differentiated responsibilities in the climate crisis, the document stresses the need to develop investment and investigation plans, and public policies addressing the urgency of the Just Transition agenda. The PLADA acknowledges the need for speedy changes and insists that such modifications in the productive framework should be coupled with state actions that promote a workforce transition with full rights for workers participating in polluting industries that would be deactivated.

Despite this, there have been multiple difficulties to make these demands a reality in a linear way. Examples of this are the dramatic cases of those affected by hydroelectric dams in Brazil and Colombia or the complex situation faced by communities in Argentina, Bolivia and Chile that live near salt flats where strategic minerals for the future electric transport systems, like lithium, are extracted. Once again, this reflects the inequalities of resource extraction in peripheral countries for the consumption of core countries. In other words,

what cost will the Global South pay for the energy transition of the Global North?

In a different context, the partial results of cases like Uruguay should also be noted. With an energy mix made up of 98% of conventional renewable sources (mainly hydroelectricity) and unconventional (wind power), in Uruguay the totality of the transmission and distribution of electricity is managed by the state-run national electricity and power plant authority (UTE, Administración Nacional de Usinas y Transmisiones). However, one aspect that generates doubts in this seemingly public system is that of generation, an area in which the UTE has progressively lost its historical monopoly in hydroelectric plants and thermal power stations. Exclusive control of power generation by the state-run company was undermined by the bidding of wind farms, and it finally extinguished itself legally with the application, by the end of the 2000s, of regulations sanctioned during the military dictatorship. In that sense, it is worth noting that 29.7% of the generation controlled today by private companies could soon increase as a result of a combination of higher energy demand in the country and the lack of modification of those regulatory frameworks. From the trade union point of view of the Association of UTE Officials (AUTE), the encroachment of private generators upon unconventional renewable sources introduces highly disruptive elements with regards to the outsourcing schemes on which these companies are usually based.

On the other side of the Southern Cone, Chile launched in June 2009 a decarbonization plan for its energy mix, which it called “Strategy for a Just Energy Transition.” In line with the proposals of the multilateral governance forums—where the interests of corporations wight heavily and the focus is placed on the modification of generation sources and not on energy delivery logics—the project acknowledges the unsustainable nature of the current energy mix in Chile, accountable for 78% of its GHG emissions. With a view to repairing this contaminating grammar, the strategy aspires to a slow and partial shutdown of the eight oldest thermal power stations in the country by 2024 and of the existing 28, located through its geography, by 2040. With a rhetoric that adheres to the UN Sustainable Development Goals the WTO's guidelines for Just Transition, Sebastian Piñera’s projects are centered around the creation of a green business model linked to decarbonization, but as a step forward in the commodification of energy, even if his government expresses its concern about reaching a “socially and environmentally just and equitable development”.

To sum up, the current picture shows that the disputes around the nature of the energy transition, and whether it will be just or not, are far from being solved. Corporate views of transition, which adhere to green neoliberalism, have been given prominence in global governance bodies and have moved forward in the region at a slow but steady pace through the establishment of unconventional renewable sources of generation. However, as we have seen, there are multiple organizations coming from different training, labor, and territorial paths that are determined to dispute energy transitions with a grassroots approach, focusing on justice, and not only on how clean or abundant the energy generation sources will be, but also on the sustainability of life itself.



**F**or the elaboration of this document we carried out a series of interviews with workers from different branches of the energy and scientific investigation sectors in Argentina Colombia, and Mexico. Besides giving their opinions as to what they understand by Just Transition, they reflected on their national realities and the regional and global situation, as well as on how they think that communities should reformulate their ties with the state and the public sphere, and natural goods as a whole. Next, we share some of the considerations they expressed in these conversations grouping them around problematic issues.

### **National situation and regional reality**

According to **Humberto Montes de Oca**, Foreign Secretary for the Mexican Union of Electric Workers (SME), and a historical representative of the now extinct electricity company Luz y Fuerza del Centro, his country is going through a transition from the neoliberal reforms applied by Enrique Peña Nieto to the expectations of the reforms applied by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, which still do not manage to bring about the recovery of the energy sector by the Mexican state. According to Montes de Oca, “there is no policy of renationalization or repeal of the neoliberal energy reform, there is rather an attempt to take administrative measures that will offer containment and allow the government to recover some level of control.”

As for the regional situation, the SME representative thinks that while the Latin American history of colonization and dependency makes sovereignty an emerging drive throughout its geography, “currently there are other aspects that are also important: considering the



energy transition in environmental and property-related terms. We are putting forward the renationalization of the industry but also in a way that it will be managed by the workers, society and the political power.” Specifically, for Montes de Oca “it is imperative to manage electricity in a way that society, the workers, and the consumers can all participate”.

From the perspective of **Edgar Mojica Venegas**, Secretary General of the Colombian Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT), the global energy pattern right now is a war model based on competition. On a global level, this is expressed by the fight for resources, routes, and prices. According to Mojica in Colombia “this has a concrete expression and it’s called accumulation by dispossession. It implies the dispossession of people, eviction from their territories. An appropriation and plundering.” Proof of that is the Colombian government’s approval of fracking pilots despite mobilizations by the socio-environmental movements and alternative proposals that trade unions and social movements have put forward. Such is the situation with hydroelectricity, and coal and gold large-scale mining, among others.

In that sense, one of his biggest concerns is the escalation of violence against social and environmental militants in Colombia in recent years. To respond to that he thinks it is urgent to open spaces for the Colombian society to discuss the mining and energy issue in a context of peace. Such a space was the “Mining, Energy and Environmental Social Roundtable for Peace”, where a movement of municipal, departmental and even national assemblies drafted proposals and documents.

For **Joaquín Turco**, representative of the State Workers’ Association (ATE) of Argentina and advisor to the Secretariat of International Relations of the Argentinian Workers’ Congress (CTA), his country is facing serious questions as to the future of the energy mix due to the unchallenged fossil model, which has been the guiding principle of all governments in the last decades, and it is focused almost exclusively on the exploitation of Vaca Muerta and the constant back and forth of flexibilization and outsourcing in the sector. As for the Latin American situation, Turco is concerned about how scattered the labor world is as a result of the advancement of right-wing governments in the region since the mid-2010s, to which the pandemic gave the final blow. It turns out, he stresses, that at the trade union level the need for an integrated energy system has always been expressed but “that is history now, given the political colors we are seeing in the region.”

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### 4.3. Relationship and Differences Between the Global North and the Global South

**T**he ties between Latin American and the Western European countries, the United States and in the last decades also with the Popular Republic of China shows several standoffs which make it difficult to conceive a possible future trajectory in common. How to think of a just transition is not alien to this problematic. **Cecilia Anigstein**, researcher at the National University of General Sarmiento (UNGS) in Argentina, states in a document she prepared for the TUCA and in preparation for the Paris 2015 COP, that there are a set of structural asymmetries in the contribution of emissions from the Global North and the Global South that require as a starting point for the reconversion of economies in this region a transition that assumes differentiated methods. On the basis of historical facts, Anigstein considers that thinking about a Just Transition is also an opportunity to reflect on how we could achieve a convergence among the plurisecular inequalities of the developed world with respect to Latin America.

According to **Humberto Montes de Oca**'s perspective, trade unionists from core countries always insist in their discourses on that which should be public, but always situated in the context of state institutionality. They don't mention however a socialization of the means through community management. Montes de Oca Considers that these nations "have dispossessed different peoples of their resources and they can afford the excessive use of energy while in our communities we have deficiencies in the access to energy consumption." The Mexican trade unionist believes it is very important for Latin America to distance itself from unfeasible models. In that sense, he highlights the many regional experiences of self-organized communities that build cooperatives and make social use of the common goods. He sums up: "That is very important for us, and for us that means transition".

For **Laura Maffei**, from the Chico Mendez Socio-environmental Department of the Education Workers Union of Río Negro and the Ecosur Foundation, it is important to sustain differentiated approaches to discussions in the Global North and in the Global South due to structural differences that exist in the socio-labor reality of one and the other. However, she also believes that we should not hold simplistic views of the situation in the Global North. For example, in countries “like the United States, you can also see higher rates of labor precariousness, and in many cases, even worse legislations than ours in the South”. In spite of such complexity, she concedes that in average Latin America has higher percentages of precariousness and informality that constrain not only the frameworks of dialogue and discussions but also short and middle-term projections due to existing power relations.

But Maffei thinks that unlike the Global North approach, which is centered only around labor legislation aspects, notions in the South have a substantial advantage that lies on their preoccupation with “challenging the meaning of the socio-ecological transformation itself, that is, being able to understand and tackle the system’s structural causes and the causes of its collapse.” Regarding PLADA’s proposals, the Argentine researcher understands that there is a long trajectory of reflection in Latin American environmental thought, which has been affirming that discussions on sustainability must revolve around the political causes of the ecological crisis. Therefore, for Maffei, that tradition has many advantages when it comes to projecting Just Transition not only as the transformation of the energy mix in technical terms, but above all as a vehicle to overcome the incoherencies of the current production model.

According to **Edgard Mojica Vanegas**, there are substantial differences between Global North and South action frameworks, such as uneven possibilities to open a dialogue with businessmen, trade union representatives and the state. For Mojica, stability in developed countries guarantees “the possibilities to sit down, come up with public policies, and establish economic paths for their implementation.” Given the difficulties posed by the advancement of right-wing governments in the region, Mojica thinks “it is impossible for those governments to accept dialogue without social pressure, without the workers out in the streets and organized (...). If we don’t do that, transition is left in the hands of the companies.”

**Joaquín Turco** agrees on the structural differences between the Global North and South mentioned above. This was reflected in the trade union roundtables of the 2008 Climate Summit in Poznan (Poland), where the issue of job loss was closely linked to decarbonization in the Global North. In those discussions, Just Transition only meant “green jobs.” And as we have seen, such debates were noted by the PLADA, and in the document drafted by **Anigstein, Angelim and Medeiros**, although not directly. According to Turco, “You cannot force a canned model like the one the Europeans want to apply in the South. You need to adapt it to the different conditions. They were having high employment rates, and we had 50% informal jobs. There are many elements in the Just Transition manual, like ‘job creation, social security, research, etc’, where we are lagging behind by a very far stretch, we would not be able to do the same.”

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To reflect on what we understand by Just Transition, **Humberto Montes de Oca** recovers the experiences of the Assembly of Electricity Users (2010 and 2011) that supported the struggles of the Mexican Union of Electric Workers during that time, through a utility bill strike. The historic militant of Luz y Fuerza del Centro states that “Just Transition is not only about changing the way we generate electricity, but it is also related to social management, where the common proprietors of the natural resources, such as indigenous and peasant communities have control over them, are not displaced, and are able to generate their own electricity.”

Highlighting the Latin American experiences that link the energy sector to the different communities and their self-organizing, Montes de Oca comments that this type of frictions help facilitate a process where “we need to look for agreements and find out together how to sustain jobs, employment, and at the same time avoid being invasive and step over the communities. It is very difficult to solve this conflict, but I think we are ready to address it,” that is why he wants to “walk in unison with social, indigenous and peasant organizations.”

For **Laura Maffei**, one of the key elements of the Just Transition notion is that it should implement the essential socio-productive modifications in ecological terms and, at the same time, “not leave anyone behind.” That means it should not harm those who are most vulnerable, who have traditionally paid the price of previous transitions. The researcher thinks the concept implies employment protection, professional training for the redeployment of workers in new sectors, and other associated issues. However, one of the elements highlighted by Maffei is that it is necessary to project a different type of Just

Transition for each concrete socio-labor area, also considering the specificity of each community. Ultimately, the common program from which the idea of Just Transition was born must be translated and customized for each of the local realities.

Maffei also believes it is important to think about Just Transition from a gender-based perspective. Pointing to globally widespread problems such as the gender pay gap, the Argentine researcher urges us to realize that energy sectors are strongly masculinized, and this is largely due to gender stereotypes. To go deeper into these issues, Maffei points out, the main aspect to be challenged is the role of women in the production system, a topic increasingly addressed by feminist movements both in the Global North and South. Ultimately, she considers we are facing “a system that needs to be transformed, since not only does it not contemplate nature’s reproduction capacity, but it also ignores women’s reproduction and care work, which are essential to the functioning of the system. What allows many people to have time to do paid work is the unpaid care work that most women perform.”

For **Anigstein, Angelim, and Medeiros**, Just Transition is the core proposal of the trade union movement to face the negative consequences of climate change on peoples and territories. The transition is made up of a set of policies implemented to move towards low-GHG emission productive frameworks. According to the document, for this process to be just, it is a priority to not make workers pay the cost of a mandatory shift for which they are not responsible.

From **Edgar Mojica Vanegas’** perspective, it is a mistake to define Just Transition only in terms of workers’ destiny and their rights in a post-fossil world. “Talking about Just Transition means discussing who will manage that transition. The multinational companies are carrying out a transition, but they’re owning it, they’re doing it with a commercial and market-based approach, and we think it should be a social and communal one. This calls for a deep discussion around public access and the need for a public, municipal, departmental, and national control of the mining energy sector. Just Transition goes beyond workers’ employment.”

In spite of its conceptual clarity, says Mojica, there is a great difficulty when it comes to the redeployment of workers from carbon intensive areas. However, he affirms without a doubt

that “we should dare say we support the transition and that the activities we carry out are harmful. It is not an easy topic. We live off the industry. But if you ask me today, both coal and oil workers in Colombia are politically convinced within our trade union organizations of the need to walk the path towards transition and build an alternative proposal. We are convinced about that, and that is already a very important achievement.”

**Joaquín Turco** believes that the Just Transition concept has now evolved from its close associations to climate change, as it was in its beginnings, to include many other elements like the new global labor context and its changes. The Argentine trade unionist insists on the need to understand Just Transition as a framework of global agreements that must be filled with specific content at the local level, in light of the particularities of each country, rather than as a fixed framework.

At the same time, Turco believes that the conceptual vagueness of the notion opens the door to a set of dangers, “because if grassroots organizations don’t do a good job, I think corporate sectors will appropriate the language of transition. It is essential to move forward with such discussions so that we can win them and create good public policies. The problem arises when you allow the concept to be trivialized and appropriated by the enemy.”

As for workforce redeployment, Turco expresses the concerns of carbon-intensive and formal sectors, as opposed to the high informality derived from the conversion. “They have more to lose,” states Turco. ATE’s representative points to another contrast with the Global North: “when the Europeans talk about Just Transition, they don’t talk about this, they mention recyclers and similar sectors. That is why it is easier to solve that issue; you’re offering a better horizon to fellow workers under very precarious situations. But how do you tell a registered worker who has social welfare benefits that the mine will be closed tomorrow or that he has to stop drilling? Specially in a country like Argentina where decisions are not planned ahead of time, but rather are taken overnight.”





**T**he interviewees all agree on the need to build ties to facilitate a **dialogue** with the different sectors with a view to carrying out a Just Transition, as it is put forward by the **TUCA** and **ITUC**'s guiding principles. However, the Latin American perspective in this social dialogue takes into account regional specificities, above all with respect to its economic and institutional precariousness.

**Humberto Montes de Oca** acknowledges that his ties with the **TUED** encouraged those debates, but that the Mexican Union of Electric Workers has been discussing Just Transition for some time. In particular, Montes de Oca notes that "we have been discussing this for a long time, before joining TUED, the right to energy. We have argued that energy should be understood as a human right and to that end we have presented initiatives for a constitutional reform in Mexico." Likewise, in matters of energy management, the Union believes "there has to be greater space in management for society, workers, users, researchers, scientists. A greater space in the energy sector and in the government too."

For **Laura Maffei**, resorting to spaces of dialogue is key to be able to conceive any type of Just Transition. A dialogue that must involve not only workers, but the community as a whole. Thus, social dialogue has to do with the program-based processes to discuss how to carry out the Transition, almost intuitively building bridges to bring together the concerns of sectors that struggle for environmental justice with those of actors that mobilize mostly for labor justice, mostly represented by the trade union movement. For Maffei, it is essential for the trade union movement to be part of discussions around the nature of the Just Transition in a way that goes beyond mere employment protection, with a more

systemic view. All the same, and even if there is a long history of organizing to bring together socio-environmental demands beyond the labor world, she thinks “we still need a critical mass to promote this type of changes at the structural level.”

Without underestimating the possibilities that social dialogue opens up, and highlighting its limitations in the Latin American context, **Edgar Mojica Vanegas** believes it is interesting to observe TUED’s notion on social power, since it helps us think about a Transition “with the people.” That is, against corporate solutions that only consider a change in generation sources. In that sense, Mojica Vanegas believes that this way of understanding Just Transition “implies an attack of the model, calling for a public global debate with workers and unions in that dialogue and that struggle.”

As for **Joaquín Turco**, he thinks that a full social dialogue is only possible if there is a state that guarantees its creation and secures an effective exchange of ideas among different actors, and not a simple aggregation of overlapping monologues. Such a fluid dialogue is what, according to Turco, makes up a real participatory democracy; and accepts that so far it has not been easy to find it in the spaces in which he participated as representative of the ATE-CTA. The Argentine unionist also stresses that from his perspective the notion of social power is also a type of dialogue, since the coming together of workers and users is key for the effective control of the energy system, and this is only possible with state arbitration.

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Ultimately, Maffei considers we are facing “a system that needs to be transformed, since not only does it not contemplate nature’s reproduction capacity, but it also ignores women’s reproduction and care work, which are essential to the functioning of the system. What allows many people to have time to do paid work is the unpaid care work that most women perform.”  
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**F**rom its beginning in the late 1970s, to this day, the notion of Just Transition has evolved from being a proposal of a number of limited groups to becoming a frequent demand in the wide spectrum of the socio-environmental movement. Despite having lost part of its original meaning within that movement, it is still associated to an idea that, even if vague, speaks of the need for a change of model.

Specifically in the trade union sector, the notion traveled from the Global North to Latin America in the 2000s and it has gotten a foothold in organizations like TUCA, among others. However, as we saw in our analysis of the different Just Transition programs, and particularly in the interviews with workers' representatives and other actors involved, its definition is still subject to free interpretation. Its resolution depends in many cases on the political track record of the person and the history of the territory to which they belong.

In spite of this, after our review of the matter we are convinced that while Just Transition needs to be conceived from the standpoint of the fossil pattern's unsustainability and the future of its workers, it cannot be circumscribed to that. On the contrary, the cluster of problematic issues that force us to struggle for an urgent energy shift to avoid environmental collapse reflect that in all probability we are facing an even deeper breakdown, this time a civilizational one. It is not fortuitous that the totality of human beings has reached this limit, and it can be explained by the accumulation model that big corporations have put in practice since the dawn of the capitalist mode of production to this day. Under such dynamics, the mere shift of sources would not modify substantially its underlying logics. And any initiative to do so would run the risk of being quickly coopted by

corporate interests. Thus, thinking about a systemic change requires not only social dialogue instances, but also the possibility for communities to seize power and use it to their benefit. To conclude, promoting a Just Transition by the people and for the people implies that the old needs to die for good and the new needs to be born at last.

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## **Interviews/Dialogues**

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