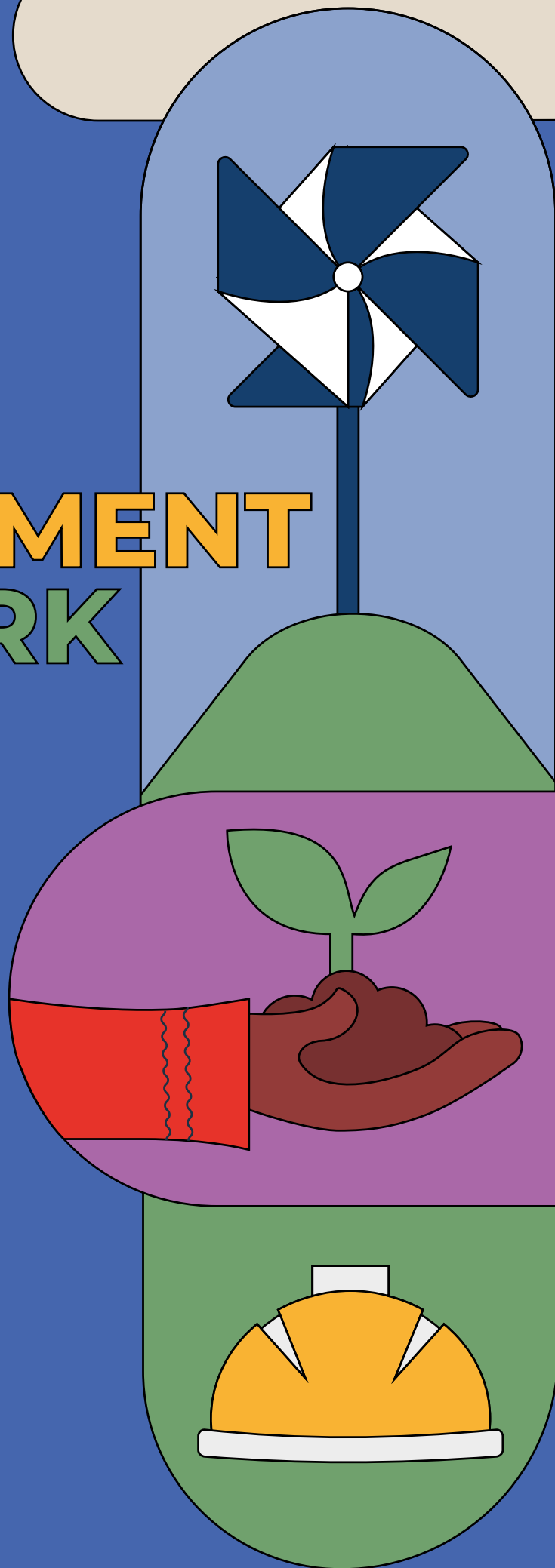


ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND WORK

A working class perspective vis-à-vis
the transitions of our times



FES  SINDICAL

In memoriam Gustavo Cotas, our dear brother whose commitment, knowledge, analysis and reflections contributed to turning this document into reality

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Presentation

The priorities of the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) include, among others, a coordinated, unitary combination of trade union, social and environmental struggles. This challenge is reflected by the overall subject areas and key elements defined as cross-cutting issues by the 4th TUCA Congress for the years 2021-2025. One of these issues addresses the relation between environment and work, in reply to union concerns that have been voiced since TUCA's foundation.

From October 9th to 11th, 2018 TUCA held its 3rd Regional Conference on Energy, Environment and Work (CREAT, for its Spanish acronym) to move forward towards the definitions the labor movement was to adopt with regard to environment and energy issues from the perspective of an alliance with other social movements and sectors of civil society.

Environmental issues have been on TUCA's agenda ever since its founding congress held in Panama in 2008. Besides, TUCA organized already two conferences on energy, environment and work, in Managua (2008) and Buenos Aires (2009), which defined the positions and proposals for TUCA union action on sustainable development, environmental justice, democratization of energy, addressing climate change, and defending common goods.

As one of the most relevant political results of this accumulation process, in which TUCA drafted the Development Platform for the Americas (PLADA, for its Spanish acronym) with ample participation of its affiliate organizations and allied social movements, the environment issue was included as one of the four dimensions covered by the document. Launched in 2014, the document set out a number of claims by the labor movement and its allies that establish the intrinsic link between social justice and environmental justice, including the defense of decent work, fairer income and wealth distribution, participatory democracy, gender equality, an end to racism and xenophobia, among other political guidelines.

It may also be assumed that the most recent CREAT played an important role in the PLADA [update](#) which TUCA and its affiliated national organizations carried out in 2019, and whose final result was presented in 2020.

The 3rd CREAT held in 2018 confirmed a number of claims and perspectives that describe a panorama, where trade unions increasingly take up environmental issues.¹

The document we are presenting here continues this path. While submitting the results of the work carried out by specialists and leaders, as well as the exchange and the debate between TUCA's affiliate organizations and allied movements, we want to take a deeper look at the issues addressed throughout those more than ten years. The document consists of four parts. The first chapter is a posthumous text by Gustavo Codas, who was organizing this compilation at the time of his departure. His text outlines the international and regional context of the issues included in the document – environment and energy – and therefore reflects Gustavo Coda's vision and thinking in his final years.

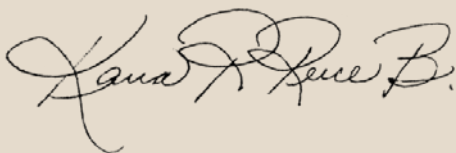
The second chapter, written by Pablo Bertinat, collects and presents a number of guiding principles and dimensions to be taken into account when thinking about the democratization of energy. These considerations draw on years of debate both within the labor movement and with allied social movements. The third chapter by Cecilia Anigstein addresses the issue of the commons and their importance for workers' strategic struggle with respect to energy. In the fourth chapter, Diego Azzi reviews and frames the discussion about just transition. Finally, in the fifth – and last – chapter written by various authors (Cecilia Anigstein, Diego Azzi, Pablo Bertinat, and Natalia Carrau) it is suggested to move towards a regional characterization of the significance and scope of the per-

¹ The Final Declaration of the 3rd CREAT conference is available (in Spanish) at https://csa-csi.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/16_10_2018-DECLARACION-FINAL-CREAT-ES.pdf

spective of just transition for the labor movement in Latin America and the Caribbean.

For all these reasons, the present document reflects TUCA's accumulation and program-building process in the area of environment and work as expressed by its Working Group on Environment, the development of PLADA's environmental dimension, and the three CREAT conferences held since TUCA was founded. Furthermore, the document presents a synthesis based on dialogue with allied social organizations and movements in the region.

As TUCA presents this document with inputs to continue the debate about the issue of environment and energy within the context of the struggle to defend the rights of the working class and democracy, it doubles its commitment to go ahead both with its programmatic work and with industrial action.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Kaira Reece B." in a cursive script.

Kaira Reece
Secretary of Sustainable Development
TUCA

Work and energy in a world in crisis and transition

The world experiences a period of multiple tensions, whose overlapping dynamics create high levels of instability and crisis in our countries and internationally. Before this background reactionary political forces, which try to manipulate people's fears and favor the hegemony of right-wing policies, increase their presence and activities.

The present text discusses the situation and perspectives of work and energy in today's world, in other words, how these two pillars of social life permeate the current period of contemporary history.

In 2008, the neoliberal model for the reorganization of international capitalism entered a crisis. The economy that was pushed, above all, by an increase of financial wealth had arrived at its limits. Ever since, the bases for new financial impositions have remained unchanged. This can be attributed to a relatively simple reason: The pace at which the volume of financial wealth increases cannot be matched by sufficient levels of resource extraction and real wealth production. As a result, international financial crisis occur from time to time, with repercussions on the entire real economy, in other words, on production, employment, wages, public finances, etc.

Struggling with the refractory hand of labor

When capital enlists science into her service, the refractory hand of labor will always be taught docility.

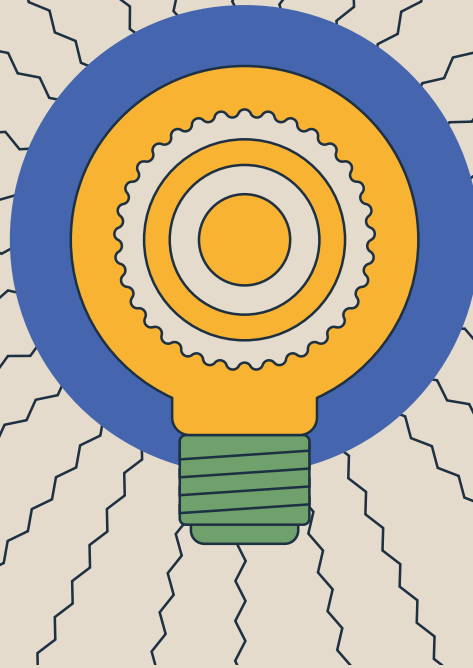
A. Ure, 1836²

Since the 1970s the organization of production and work has undergone profound transformations. Both the Taylorist-Fordist forms of organization and the overlapping institutions of the Welfare State in developed capitalism after World War II were challenged before the background of the two petrol crisis of 1973 and 1979 and the "demise" of Keynesian formulas for the recovery of the crisis-stricken economies.

As microelectronics and computing started to play a central role in the operation of machines and in work processes, technological revolutions, changes and innovations have been accompanied by such challenges ever since. Together with each of these transformations, new setbacks occurred with respect to the social and labor rights that had been conquered during the previous stage of Fordism-Taylorism and the Welfare State.

It should be stressed that there exists no strictly deterministic relation between technological and social change. This relation is always mediated by politics based on a correlation of forces between capital and work. The neoliberal and post-Fordist regulatory system of Western capitalism was by no means the only social format to accompany the implementation of the technological revolution; however, following the neoconservative offensive applied by Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Ronald Reagan in the United States it turned into its concrete social expression. The

² Quoted in Gilly (1994, p. 31), based on a quote from the manuscripts of Karl Marx (1861-1863).



formula applied by capital was an outright attack against union organizations taking advantage of long-term unemployment in various countries, the closure of entire sectors of production due to the restructuring of the economies and, above all, the increasing instability of the labor markets.

Developed capitalism's second general crisis took place in 2007 and 2008. Its impacts can still be felt, while its triggering factors are not yet entirely under control. In other words, many analysts expect its return. When reacting to the challenge, the governments of developed countries threw their neoliberal principles overboard. The governments of the capitalist North used public money to rescue their broken banks and national companies. And they made a real effort to recover their economies by easing their monetary policies. Keynesian economics in the 21st century!

Meanwhile, the government of the United States of North America did not hesitate to unleash an "energy revolution" based on "non-conventional" petrol and gas – extracted with the help of technologies that cause serious environmental damage –, helping the industry to recover its international competitiveness, while leaving aside all the standards and commitments assumed to combat climate change. Something that began in an undeclared manner during the mandate of President Barack Obama and was correctly translated by Donald Trump: His administration withdrew from the commitments of COP 15 in Paris. A setback of a hundred years in terms of civilization!

Capital's reply to the general crisis of 2008 included also a social and labor dimension: the geometric increase of new recruitment strategies used by "digital platforms" and progress in artificial intelligence. As opposed to the past, when automation sought, above all, to replace manual work with machines and automatic control processes, the programs and algorithms of today make it possible to substitute intellectual work.

By doing so, capital continues its attack on the labor conditions of the working class. Unemployment rates might eventually drop, but the new instability spreads throughout the labor market. In other words, workers are vulnerable even when they are employed, either because they work less than expected, or because they earn less than they need, or because they work in conditions that may disappear together with their jobs, as soon as market problems arise.

New conflicts about hegemony

Dramatic transformations in geopolitics worldwide took place during the past fifty years. The world witnessed the end of the Cold War (1970s and 80s), the installation of a unipolar world, with the United States as the sole superpower (1990s and 2000), and the conflicts about hegemony among emerging regional powers (China, Russia, India) with a view to establish a multipolar world, above all due to the impact of the 2008 crisis.

What is "new" in this geopolitical conflict is the fact that it takes place, while the effective weight of the US economy in the world economy is receding, as is its capacity to lead a new phase of capitalist expansion. Table 1 shows the rapid loss of US participation in global industry.

Table 1

Main industrial countries.**Participation of the processing industry in added value (vti) worldwide, in percent**

Country	2005	2016
1. China	11,7	24,4
2. United States	20,3	16,0
3. Japan	11,0	8,7
4. Germany	7,3	6,3
5. India	2,0	3,4
6. South Korea	2,5	3,1
7. Italy	3,7	2,4
8. France	3,1	2,3
9. Brazil	2,9	1,8
10. United Kingdom	2,7	1,8

Source: UNIDO, quoted from IEDI (2017).

Figure 1 shows the disparities caused by the United States' efforts to keep their economy going: "For the first time in the history of industrial capitalism, a major economy is building a debt pile in peacetime which it has no realistic way of shrinking" (Mason, 2019). This disproportion is only possible, because the US government benefits from emitting the currency that continuously to be used as reference for world trade. However, this has begun to change. An increasing number of countries conduct their transactions in other currencies. The danger of the United States' impossibility to finance their deficit and, as a result, a serious crisis of the current world-system is a hypothesis on the horizon.

New territorial conflicts are unfolding. Whereas during the peak of neoliberalism – the decade of the 90s – national spaces were said to have lost importance, because capital could migrate at any time in search of better conditions in order to increase its profits in any location, nowadays we experience new territorial conflicts, either about the control of natural resources, or about market control. Apparently, the utopia of a unified world market will finally not materialize.

There has been a "new turn" to the States, which actually had never been abandoned by capital, although a certain scholarly literature and publications at airport bookshops had announced their death or expiration. States even return at the hands of transnational companies that, rather than widely distributing their property via the international share markets, work for certain "national interests", for the benefit of "their States". The United States and German governments

have taken steps to prevent their strategic companies from being acquired by Chinese capital.

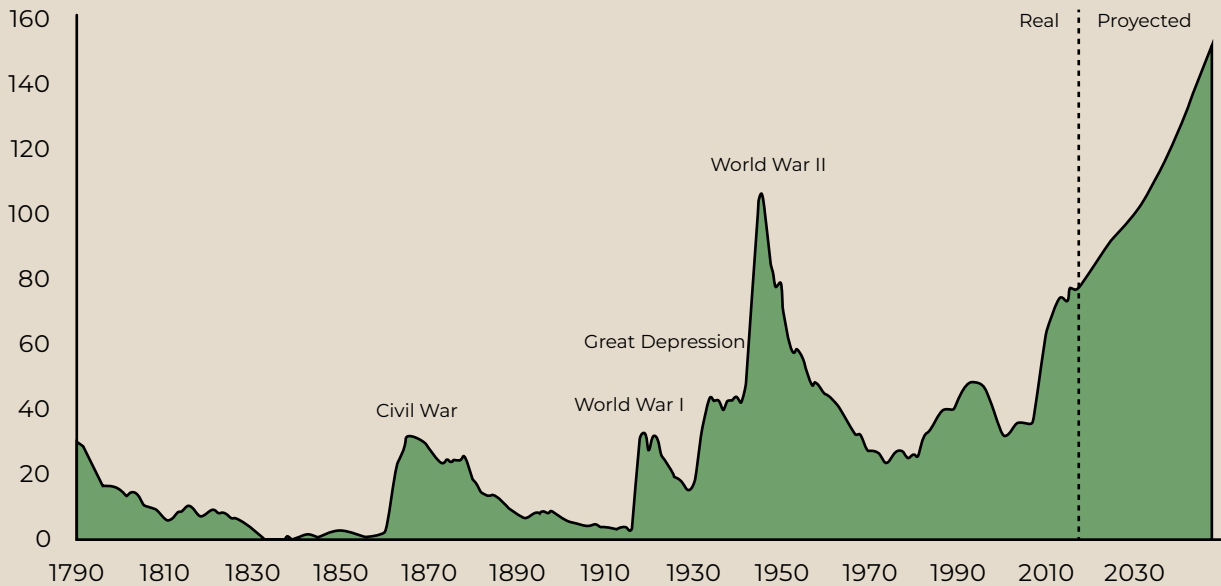
Only peripheral countries with subordinated ruling elites, such as Michel Temer's and Jair Bolsonaro's Brazil accept, for instance, that a North American giant like Boeing devours Embraer,³ a Brazilian company, which at that moment was technologically advanced, innovative, and internationally highly competitive in its field, with a strong participation not only in private aviation, but also in the Brazilian defense industry.

Energy and climate at the heart of the conflicts

By the end of 2015, in Paris an increasing concern of the international public opinion defending the case that in the face of critical climate change urgent measures should be taken to find solutions and transitions, on the one side, met with a renewed neoliberal offensive pushing procedures that offer *false solutions* and introduce concepts such as public-private partnerships (PPP) and attempts to "greenwash" the market strategies of financialized capitalism.

³ Embraer is a Brazilian company with cutting-edge technology manufacturing commercial, military and executive aircraft. Founded in 1969, it was originally a State company under the control of Brazil's armed forces. Although it was privatized in 1994, the State retained its veto power over the company. In 2018 US giant Boeing made a purchasing offer that was accepted by the Brazilian government of president Jair Bolsonaro.

Figure 1
Debt, as a percentage of gdp in the United States



Source: Congressional Budget Office, taken from Mason (2019).

In any case, an important historical cycle of our civilization seemed to come to an end, a period that started, when the English navy decided to substitute carbon by petrol as its source of energy at the beginning of the 20th century, while the car industry opted for combustion instead of electrical motors, and all affluent societies of the 20th century were based on this cheap, versatile fossil energy with its multiple derived industrial applications. They leveraged the productivity of work and the growth of the national economies of developed capitalism and part of peripheral capitalism throughout the last century.

However, there was a drastic change, when Donald Trump became president of the United States in 2016. Denialism gained access to circles of power at the very heart of world imperialism. Obviously, this cast doubts on the entire plot that was to be set up – and only partly completed – in order to push the ecological transition at the international level in Paris, in 2015. For the US government this was not only a matter of changing its discourse, but rather of securing its strategy for an energy revolution based on “non-conventional” petrol and gas it had pursued for some time.

As the new US policies got under way, multilateral negotiating forums, e. g. on climate, trade or the big blocks also fell into crisis. The multilateral architecture, which generally had been captured by the factual powers of transnational companies and the interest of big money, was now replaced by bilateral negotiations based on the “national interests” of the powers, above all the United States.

In 2019, the European Union took advantage of the neoliberal turn of the most important Mercosur governments – Argentina and Brazil – and the political weakness of their presidents, Macri and Bolsonaro, both in need of international news that might renew their standing, pushed a broad agreement with Mercosur, while taking up predatory standards like the ones laid down in the Free Trade Agreement of the Americas (FTAA), which North American governments had been promoting until its final rejection by the region at the 2005 Summit of the Americas in Mar del Plata, Argentina.

The dismantling of the architecture of regional integration as promoted by the governments of the right that had come to power in Latin America made the lives of those economic powers easier which take part in the neo-colonialist conflict about portions of our region.

Looking for the working class of the 21st century

Within the context of over two hundred years of class struggle between capital and labor, the last fifty were particularly marked by rapid changes. At least three periods can be distinguished. Until the 1970s, Western capitalism followed the paradigm of the social Welfare State, although its implementation was rather mitigated in some advanced countries such as the United States, or simply incomplete and deformed in the capitalist periphery of Latin America, whenever it was applied. Those were the times of social pacts and the recognition of social and labor rights. However, drastic changes

followed after the political turn the right-wing governments introduced in order to apply the neoliberal program. In the 1980s and 1990s, trade unions became enemies that had to be destroyed by governments and companies, while social and labor rights turned into “costs” that had to be cut, because a company or a country stopped to be competitive on the globalized market.

Whereas the previous period had been characterized by social and labor achievements, the quest for full employment and upward social mobility of the marginalized, in the new period rights had to be reduced and replaced by some kind of meritocracy and individual solutions (employability, entrepreneurship, etc.) that result in precarious, vulnerable work due to a drop in workers’ real wages and increasing social inequality. This change had a profound impact on democracies and led to an erosion of politics. Right now we are witnessing a surge of right-wing policies aimed at manipulating people’s critical conscience regarding the disastrous consequences of such policies, in order to blame the problems on “the others”: refugees, migrants, women, LGBTIQ+ persons, people of African descent, etc., and thereby increase public violence.

The political history of Latin America presented some unique features during the past thirty years. In some countries of the region, neoliberalism plunged into crisis in the 1990s, in contrast to its worldwide upswing. The 2000s were marked by a number of experiences that had been introduced by national governments promoting a variety of new country paradigms based on public policies that, although they did not shape a new country model, highlighted the potential of a number of those alternatives. Currently, the region is going thru a conservative and reactionary hangover, but the memory of how much life had improved is still present in large sectors of the people. Which paths should be followed to overcome those shortfalls and *impasses*?

For more than ten years TUCA has been debating about the need to transform the hemisphere’s trade unionism. It is clear that the forms of organization and union action inherited from previous periods of struggle against capitalism are under pressure and besieged due to new company and government strategies. The trade union movement is on its way towards restoration and modernization. Numerous struggles are under way, although most of them appear fragmented, above all because unemployment, underemployment, precarious work and work under informal conditions threaten the working class and try to intimidate it. Therefore some time ago the labor movement has come to understand that it needs to combine its fights as unions with the struggles of other social movements and citizens’ mobilizations.

The needs of the majority that remain unsolved have led to new protests; the trade union movement must be able to act as their backbone.

Democratizing energy as a fundamental tool

Some aspects regarding the energy system

Like almost everything that surrounds us in this unequal society, energy has winners and losers. Those who have become rich thanks to energy are getting richer, and those who are poor due to a lack of energy are getting poorer. Some are displaced by energy, others are exploited by energy, and others excluded due to energy.

Usually, in the popular sectors we talk and discuss about energy only if certain effects of energy policies affect us, because they impoverish us, because we don't have access, because we are being displaced, or because we are laid off, if we work in the industry.

The energy system is obscure, almost without transparency, and intricate, and it presents itself as a domain of a limited number of the chosen, who declare that they "understand" or "know" about energy, technology, and development.

The energy system is highly concentrated and centralized; it is not only exclusive with regard to access to energy, but above all, with regard to the possibility to participate in decision-making.

It is a highly concentrated system not only with regard to decision-making, but also in terms of property, even if we accept that the largest companies of the industry are public property.

The energy system's features of concentration and centralization are validated by the general belief that the issue should be dealt with by "specialists". However, there is sufficient evidence that the popular sectors, particularly those affected by energy policies, analyze, debate, fight and propose alternatives to the current reality regarding energy, although they are not yet in a condition to build power from this perspective.

The "big" debates, the debates that define the energy policies of our countries and regions, are still limited to certain government elites, "specialists", and some "specialized" consulting companies, which are exposed to intense lobby activities by business sectors with an interest in the industry.

But the system is not only concentrated and obscure; it is also a highly centralized system, where local concerns are not represented. Decisions are usually adopted in terms of the so-called "common good" and "development".

In line with the Final Declaration of the 3rd Conference on Energy, Environment and Work (CREAT),

We affirm the need to democratize energy, because we understand that far from being just a debate between state planners, sector technicians and managers of large companies, it has to be society, through democratic and transparent mechanisms of popular participation, who define what energy we want to develop, how, for what purposes and for whom, and in doing so question, among other things, the excessive consumption patterns of the elites. It is not enough to discuss changes in the energy mix, we must debate the energy policy in relation to our desired vision for national and regional development. (TUCA, 2018)

Within this context, it is not only possible, but necessary to move forward towards the democratization, deconcentration and decentralization of energy policies, not only for its own sake, but as a tool in order to challenge power regarding energy and to push a process of fair energy transition for popular sectors and nature.

We conceive of energy as a common good, as a tool and not an end in itself, and from this perspective, as being a part of collective rights and consistent with environmental justice. Therefore it is necessary to view energy as a right, possibly following the example of the struggles for the right to water, not only at a conceptual level, but also in concrete action.

This process needs to be in parallel to the demercantilization of the energy sector.

Key areas for building energy democracy

Contemporary democracies have been distorted and weakened due to the extreme concentration of wealth and media power, States being captured by corporations, and in many cases, the criminalization of dissent (Grupo de Trabajo Global más allá del Desarrollo Global [Working Group Beyond Development], 2019). We don't conceive of democracy as a state of government, but rather as a continuous, multidimensional process that aims at democratizing unequal power relations. This logic implies the transformation of existing institutions, a change of well-established political cultures and the development of other collective mechanisms (Bertinat and Chemes, 2022).

According to the movement Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) the transition to a truly sustainable energy system will only materialize, if there is a decisive change of power, from profit-oriented companies to ordinary citizens and communities (Worker Institute at Cornell, 2012). The same document argues that energy democracy can replace the anarchy of markets with the help of planning, free the potential of renewable energies and move towards the demercantilization of energy, among other objectives (Bertinat, 2016).

According to the Final Declaration of the 3rd CREAT,

We must conceive of energy as a fundamental right for a country's entire population and, as such, it must be defended as a public service. This right is essential if people are to exercise their fundamental human and social rights, their integration into social life, and uphold their dignity. (TUCA, 2018)

We will address some aspects that we consider important in order to push the process of deconcentration, decentralization and democratization of the energy system. The lines of action we are going to present should not be seen as recipes, but rather as aspects to be taken into account during this process.



1. Energy information

For various reasons the problem of information is extremely relevant. First of all, we must take into account that in most cases the information related to the energy system is partial, has been constructed on the basis of the productivist paradigm, and is presented in an exclusive language that misuses technical aspects while relegating social and environmental issues.

Possibly, the four main sources of energy-related information include:

- National government statistics which are usually very disparate, because numerous countries do not elaborate such reports, and because, as a rule, they use formats that cannot easily be made compatible between countries, when referring to physical aspects;
- Information provided by international bodies, such as the International Energy Agency (IEA), the Latin American Energy Organization (OLADE, for its Spanish acronym), and the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), but also multilateral finance institutions like the World Bank (WB) or the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) (BID);
- Big transnational companies like British Petroleum (BP), Chevron Corporation, Gazprom, etc.
- Organizations representing popular sectors, those affected, environmentalists, union members, peasants, women, and indigenous just transition, among others, who in many cases call on them to build their own information from a perspective of resistance, grievance, and defense of human, territorial, labor and natural rights.

Probably, we should not expect miracles from the three first sources. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to submit them to a critical review, while the popular sectors and workers should work out relevant information in accordance with the objectives of a fair eco-social transformation. A huge effort will be needed to work out the necessary conceptual framework that will define the targets, set priorities, develop a common language and make this information visible.

It will be essential to build up popular information systems that will be in a condition to challenge the biased data provided by business lobby groups with their intentions and strong interest-led purpose. Such information should be developed as part of popular education processes and should not be limited to the development of “technical” knowledge, but instead include all kinds of knowledge beyond the traditional scientific perspective of the West, as Boaventura de Souza Santos points out in his thesis about the epistemologies of the South (De Souza Santos and Meneses, 2014).

The development of popular information systems based on a complex interdisciplinary data matrix is an alternative that

would allow for the development of “technical” capacities for energy analysis at the same time. Such systems would enable us to get to know and understand the global and local logic of the energy sector.

2. Education

We have been told that energy is an issue to be dealt with by specialists, an issue that has been converted into an elitist matter. However, there is sufficient evidence that things can be different. A substantial proportion of very good analysis is carried out by popular sectors. Numerous examples show, how populations affected by big dams, oil extraction, even wind parks develop analysis and proposals which are difficult to find in governments, companies, and even academic research.

In many cases the processes of energy education have been the result of resistance, they were motivated by the desire to generate something different of what oppresses, displaces or exploits us. Trade unions are also a source of development in this respect, although sometimes it may not be easy to have them shake off their technological ties, and in other cases predatory alternatives are promoted exclusively for being of domestic origin. In the Development Platform of the Americas (PLADA, for its Spanish acronym) we argue that progress towards reducing dependency from fossil fuels is necessary, and a program to decrease oil extraction will be needed, although this will not necessary materialize in the sector’s unions, where it may be a difficult task to strike a balance between the defense of jobs and new technological horizons.

Establishing education and self-education processes poses a huge challenge, and it is a key necessity to drive the democratization of energy with a view to assuring the collective character of the debate about energy and to be able to develop proposals and challenge decisions. There are a number of examples, including the Landless Workers Movement’s schools for education in renewable energies, a training course that has been developed by the Federal University of São Paulo’s ABC region and TUCA, and the courses of the movement against dams. All of these tests evidence an interest for understanding, analyzing, developing proposals and challenging power.

Probably, the path to follow could be the mapping of a number of sector-specific needs and the elaboration of programs for their solution. We think of technical training, of understanding the context of energy development, assuming the limits of our planet within a context of strong inequality, analyzing energy sources and energy efficiency as a point of departure to frame energy development in its political perspective, in the understanding that energy is a tool to improve the quality of life, not a commodity.

3. Technological aspects

When we refer to technologies, we follow Winner (1978) in focusing on their presence at three possible levels: artefactual (tools, machines, appliances, etc.), processes (skills, methods, procedures, routines, etc.), and organization (companies, cooperatives, clubs, regulations, etc.).

It is necessary to understand that the above-named three technology levels are not neutral. They determine the players' space and behavior, condition the structures of production, distribution and access to goods and services, facilitate certain forms of organization or interfere with them, create social and environmental problems, while contributing to their solution as well. Technologies act (in many cases beyond the intentions of their designers and producers) in favor of certain social groups, and against others.

From this perspective policies are always a constituent part of all dimensions of technology, whereas technologies always condition such policies, their scope, scale, contents and eventual viability. All technologies are political, and all policies are technological (Thomas et al., 2020).

Public policies are technologies – regarding organization, processes and products, as well as the use, access to and distribution of public goods and services – capable of building the conditions for possibilities and future options in a democratic manner and at an extended social scale. Public technologies play a key role in planning processes and the design of inclusive, sustainable development strategies in the region. The way such processes are co-designed will be key to the generation of local, socio-historically located dynamics with a tendency to equalize rights.

The Final Declaration of the 3rd CREAT proposes:

A discussion regarding the role and application of technology within a democratically-decided national project. We must not accept technological determinisms imposed and manipulated by corporate interests nor that, under the pretext of transition, reinforce dependence on technological development centers in the Global North. (TUCA, 2018)

To a large extent, the problem we face is tightly associated to the current technological development. At the same time, the current production model is associated to a technology model. According to Hernán Thomas (2012),

Technologies – all technologies – play a central role in processes of social change. They demarcate the positions and attitudes of the players; condition the structures of social distribution, production costs, and access to goods and services; generate social and environmental problems; and facilitate or complicate their solution.

The challenge consists in understanding which technologies are adequate to support democratization processes and how to generate the technological basis that will underpin such processes of social inclusion. This is not about insisting on the transfer of technology packages, but about creating processes for the development of technologies for social inclusion, instead of profit-orientation (Bertinat, 2016).

Technologies should not act as straitjackets which limit alternatives. Historically, the sources of energy have played a role in society; in fact, in many cases they allowed processes of domination to become viable. The impacts caused by the current development model, as it increases the complexity of systems to the extent that life on the planet itself is compromised, make it necessary that we assume completely our responsibility for the development of the fossil and nuclear resources that have taken us to the current situation.

There is a need to establish limits, not everything that “can” be done should be done. We know which sources must be abandoned, we know that we have to use less energy and distribute it in a different way; but perhaps the most important challenge will be to set up mechanisms and processes, which enable us not only to distinguish which technologies we should use, but also in which way and how to use them in each location and in each situation.

4. Disputing power

Energy control has been about controlling the sources and different vectors, but also the means that allow for their exploitation (technology, transport and storage). (Fernández Durán and González Reyes, 2018)

The same authors argue that there exists a decisive relation between energy and domination; that an increase in the quality and quantity of available energy allows for the control of more persons and territories. And vice versa, without enhancing energy control it will be impossible to increase social and environmental controls.

Energy control encompasses a number of aspects including the control of natural resources, territories and their population, and technologies. However, it also draws on juridical, legal and regulatory tools that allow for sustaining a concentrated, centralized system even within the context of predominant state ownership. The operating logic of the energy system is associated to a fundamental tool for the reproduction of capital and the upholding of inequalities.

Breaking up current energy-related power requires an understanding of its predatory energy-consuming logic in order to weaken it, while it is deconcentrated, deprivatized, decentralized and democratized and the logic of a right to energy can be built up.

Proposed actions

The events of the past few years, above all the pandemic and the current state of global war since the beginning of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine establish a far more complex framework, when it comes to promote a fair and popular energy transition.

But challenges are even more complex, because we don't conceive of a fair and popular energy transition as a simple change of energy sources, but rather a systemic change that will enable us also to address inequality, inequity, environmental and climate injustice, conflicts, a lack of citizen participation, etc.

We want to outline only a few initiatives, which can be put into practice. These include, among others:

- Building collaborative systems for information and the exchange of experiences. Mapping the power structures and methods of the sectors related to the power of energy could be the first step. Establishing shared methodologies, criteria and methods that enable us to analyze the energy system. When elaborating information, we should work in a regional context and try to undertake eco-systemic analysis that go beyond national borders.
- In-depth reviewing and drafting of the PLADA chapters about energy.
- Local contexts – villages, communities, cities –, where it is possible to promote spaces for public participation for the debate about local energy problems provide important opportunities. We think of diverse spaces, where it is possible to debate about which energy we consume and how it is generated, but also to act on energy poverty, patterns of consumption and the role of local authorities from a local perspective.
- “Trade unions can contribute a lot to the identification and encouragement of spaces for debate, reflection and synthesis of this kind. Possibly, in some territories the unions may be the most organized players to promote such spaces. The union houses proposed by TUCA as part of the [Road Map for Strengthening and Transforming Trade Unions](#) constitute an initiative that can be complemented and support exercises of participation like the one proposed, not only from an exclusive union perspective, but from a sociopolitical one that includes other leading social players in the territories”.
- Disputing power requires agreements, alliances, and the development of regionally scalable programs with a view to promote energy transition. “Regional integration processes provide the potential to think about present and future energy transitions, although of a different kind like the change towards a different development model. The trade union movement defends regional integration as a shared space for the coordination of public policies with social players as leading participants. On the basis of such a defense, it will be possible to take an in-depth look at how regional integration could channel proposals of a fair energy transition following the assumptions set out in this document”.

Making unions and the commons meet in the Latin American social movement

As part of a sociopolitical trade union strategy, for more than a decade the region's labor movement has been including and re-signifying a number of concepts and demands in its program, which were originally raised by other popular organizations. Notions like food sovereignty (as defended and promoted by the indigenous peasants movement) or the radical criticism of the patriarchal system, which is at the root of gender inequalities (introduced by feminist movements), indicate that cross-sector coordination is a crucial element for the construction of a counter-hegemonic model in Latin America and the Caribbean. The same can be said about the commons, a concept that emerges as a language of evaluation of popular environmentalism in the ecological conflicts of interest related to the territorial impacts of enclaves specialized on extraction (the hydrocarbon sector and mining), projects related to energy infrastructure (like mega-dams), or deforestation and the forced displacement of people due to the extension of the extensive livestock and cropping frontier based on fossil energy and the increase of property transactions.

It is not enough to simply borrow a flag; it also means strengthening diverging political and ideological matrixes and establish a dialogue between them. And in this case it means getting closer to the perspective of common goods starting from the trade unions movements' own experiences, concepts, claims and programs; a preliminary exercise in exploration that is by no means exclusive.

The idea of commons is more comprehensive than a physical entity, a geographic space or a reference to nature. The commons denote the metabolism that develops out of the interaction between human beings, communities and society. And it wants to account for a specific social and historic relation with nature, biodiversity and vital processes.

There is a difference between talking about commons and natural resources. In its hegemonic meaning a natural resource is a specific property of the environment which has been subjected to observation and evaluation. It has been pointed out that the idea of natural resources implies an economy-focused, industry-oriented understanding. Natural resources are considered in accordance with human capacities, as a potential or reserve that is constantly offered or donated by nature in order to be transformed into a good; a commercial product that is transformed into a finished or half-finished product during a production process and marketed. However, this world view is currently suffering some changes, as it adapts to the dynamics of the financial market. Nowadays natural resources are identified as commodities or "natural capital". They are treated as undifferentiated goods (regarding manufacturing, availability, and international demand), whose prices will be fixed internationally and serve as a base for the creation of financial assets (Fornillo, 2014).

By contrast, the commons denote above all a horizon of social transformation and a counter-hegemonic narrative under permanent construction. They prefigure possible transitions and futures. They resonate in organizations, struggles and collective subjects all over the continent, who seek to stop and reverse the extractionist mining, energy and agro-industry model that deprives, exploits, encroaches on and expels people from their territories. Furthermore, they are intertwined and associated with the ideas of "communality", community, shared ownership, and collective, democratic management.

Unlike the capitalist ideology that legitimizes private property and the cultural and symbolic hegemony of the bourgeoisie, they promote a community-based popular, collective management. Therefore they offer a critical narrative of the capitalist model and its forms of production and reproduction of



life, but also a perspective of resistance and construction of alternatives.

But the perspective of the commons also requires an egalitarian communication model in order to coordinate, organize and create collectively. In this respect communication denotes a set of processes, which are vital for the shaping of a critical conscience.

It is important to highlight the feminist movement's substantial contribution to the vision of the commons, above all the

concept and vindication of the contribution of women and communities to the sustainability of life. Within this context, special value has to be assigned to the defense and conservation of territories, water, energy, biodiversity, agriculture, seeds, ancestral knowledge and, above all, the organization of cities, as all of these processes have been made invisible by the hegemonic perspective that reduces the spheres of value and work to what can be commercialized.

According to radical feminist thinking capitalist accumulation cannot take place without the reproduction process operating outside the sphere of goods production, which implies dedicated work (cooking, cleaning, childbearing), but also a space for struggles and negotiations. Therefore reproduction-related shared spaces like food banks, community-owned vegetable gardens, consumer cooperatives, and collective care mechanisms need to be recovered and appreciated once again from the perspective of a society, whose objective should be the reproduction of life and not the exploitation of work; in other words, a society that generates community and depends on it (Federici, 2018).

The World March of Women (WMW) suggested that it is necessary to challenge androcentrism (the male reference as the universal standard) hiding the links between production and reproduction, public and private, culture and nature, and reason and emotion as interrelated dimensions, whose separation ensures the persistence and legitimation of patriarchal and capitalist oppression.

As Silvia Federici (2018) points out, feminism unfolds as a movement for social justice that introduces a policy of the commons as a political project, at the heart of which we find the restructuring of reproduction as a crucial area for the transformation of social relations, a revolution of our relations with others and with ourselves that subverts the hegemonic value structure.

For decades also the peasant movement has elaborated on the concept of food sovereignty, given its close links to the notion of commons:

Food sovereignty consists of a systematic change – in which human beings exercise a direct, democratic control of the most important elements of society – regarding the way we eat and feed ourselves; how we use and maintain the soil, water and other resources of our environment for the benefit of present and future generations; and how we interact with other groups, persons and cultures. (Vía Campesina, 2018)

On the other hand, the people of Latin America's Andean countries vindicate the *sumak kawsay* ('good living'), an equivalent of the commons. It is defined as a way of life that guarantees more human satisfaction based on equity, social cohesion, solidarity and sustainability. It promotes a logic that

values human activities according to their contribution to well-being, rather than gross domestic product and tries to overcome the vision of the market as the organizing principle of society (Unceta, 2014).

At the same time, a diversity of critical social movements and theoretical currents vindicating the commons as a new anti-capitalist utopia proliferate in the countries of the North. Among these movements such experiences stand out which focus on production, distribution and free access to knowledge and so-called intangible goods. As Mayo Fuster Morell (2017) points out, the creation of internet and the general implementation of information and communication technology set off contradictory dynamics: On one side, the democratization and decentralization of knowledge, production and open, collaborative and efficient distribution of the commons like free, open source software and collaborative encyclopedia and platforms such as Linux, Apache or Wikipedia; and on the other side, enclosures, commodification, and the expropriation of knowledge commons by corporations, as in the current cases of transnational companies like Uber, Amazon, eBay, Airbnb, Glovo, and many others which manage to multiply their returns, while evading labor standards and national regulations.

Such approaches, mainly in the North, are characterized by a profound criticism of the modern State that also include the socialist and communist systems of the 20th century that gave rise to what some called the bureaucratic capture of the commons (Laval y Dardot, 2015).

They argue that it is not enough to protect the commons against capitalist predation; instead a profound transformation of the economy and society is needed. As Laval and Dardot (2015) explain, we currently pass thru the tragedy of what is "not common", an impasse where national frameworks and state mechanisms appear politically disarmed and prove insufficient. Although these ideas manage to question the structural shortcomings that tension the co-existence of capitalism and democracy, they don't provide fundamental keys in the South, where the concept of the state and democracy as safeguards of mass political participation and the expansion of rights is at the heart of popular political programs.

The vision of the commons itself in the countries of the South makes it possible to think about the nature of state property and collective forms of private property, and thereby emphasize the problems of democracy, the control by and participation of communities, villages, social movements and workers in the management and administration of state assets and services. This is far more than an abstract vision; it is within the framework of neo-colonial, extraction-based and expropriating violence, where such counter-hegemonic narratives gain space as ways of resistance.

Accumulation, dispossession and new enclosures

The capitalist economy and its primitive accumulation processes emerge and reproduce as a result of the permanent violent separation of human beings and communities from their conditions and livelihoods. This phenomenon is known as commodization, and far from being a feature of present-day Latin America, it is rooted in history.

In the 20th century development was associated with the defense of economic growth (and in addition, with the improvement of some social indicators in accordance with the standards of the Western way of life). Growth was the basis for expanding the market sphere. Increasing production became vital for the satisfaction of human necessities and gave rise to the persistent market expansion (driven by private property and monetary exchange) in all spheres of life. Society and nature appear as separate, auxiliary components of the market (Unceta, 2014).

However, long before the original accumulation had become the process, in the course of which the masses were dispossessed of their most important means of production and livelihood, as a precondition for the emergence of the capitalist mode of production.

In fact, the so-called primitive or original accumulation consisted of the creation of a sector of the population which had no other means of living to offer than the sale of its labor force on the incipient labor market. This population was formed mainly of peasants, who had been expropriated and expelled during the enclosures in Western Europe, and as a result of the plundering of communities, the slave trade from Africa to the rest of the world, and the exploitation of the indigenous population of Latin America (De Angelis, 2012).

This scenario is completed by

The separation of the processes of production (production for the market, production of goods) and reproduction (production of the labor force); both processes begin to separate physically, and at the same time, they are carried out by different subjects: the first mainly by men, the second by women; the first as paid work, the second as unpaid work. (Federici, 2018, p. 15)

This is a history of bloodshed and fire, where the peasants' land was converted to grazing land, when farms were set up. The rise of the imperialist centers depended of the subjugation of new populations under the exchange relations of the nascent market economy (Bonfeld, 2012).

By the end of the 17th century an international division of labor had been established, an international production chain that reduced the production cost of the industrial workforce

and connected waged labor and slave labor in ways which foreshadowed the use of immigrant labor. Its most characteristic expression was plantation system that integrated slave labor into the reproduction of the European industrial workforce, while keeping them socially and geographically apart. As a result the most important goods for the reproduction of the European labor force (sugar, tea, tobacco, rum, cotton), which, in addition, were the basis of the industrial revolution, were produced by slaves (Federici, 2018).

However, the primitive accumulation must also be understood as a continuous phenomenon that is still in full force in contemporary global capitalism, while it is linked to the economic dynamics resulting from the international division of work.

Continuous accumulation combines the traditional exploitation of labor in all latitudes with old and new forms of primitive accumulation and new enclosures, above all in the nations of the South (De Angelis, 2012). Its constant reproduction takes place at two levels: as a renewed separation of new populations from their means of production and livelihoods (putting new workers under the orders of capital), and as a reproduction of the wage relationship within the established relations of capital (Bonefeld, 2012).

The dismantling of the commons created by the postwar Welfare States of the 20th century (such as State-guaranteed rights and subsidies, policies of full employment, collective bargaining, etc.), the manipulation of the state coffers, the consolidation and exponential growth of public debt, the international credit system or some confiscatory tax systems can be understood as modern forms of primitive accumulation (De Angelis, 2012). The same applies to the expansion of the agricultural boundaries in accordance with the agrobusiness model, the expropriation, dispossession, forced displacement and massacre of communities for the installation of big mining or oil-drilling operations or energy infrastructure by transnational companies, often with the support and complicity of the states at different levels.

The continuity of enclosures highlights the ongoing implementation of strategies aimed at separating populations from their livelihoods.

As a matter of fact, capitalist accumulation cannot exist without the continuous reproduction of the divorce between work and its material conditions of existence. This divorce can only be contained by force, with the subsequent destruction of production capacities, unemployment, poverty, worsening working conditions, war, ecological disaster, famines, the burning of fields, water pollution, and ravaged communities (Bonefeld, 2012), and of course, the persecution of the labor collectives which organize to defend their rights, in other words, the infringement of trade union freedoms.

From this perspective the differences and splits between urban and rural workers, employed workers, private and public sectors, big corporations and small businesses, self-employed people, and the solidarity-based, popular economy and peasants become particularly significant. In a broader, comprehensive sense the labor movement is enormously heterogeneous, covering all kinds of working conditions and existence, forms of organization and identity. Given the predatory and expropriatory dynamics of the neoliberal development model, that is why the coordination of the trade union movement with the movements of peasants, indigenous people, Afro-descendants and feminists who put the territory at the center of their demands and worries, is considered strategic.

Indigenous people, peasants and Afro-descendants from countries like Bolivia, Ecuador, Peru, Colombia and Brazil introduced the issue of territory in the theoretical and political debate, and thereby re-signified the concepts regarding the earth on the continent.

That said, it must be added that according to the new epistemic-political contributions of the movements, territory is not equivalent to the earth in the *campesino* discourse of the 20th century. And it does not correspond with the concept of territory of the nation state, which it actually challenges. Territory does not mean property (although it recognizes collective property), but rather the actual ownership thru cultural, agricultural, economic, ecological or ritual practices. Therefore territories do not have established borders, but porous fabrics uniting them with neighboring territories (Escobar, 2014).

Collective government and co-government

At the end of the 20th century a new current of constitutional thinking appeared in Latin America that introduced the concept of cultural diversity and enabled the debate about the collective rights of indigenous and traditional just transition. Under the impulse of the democratic transition processes, since the 1980s a majority of Latin American countries passed new constitutions or introduced important reforms, in which notions like collective ownership, shared use and possession of new natural resources and territories, and the respect for cultural differences gained weight⁴ (Belloso Martín, 2017).

Between 1989 and 1995 a second period of constitutional reforms determined the inclusion of indigenous rights (language, bilingual education, mechanisms for participation) laid down in Convention 169 of the International Labour Or-

⁴ El Salvador, in 1983; Guatemala, in 1985; Honduras, in 1982; Nicaragua, in 1987; Brazil, in 1988; Chile, in 1980; Colombia, in 1991; Ecuador, in 1979; Peru, in 1993; Mexico, in 1992 and 2000; Argentina, in 1994.

ganization (ILO). At that stage the catalogue of basic human rights was expanded, as the number of protected subjects was extended. On the other side new safeguards and institutes for administrative control and popular participation were added (Beloso Martín, 2017).

Ironically, the reforms enabled adjustment policies including social rights setbacks, labor precariousness, privatization, openness towards transnational companies, and new forms of territorial expropriation. The case of Mexico may serve as an example.

The land reform launched in post-revolutionary Mexico, which was the result of the peasants' fight during the 20th century, was cancelled in 1992 during the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, when article 27 was modified; this article had been passed as part of the post-revolutionary constitution of 1917. Article 27 was the key to the implementation of the land reform. It introduced expropriations in the name of public interest, the nationalization of natural resources, restrictions to foreign land property, and the allocation of land and water to small villages, which lacked or needed them (Carrillo Nieto, 2010). The 1992 reform repealed the right of landless Mexicans to apply for land and established mechanisms for the privatization of social property. Meanwhile, the agrarian laws were amended, as was the national water and mining legislation which regulated article 27, and the sales process of community land and the expropriation and concession of land in the public interest. At the same time, the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was announced, which took effect on January 1st, 1994 as part of Mexico's neoliberal turn (Núñez Rodríguez et al., 2013). Within this scenario of structural reforms and the conclusion of NAFTA the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN, for its Spanish acronym), an indigenous peasant movement that launched the issues of land and work and a profound questioning of the agrarian counterrevolution of 1992 as its most important claims, made its public appearance.

We should keep the dual character of the reforms in mind, the fact they institutionalize popular claims regarding commons in the context of a profound offensive and neoliberal restructuring. This dual nature, and the recognition of rights in constitutional processes of neoliberal inspiration, follows the dynamics of social (and in some cases, armed) conflict in these countries, rather than obeying to the will of governments. In the same direction, the recognition of common goods under collective property or dual jurisdiction figures and the acknowledgment of the self-determination of indigenous and Afro-descendant populations can be seen as examples that in our opinion reflect a concept of a State which responds to the interests of the majorities, not the corporations, a State that safeguards rights and democratization in terms of collective decision-making, not a repressive, expropriating State.

The paradox aspects of such reforms can be clearly observed in the cases of Colombia, in 1991, and Brazil, in 1988.

In Colombia, following the adoption of Law 70 in 1993 collective organization is dynamized around the appropriation and social control of the territory of Afro-Colombian people as the basis of their autonomy and food security and the setup of transnational networks. The law recognizes Colombia's black communities as an ethnic group with collective rights to their territories and their cultural identity, identifies their ancestral settlements, and creates the necessary mechanisms for the titling of those territories as well as parameters for the use and protection of the environment. This legislation enabled the Afro-descendant communities of the Southern Pacific of Colombia to claim the rights over their territory starting in the year 2000, and if such rights were recognized and safeguarded, to develop strategies for food autonomy, the promotion of traditional wisdoms and practices (recovery of rice growing, production of sugar cane sweetener), and strengthen their organizations as part of their resistance against forced displacements and massacres in a heavily militarized area which is controlled by the big banana and palm oil corporations (Escobar, 2014).

In Brazil the creation of the National System of Conservation Units (SNUC, for its Portuguese acronym) by Law 9985 in the year 2000 and Decree 6040 in 2007, which established officially the term *territory* with reference to these populations instituted a national policy for sustainable development. Before this legislation was approved, the struggles of the *seringueiro* (rubber tapper) movement under the leadership of Chico Mendes in the 1980s were very important, as were the creation of the Coordination of Indigenous Organizations of the Amazon Basin and the rural black communities (*quilombolas*), among others.

Many years later the constituent processes of the first decade of the 21st century in Bolivia (2008), Ecuador (2009) and Venezuela (1999) were meant to be a qualitative leap in the same direction, with the firm intention to put an end to the liberal individualist logic of traditional political constitutions. This new legal-political movement breaks vigorously with the modern concept of the uninational, monocultural, centralist and exclusive State.

The pluralist assumption of Latin American constitutionalism defends the coexistence of various legal systems in one sociopolitical space, with the State's legal system as one among others. It implies an integration of the Constitution and democratic pluralism which opens the perspective of a new rule of law and a new model of democracy. New subjects and institutional settings appear, and the existence of a nation of various just transition or a plurinational State is proposed. This means an option for a social State that would be focused on the public protection of the environment within the framework of a sustainable economy and increased citizen

participation, as opposed to the neoliberal State, and it means leaving behind the centralist vision of the State. Adding to this, the ownership of rights of collective persons such as communities, just transition and nationalities would be recognized, as would be new rights like the right to water and food (Belloso Martín, 2017).

As Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2010) points out, we are confronting a bottom-up constitutionalism, which is imbued by a different emancipating epistemology vis-à-vis capitalism and colonialism that recovers the presence of millenary just transition with a direct, symbiotic relationship with the cycles of mother earth (Pachamama).

In the case of Ecuador, nature is recognized as a subject of rights. The Bolivian Constitution includes the ethical principles of *suma qamaña* ('good living'), *ñandereko* ('harmonious life'), *tekokavi* ('good life'), *yvyamarane'y* ('earth without evil'), and *qhapajñan* ('noble path'). Both the Bolivian and the Ecuatorian constitutions include the principle of *good living* that is part of the Andean and Amazon world and has a double plurinational and environmental connotation (Belloso Martín, 2017).

There is yet another aspect of the Andean constitutionalism, which has to be stressed and becomes central for the perspective of the commons. We refer to the modality of a shared government by society and State that would not only give priority to the principle of self-determination of just transition, but also the possibility to reinvent democracy with the help of mechanisms that safeguard the exercise of the autonomy of communities, interculturality and democratization.

In the case of Venezuela, the Constitution of 1999 establishes a fourth and fifth power, called Citizens Power and Electoral Power, and hoists the principles of a democratic, participatory, protagonist, multiethnic and pluricultural society. In the case of Ecuador the Constitution of 2008 defines five powers by adding to the classical tripartite division the functions of transparency and social control as expressed by the Council of Citizen Participation and Social Control (Pauca, 2017).

On our way towards the construction of broad social alliances and continental coordination it is very important to know, defend, safeguard and extend these tools of democratization, which are the result of historic achievements that were obtained thanks to the struggles of just transition and communities now at risk.

Just transition: Democratic policies to give priority to decent work and sustainability

When we take a look at our recent past it becomes clear that the human history of the 20th century was marked by the implementation of models for economic and social development which did not include the environment and climate among their guiding principles, let alone among their priorities. Therefore it was not before the last quarter of the century that the idea of sustainable development gained space and achieved international dissemination.

Both capitalism and actually existing socialism always presented heavy industry and extractivism as bridges towards development models that were seen as an expression of progress per se, without further considerations about the unsustainable consequences of that kind of development.

Within this context defending employment, collective bargaining and the struggle for labor rights did not only take a priority position on the trade union agenda, but on numerous occasions unions did not pay attention to environmental concerns, which were considered a political agenda of the intellectualized middle class. However, this conflictive relationship regarding the issue of environment must be understood as part of the labor movement's political culture in a specific context. Traditionally the workers of the 20th century, both in the North and the South, were politically educated and trained for the class struggle and the defense of the interests of each industry, usually not only with their backs to environmental problems, but also to ecologist social movements.

The mutual approach and recognition of trade unionists and environmentalists continuous to be a difficult, though necessary step towards developing a vision of *ecology-oriented labor* for a progressive political transformation in the future. The idea of a *just transition* is not only presented as an answer to the transformations affecting the climate, the economy and the production mode, but also as a concrete possibility to build bridges for a dialogue between the labor movement and other social movements that would have a positive im-

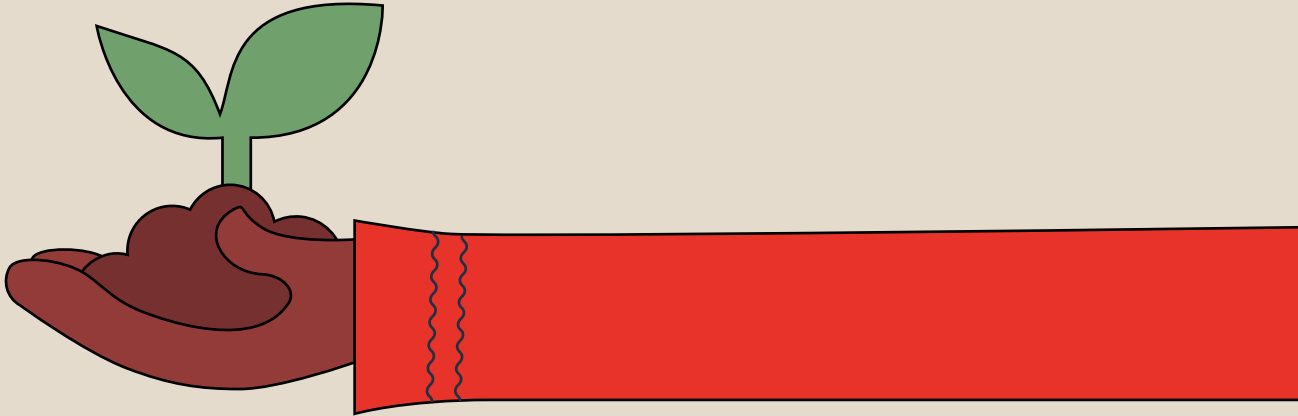
pact on strengthening the so-called *social power* of trade unions.

Our approach is based on the analysis of *power resources* (PRA), which tends to emphasize the primary sources of workers' political power (*structural power*) based on their capacity to solve conflicts, the vitality of labor organizations (*associational power*) and their possibilities to cooperate with other social movements (*social power*) while bearing in mind the institutional settings (*institutional power*) (Schmalz et al., 2019, p. 88). The overlap of history, players and political content will be analyzed with the objective to reflect on the idea of just transition in a world that has been hostile to organized workers during the last five decades of neoliberal hegemony in the global North and South.

In the 20th century industrial relations were turned more precarious as a result of regressive labor reforms, while social dialogue suffered setbacks in many parts of the world. Digitization, automation, and the dissemination of the platform economy have led to increasing disruptions on the labor markets and in union affiliations, which continue to be heavily rooted in the organization model of the 20th century. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the fragility of global production chains, and it showed clearly that any viable economy depends on the fundamental role of workers in the essential sectors of the world of labor, which includes work in the care economy and at home, among others.

This crisis scenario also includes the ILO after its centenary, as it tries to obtain tools that would allow for being up to the emancipatory spirit of the 1944 Declaration of Philadelphia (ILO, 2019), reaffirming

the fundamental principles on which the Organization is based and, in particular, that: (a) labour is not a commodity; (b) freedom of expression and of association are essential to sustained progress; (c) poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere; (d) the war against want re-



quires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision [that is to say, social dialogue]⁵ with a view to the promotion of the common good. (p. 1)

The disruptions of the coming decades will only be due to climate change. Industry 4.0 (focusing on the digitization and automation of production and distribution) promises to leave thousands of workers without their jobs, without any safeguards whatsoever that they will have the chance of a just transition during this process. The restructuring of production as promoted by the neoliberal globalization (between 1970 and 1990) showed already that many workers were left out, even in the United States, where the overall number of jobs in the manufacturing industry decreased from 20 million in 1979 to about 12 million in the second decade of the 21st century (“Why trade unions are declining”, 2015; United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor [US-BLS], 2020).

The sections hereafter will present a short history of the concept of just transition followed by a discussion of perspectives for the future within the context of the post-pandemic period and the war scenario in Ukraine, which pose important new challenges if compared with 2015, when the expression *just transition* was included in the Paris agreement on climate change for the first time.

Trade union origins

The idea of what finally came to be known as *just transition* emerged in the United States during the 1970s and followed a political path of continuous internationalization in the 1980s and 1990s. However, as early as 1973 Tony Mazzocchi, a leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union (OCAW) managed successfully to secure the support of environmentalists in order to organize what he called “the first environment strike” highlighting health and safety issues in Shell refineries (Morena et al., 2018, pp. 6-8).

By the beginning of the 1990s this network of trade unionists and activists had developed an action program explicitly called “Superfund for Workers” with the aim of financing the professional requalification and relocation of workers, who lost their “dirty” jobs. In 1995 trade unionists introduced the term *just transition* during a presentation before the International Joint Commission on Great Lakes Water Quality. And the year 1997 witnessed the launching of the Just Transition Alliance (JTA) with the purpose of connecting the trade union movement with groups campaigning for community-centered environmental justice (Morena et al., 2018). In 1998 a Canadian union activist, Brian Kohler, published what was to become one of the first mentions of the concept of just transition in a union newsletter. Throughout the years 2000 the concept was included in the documents and speeches of Global Union Federations (GUF) like the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) and the International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers’ Unions (ICEM) (Rosemberg, 2010, pp. 156-157).

This short historical account illustrates to which extent the concept of just transition includes two interrelated dimensions: a) a transition with the aim of achieving policies for specific labor sectors – a just transition for the workforce –, and b) a transition with the aim of achieving policies that promote a different relationship between industries and the communities around them in particular, and between the

⁵ Author’s note.

economy and society in general. Both dimensions are linked to the pursuit of a *transition to a low-carbon economy*.

Although the debate about just transition in the United States declined during the passage from the 1990s to the decade of the year 2000, it had already spread to other national contexts (above all in Western Europe) and important official spaces of multilateral politics (Morena et al., 2018, p. 8).

At its founding congress in 2006 the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) added new issues of growing international importance to its agenda of fundamental struggles, such as the international food crisis, financial hegemony, sustainable development and the acceleration of the climate change. As part of this process, in 2007 ITUC and the Sustainlabour Foundation began to drive efforts to add issues and concerns of the world of labor and the debate about policies that might create green jobs to the negotiations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which traditionally ignored the link between employment and climate change (Rosemberg, 2010, p. 142). ITUC and a strong delegation participated at the COP15 held in Copenhagen in 2009, where it defended the idea of “a just transition to a low-carbon economy that merges the agenda of decent work and the interests of working people” (Hennbert and Bourque, 2011, pp. 154-156).

Specifically, in the period prior to the Conference of the Parties on Climate Change (COP21) in Paris the international trade union movement made sure that the *just transition* was mentioned explicitly in the Green Jobs Initiative (2009-2014), a shared initiative of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), ILO, ITUC and the International Organization of Employers (Morena et al., 2018, pp. 8-9 and 13). The substitution of “old” jobs with “new” ones is a key feature of this approach to transition, in which creating jobs is a matter of “justice”.

However, it is important that for the first time the concept was included in United Nations documents. As a result it was possible to formulate policy visions which took gender differences and the specific roles played by women in the economy and in the fight against climate change into account (ILO, 2017b, pp. 1-5). Between Copenhagen 2009 (COP15) and Paris 2015 (COP21) the ITUC worked hard to transform the traditional rejection of climate and environment issues by trade unions with the help of the structure of opportunities the ongoing follow-up process of the COP had opened up. “There are no jobs on a dead planet”, asserted the awareness-raising slogan the ITUC and its affiliates used before COP21.

This way the ITUC initiated a renewed follow-up process of the approximation of trade unions and environmentalists after the pioneering experiences during the protests against

the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Seattle 1999, but now it benefitted from the growing public conscience and concern for climate change and its connection with the global financial crisis that had started in Wall Street in 2008. Important environmentalist sectors also began to pay more attention to the differentiated social implications of climate change for the world of labor, a fact that increased the chances for dialogue and cooperation with the unions.

In the Americas, in 2008 the CSA and its former Secretariat of Economic Policies and Sustainable Development – the current Secretariat of Sustainable Development – started to deal with the subject together with the national confederations of the region, organizing dedicated conferences, coordinating the Latin American delegations to the COP and, finally, including the concept of just transition into the Development Platform for the Americas (PLADA, for its Spanish acronym) in 2014, which was subjected to an in-depth review in 2020 (Medeiros, 2016, pp. 257-306; CSA, 2014; 2020).

Just transition in international negotiations

Taking into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities, ... (Paris Agreement, Preamble)⁶

In a variety of aspects the inclusion of the concept in the preamble of the Paris Agreement closed a political phase, while opening another. The first phase was characterized by the increasing presence of the issue of climate and environmental change in the political culture of international trade unionism and its documents and political formulation since 1994, as part of a process increasingly present in the general public opinion and the international system in particular within the context of the UNFCCC as one of the results of the ECO92 United Nations Conference in Rio de Janeiro.

The follow-up process of the climate COP led to a priority action structure which was complemented by work focusing on the negotiations about Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) since their adoption at the Rio+20 Summit in 2012. The years 2011-2015, that is to say, the path leading from Rio+20 to Paris 2015 encompass the period of most intensive activity and, in some aspects, protagonism of international trade unions with regard to the issue of climate change.

A more ambitiously worded version of the concept of just transition was, as we know, not included in the operational part of the Paris Agreement. The fact that the concept was

⁶ In footnote n° 6 of the original Spanish version of this article the author draws the readers' attention to the use of the Spanish term *re-conversión* for the English term *transition* in the official translation of the UNFCCC, Preamble, p. 2. Translator's note.

included in the preamble means that it was part of the general considerations, before the parties began negotiating the actual content. Nevertheless, its inclusion in the preamble of the Agreement added legitimacy to the narrative of just transition by governments and United Nations, as its “imperatives” were officially recognized (UNFCCC, 2015). Therefore the most important achievement of trade unions at the Paris Summit was the conversion of the idea of just transition into an official concept at the climate negotiations that was adopted by the parties, just like the agenda of *decent work* which had been agreed by the ILO.

The idea of a “just transition for the workforce” – as it is called in the Paris Agreement – reflects the need to bear in mind that as a consequence of climate change jobs will be eliminated (mainly in contaminating industries) or reallocated among sectors (need for training and skills programs), but also created (new sectors and technologies). Even before the COP21 the ILO had also included the vision of just transition in its documents, while continuing its substantial work regarding the issue along the guiding political principles of the organizations centenary (ILO, 2015; 2017a).

Including the concept of just transition in the preamble of the official document opens up the possibility for an in-depth analysis of its political content and practical application in the coming years. This imperative derives from the simple fact that there is no single process of just transition; instead, such processes will be diverse, as they respond to the specific characteristics of the economies, labor markets and impacts on the environment.

Until the Paris Summit in 2015 the process of formulating the concept focused mainly on the union reality of the industrialized global North rather than that of the underdeveloped, technologically dependent South. Such a pragmatic focus on social dialogue and alliances with the private, even transnational sector, while labor rights are cut in the global South in order to keep up profit rates, shows how different realities require different transition policies and strategies from trade unions.

In fact, the negotiations about climate change deal with some key issues of international political economy which include the power disputes both between nations and between big capitals. The markets’ interpretation of the climate crisis as a financial opportunity is proof of this. Social organizations have been warning that the debate about climate is turning into a business counter between the private sector and nation states, where public-private partnerships (PPP) and carbon prices are increasingly valued as a means of implementing and funding the nationally determined contributions (NDC) (Pietrikovsky, 2018).

Against this backdrop of expanded financial boundaries as a supposed solution to the climate crisis, the CSA’s 3rd Regional

Conference about Energy, Environment and Work (3rd CREAT, 2018) argued that “a just transition cannot focus on a new commodification of nature and alternative energies” (p. 5). Nowadays we find competing narratives regarding the idea of just transition, and of course, it has friends on the market, which are interested in the profits to be gained with the idea. However, leaving aside corporate social responsibility and the problems of social dialogue with employers, the disputes about future transition policies are power disputes, because every injustice is about power disparities.

It is precisely this fundamental aspect that justifies the debate about just transition: Is it about a changing workforce during the transition from a dirty economy to a clean economy without a fundamental change in the balance of power? Or does the change to a low-carbon economy necessarily imply a more thorough transformation of society? (Morena et al., 2018, p. 13). The need for a change of the production mode in order to reply to the climate crisis provides us with the opportunity to question and reframe what is produced, how we produce and who will receive the production. Understanding the current power struggles and unequal structures is a vital step towards thinking the transition not only in environmental terms, but also as a step towards a society that would be structurally fairer.

The period following the COP21 in 2015 was marked by the adoption of the language of just transition by a number of non-union players, such as non-governmental organizations (NGOs), social movements, corporations, governments and international institutions. In fact, climate change had a differential impact on different groups, depending on their economic status, ethnicity, gender and location. It even impacted the defense, security and energy policies of nations and transnational corporations (Buxton and Hayes, 2016, p. 286).

Within a short period of time the content of the idea of just transition was more or less freely interpreted and adapted according to the interests at stake. The multiplicity of interpretations and presentations of the concept does not always add up to a progressive profile. In fact, it is possible to establish a classification of some narratives on just transition in terms of their emphasis: *management reform vision*, *structural reform vision*, *transformative vision*, *status quo vision*, with varying degrees of radicalism or reformism (Shelton and Stevis, 2018). All approaches, even the less transformative, share the idea that a transition from an economy driven by fossil fuels to a more sustainable one is necessary, and that setting it up will have a considerable impact on employment and the way of life. The initiative Trade Unions for Energy Democracy (TUED) defends the idea that the current power relations must be questioned and changed, and that this will only be achieved on the basis of public/social property and the democratic control of key industries, above all the energy sector (Sweeney and Treat, 2018, p. 14).

At its 4th World Congress held in December 2018, ITUC broadened its vision of just transition policies, when it argued that “safeguards for a Just transition must be at the center of all global changes, including climate change, technological innovation and the flow of migrants and refugees” (ITUC, 2018, p. 28). According to the ITUC just transitions require:

During the COP24 in Katowice, Poland, in 2018 the international trade union movement managed to move forward with its strategy of including just transition in the agendas of governments, employers and United Nations. ITUC secured the adoption of the Silesia Declaration on Solidarity and Just transition by 53 countries and the European Commission; some of these countries are traditional producers of fossil fuels, like in the case of Poland. The declaration was a political step forward, although it must be observed that this kind of document does not oblige governments to actually implement policies for a just transition as a part of the *response measures* to the crisis officially agreed by the parties.

Before the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and the persistent effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economy, public health and employment the COP27 took place in Egypt in 2022. Seven years after the Paris Agreement of 2015 the concept of just transition appears thirteen times in the Final Dec-

laration of the conference, often within the context of recognizing the need to support the transition policies. The approval of the Loss and Damage Fund, which had been requested during the climate negotiations for years, was a success. However, it will be necessary to ensure that the funds are correctly directed towards the most affected countries and sectors, in order to promote transition policies that effectively reduce inequality and injustice.

The international trade union movement’s advocacy efforts at the COP contributed to the inclusion of social dialogue and the safeguarding of social protection floors for a just transition in the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, while emphasizing the importance of the effective participation of all interested parties, such as the labor force represented by the unions. The section on implementation, which was adopted as part of the Plan, envisages annual round table meetings of ministers about just transition as part of the climate COP’s work on just transition. However, the text of 2022 provides an ambiguous definition, as it mentions the need “to safeguard a just transition for developing countries” and involves all interested parties, with the *labor force* as merely one party among others, while avoiding any direct mention of the trade union movement as a interlocutor in this process (UNFCCC, 2022, p. 6).

Plans for the creation of green jobs.	The transition from the informal to the formal economy and the struggle against the increasing informalization of work.
Ensuring the pensions of older workers facing displacement.	Universal social protection including income protection for everyone.
Skills and safeguards for the relocation/ jobs for all workers, also for those entering the labor market, to support job mobility.	Investment in quality jobs and sustainable communities.
Safeguards of decent work, labor rights, a minimum living wage and collective bargaining.	The implementation of social dialogue and efficient tripartite mechanisms (ILO, Convention 44).
The right to work and equal treatment of migrants and refugees.	Reinforced information and consultation rights for workers.

Conclusion

Beginning with an idea of US industrial unions in the 1970s, moving on to operate as a bridge for dialogue between work and environment in the 1990s, and passing thru a lobby strategy during the UN climate negotiations until its inclusion in the Paris Agreement of 2015, the Silesia Declaration on Just Transition of 2018 and the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan, the political track record of just transition is getting longer within the international trade union movement; meanwhile, to a certain extent its presence is growing in national realities.

This scenario may be particularly surprising, because we are living in a period of history that is not only hostile to trade unions, but also to the centrality of human work in the organization of the economy and the political priorities of our societies. In other words, although it has become clear that human work will not disappear altogether, its central role in the way of life of our societies and economies has become weaker in a world of labor widely without rights or social protection, which is frequently promoted, as the individual entrepreneurial spirit of ordinary workers is praised. At least five out of the numerous challenges to trade unionism now and in the future should be underlined: the increasing precarity and informality of work, globalization, flexibilization and digitization of the economy, the building of social and political alliances, and the more general issue of internal participation and democracy, which includes the empowerment of women (Fichter et al., 2018, p. 3).

The trade union movement of the Americas, in particular, will have to address a number of structural challenges within the context of participatory democratic processes which take all interested parties into account; these challenges include the need for generating and safeguarding decent work, universal social protection, the freedom of association, collective bargaining, social justice, gender equality and equity, food and energy sovereignty while preserving the commons, and the self-determination of just transition and nations. Coordinating the progressive forces of the region will be another key element for the implementation of changes to the development model of our countries, with a view to insert Latin America and the Caribbean into production chains which will not exclusively be based on extraction, deforestation and the production of agricultural commodities.

Undoubtedly, the new technologies affect workers in many ways, and in numerous cases they have severe impacts. Their fears regarding automation are real, so the trade union movement has been fighting to defend workers in particularly vulnerable and precarious situations. Therefore it has been argued that expanding the concept of just transition, which is currently used in climate-related negotiations in order to link it to technological disruptions, is a valuable innovation to make sure that automation “does not leave anyone behind”

(Dobrusin, 2019). The environmental and digital transitions are coordinated both as causes of disruption and as potential solutions for the crisis of work in the world.

If we take an in-depth view at the idea of just transitions that “do not leave anyone behind”, we should take into account that the future of work and the work of the future will also impact on the future of the trade union movement as an institutional form of organization and collective action. The *institutional power* of trade unions depends on the context, the history and the political tradition of each place. In every country, in the global South and North it plays a different role and has a different meaning (Schmalz et al., 2019, pp. 87-88). But after 50 years of the worldwide neoliberal tide, the trade unions that managed to resist and have the strongest institutions in their countries are often based in dirty industries with high emissions, as well as in the public sector in general. These unions also present the most solid *associational power*. Therefore, the working group on just transition the ITUC has been driving since COP24, allows for an important observation: transitioning a workforce does not necessarily lead to the destruction of a union’s associational power, because it loses its “transitioned” members to other employments. Just transition and trade union organization are therefore indivisible issues. At a time when there are alliances with some employers’ sectors, it is necessary to expose the aggressive corporate anti-labor culture which characterizes most parts of the private sector in almost all countries, above all in the global South.

Therefore the question will be how to demand and safeguard the implementation of just transition policies that maintain and expand trade union representation. As a result, the right to form unions and to collective bargaining continue to be a challenge and an objective. The imperatives of a just transition trade unions will have to address in particular cannot be separated from the demands for a just transition for the workforce in general. Therefore the driving force of the *trade union self-reform* (now called *Trade Union Strengthening and Transformation*) presented in PLADA may be understood within the context of climate change, automation, digitization and transition policies for the labor force and the institutional representation of unions. As a rule, the concrete transition policies are implemented by the State and the private sector, but there is no reason why the trade union movement should not start implementing organizational adaptations.

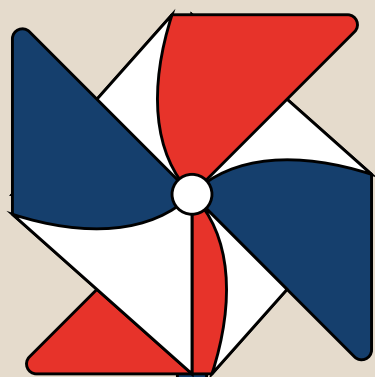
Throughout this chapter we have tried to show that a just transition for the labor force is extraordinarily important for the future of work and trade unionism itself within the context of a climate crisis that has already become a reality, although some deny it because of ideological reasons and their own interest. Without unions that are alive and strong to fight for decent work, collective bargaining and the expanding of rights for the well-being of the labor force, the

meaning of transition will not go beyond a change in the model of labor exploitation in “dirty” industries for another one – sometimes even worse – in the “clean and renewable” industries as part of green capitalism.

A crucial (and easy to measure) indicator of the just transition plans is the union density rate and the rate of formalized work. Even if a number of aspects of sustainability and transition are fulfilled, the countries and corporations where trade union representations and labor rights are suspended or under attack should not be considered social partners for the promotion of a just transition.

Finally, we should take into account that the trade union proposals for a just transition should also be presented at international forums apart from those related to environmental and climate issues to enhance their visibility, capacity to influence and practical effectiveness. This is due to the fact that business, finance and investment in infrastructure, energy and industry will be a fundamental part of the debate about the mode of production in the next decades, as are the issues of human rights and the control of corporate power. Therefore it is of strategic importance that beyond the Just Transition Center and the work of union delegations at the climate COPs progress is made as well when presenting concrete demands for a just transition at “non-environmental” spaces of trade union activity, such as the Trade Union Advisory Committee (TUAC) to the Organization of Cooperation and Economic Development (OECD), the G20’s trade union group (L20), the Trade Union Development Cooperation Network (TUDCN), in the global framework agreements negotiated by the Global Union Federations (GUF), and at the ILO. Only if the pressure and work of trade unions about just transition are enhanced, it will be possible to avoid that its content is captured by forces which simply try to adapt capitalist exploitation to a green version of the current injustices.

Perspectives of a just transition of the working class in Latin America and the Caribbean



A just transition is one of the most important demands and proposals of the international labor movement vis-à-vis the eco-social crisis. Today the working class has the chance to convert the struggle for environmental justice into a struggle that also involves trade unions, a struggle based on a perspective that has been developed originally in dialogue with other movements.

As we shall see, the energy transition is one of the key elements of the entire process of ecological transition. However, both the ecological and energy transitions can be profoundly unjust. The CSA's vision proposes to reply to the false green solutions imposed by governments, transnational companies, financial institutions and capitalist elites, which promote a vision of transition that is detached from the objectives of justice. Therefore, the just transition of the working class is the vision of establishing itself as a counter-hegemonic alternative to the corporate energy transition, from the people and for the people of today and the generations to come. It foreshadows a possible different future based on democratization, decolonization and the overcoming of class-, gender- and race-related inequalities.

In the last decade the global trade union movement managed to add the issue of just transition to the agenda of multilateral climate negotiations and even to promote its approach in the national and regional policies of different latitudes. These breakthroughs are significant, but right now they are at risk. We observe a slow but steady corporate capture of a just transition with a capacity to install national policies which are incompatible with the defense of labor rights and the need for a structural model transition, in addition to the elimination of fossil energy sources.

During the last decade the international trade union movement has witnessed the consolidation of the approach of organizations in the global North. Over there, the most urgent demands are especially linked to the decarbonization processes and how these affect energy workers and their communities. As a result, collective bargaining, social dialogue and professional training are at the center of the policies of just transition in the North.

Ecological and energy transitions take basically place in the North, but they reproduce and deepen existing disparities with the South, as they perpetuate a relation of colonialism and dependency due to the assignment of the role of provider of agromineral raw materials in unfavorable work and exchange conditions.

Latin America and the Caribbean are maintaining their role as peripheral economies, which provide raw materials for the industrial processes based in the major powers and, increasingly, China.

An emblematic case is the reconversion of the car industry to electromobility with its epicenter in China, the United States and Europe (development of electric cars and batteries), which depends decisively on the provision of minerals (copper, lithium, and cobalt, among others) from peripheral economies, especially from Latin America. Therefore, the geopolitics of energy shows us that the defossilization of the North and the geography of extractionist looting in the South are two sides of the same coin. The return of conservative agendas and anti-democratic practices in the region including coups and interferences have also been associated to the disputes about these resources, as demonstrated by the violent coup d'état against the government of Evo Morales in Bolivia, in 2019.

However, the reality of the working class in the global South is different. The structural feature of the development model currently in place in the South is not only its lack of sustainability in environmental terms, but also (as a major component for the trade union movement) the forms of overexploitation of the workforce it imposes: paid and unpaid work without rights (informality, precariousness), persecution, discrimination and even the annihilation of labor collectives and union leaderships, which organize and protest in defense of their lives and their rights and against modern slavery, child exploitation, and ethno-racial and gender exploitation.

Before the backdrop of this reality, the concept and demands for a just transition, which are genuine and valid in the developed economies, prove inevitably insufficient in the regional Latin American and Caribbean context. More than half of the working class are excluded or impaired from exercising their right to trade-union freedom and collective bargaining, simply because they are employed or self-em-

ployed workers under conditions of total informality and vulnerability, whose activities and incomes are exclusively spent on subsistence and are mostly insufficient. This panorama turns even more serious, when we verify that the important breakthroughs of the policies of universal social protection that had been achieved during the first decade of this century have been largely dismantled or disassembled by right-wing governments which resumed the neoliberal project of a compliant and unequal region without rights. By the way, undoing this path is difficult even in those countries, where left-wing and/or progressive political powers secured election victories.

We talk about majorities, not just about vulnerable groups or untypical forms of employment. This is a crucial factor, because it evidences the radical lack of social protection against the impacts of the eco-social crisis and the ongoing industrial and energy transitions that can be experienced already. Extreme events like prolonged draughts, floods, forest fires, energy cuts, and lack of drinking water cause major dislocations in urban and rural environments; they trigger health, housing and employment crisis; forced displacement of populations; the destruction of homes, means of subsistence and jobs and, in addition, the exacerbation of violence leading to the infringement of human and labor rights.

Therefore, for the regional trade union movement a just transition that is basically understood as an exercise of tripartism is far from enough, not only because it turns its back on more than half of the continent's working class, but also because it ignores the sociopolitical aspect that characterizes the Latin American and Caribbean trade union movement: the weakness of sector- or branch-specific union organizations in terms of unionization and collective bargaining is offset by powerful coordinations between unions and sectors. Latin American trade unionism, which is generally weak at the factory level, gains strength as part of a popular mobilization, together with the indigenous peasants, students, environmental justice, gender and antiracist movements. Its demands are by no means corporate, and they are not limited to traditional unionism. Quite to the contrary, they aim to defend and extend universal rights, challenge the elites and corporate power and object to exclusive and unsustainable development models.

For all these reasons the elements of a just transition in Latin America and the Caribbean are characterized by its particular tendency to spill over. They extended and redefined in the course of the popular mobilizations which drive profound changes in countries such as Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Chile, Bolivia, Panama, Honduras and Brazil.

For more than a decade TUCA's national affiliates have been debating and sharing their views as part of a feedback exercise that includes allied social movements in the region. All of this could be synthesized in its continental program together

with guidelines that contribute to the promotion of concrete country policies and experiences for a just transition. In the following sections we are going to present this guidelines, dimensions and key elements of the struggle for a just transition in the region.

Defining just transition from the perspective of regional trade unionism

A just transition is capable of generating and safeguarding decent work, universal social protection, freedom of association, collective bargaining, social justice, gender equality and equity, food and energy sovereignty, together with the preservation of commons and the self-determination of people and nations within a framework of democratic, participatory processes including all interested parties. (TUCA, 2020)

The Development Platform for the Americas (PLADA, for its Spanish acronym) provides the most powerful and internationally unique trade union program for sustainable development with social justice developed by regional trade unionism. It was launched in 2014 and updated in 2020 and includes an option for a development of a different quality based on four structural dimensions: social, political, economic and environmental. The elaboration process of the PLADA included a dialogue with allied social movements and organizations in the region which enhanced and leveraged its capacity to provide a broad representation of the popular classes of Latin America and the Caribbean. The environmental dimension contains a definition of just transition:

A set of policies designed to make sure that the transition and the path to producing with low GHG emissions at the same time offer opportunities to the workers and communities involved, so as to avoid that they will have to pay the main part of the costs of the negative consequences provoked by changes, for which they are not mainly responsible. (TUCA, 2020)

Both political developments later on and TUCA's environmental perspective added political soundness and precision regarding the consequences of developing a just transition, which reflects the region's class concept, to the above definition.

In Latin America and the Caribbean the definition's scope does not only refer to a transition towards a low-carbon economy, but to a socially and environmentally sustainable economy, with decent work and the sustainability of life at its center. To talk about decarbonizing the economy only is not enough to encompass the need for a structural change of the model, especially in this region, where we have to consider the territorial impact of production models with a focus on the export of raw materials: extensive, concentrated agriculture and food production (cattle breeding, soy,

corn, sugar cane, palm trees, bananas), large-scale surface mining (gold, silver, copper, lithium) or the extraction of hydrocarbons (gas and oil).

The practical application of a just transition necessarily implies challenging and transforming of our model of production and consumption and moving away from the extractive, neoliberal matrix, on which the current hegemonic model is based. Therefore it will be crucial to identify the dimensions of its application and to emphasize the local, national and regional aspects as multiple integrated and interdependent tiers in space and time. The territorial approach of just transition is crucial, and therefore it will be necessary to move away from false dichotomies that are strongly rooted in the hegemonic development models, for example, urban versus rural, protection of the environment versus industrial development.

Within a context of powerful changes and dramatically unstable, even critical circumstances, considering transitions is not limited to thinking about a just energy transition. In fact, the TUCA program presents the just transition as part of wider transformations, while unions also defend the idea of transition to be applied to the current industrial revolution known as *Industry 4.0*. As a crucial part of transition, justice also means to think about the recovery of jobs and the work of the future in sectors of the economy that have been hit hard by the revolution both technological and in the field of communications.

Therefore, just transition is a trade union demand which places decent work and social and environmental justice at the center of the debate, while challenging the hegemonic development model and the dominant players of this model. First of all, this means working on the basis of the fundamental rights laid down in the ILO declaration on the fundamental principles and rights at work of 1998: 1) freedom of association and trade union freedom, and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, 2) elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory, 3) elimination of child labor, 4) elimination of discrimination regarding employment and jobs, and more recently, 5) the right to a safe and healthy workplace.

On the other side, it involves productive and reproductive work and the work of communities in the territories affected by the current production model and the crisis. TUCA identifies all these collectives as being part of the working class. Therefore, a transition would be just, if it proposed answers that safeguard the admission of all directly or indirectly employed workers in each territory, either in unsustainable production models or in high-emission energy systems like the system based on fossil energy. The same applies to the collectives most exposed to the eco-social crisis that work in sectors such as agriculture, building, tourism, popular economy, the health system, transport and, in general, almost all

activities carried out by states which are committed to adapt to extreme climate events (forest fires, floods, epidemics, hurricanes and cyclones, etc.).

Fundamental dimensions of a just transition

1. Collective bargaining and effective mechanisms for social dialogue and participation

Transition is an essentially political discussion and, as such, a dispute for power.

At the sector level collective bargaining continues to be one of the most important tools of the trade union movement to defend and expand its labor and union rights (despite its enormous shortcomings in the region). In the sectors and companies affected by the transition processes of the energy and industrial model, collective bargaining provides an opportunity for the voice and proposals of workers and trade unions to become a part of the design and implementation of such transformations, not only in defensive terms, in order to preserve acquired rights and safeguarding jobs, but also thru active participation in the design of transitions which are guided by the principles of social and environmental justice and equality.

At a national level the entire trade union movement of the region shares the concern about the lack of institutionalized, effective and regular mechanisms for social dialogue and tripartite social participation, as well as the systematic exclusion of the unions from the processes of decision-making and the implementation of public policies.

We need to ask, to which extent the model of tripartite social dialogue promoted by the ILO as the pillar of decent work and fundamental rights is sufficient and viable within the context of Latin America. Going through this discussion shows us that the constituent processes of the continent (the successful ones, but also those which failed or inspired enormous popular mobilizations) contribute the most substantial, genuine and advanced elements of popular participation. No doubt, trade unions will have to address the challenge to move forward towards a synthesis between a union tradition that promotes social dialogue and the new elements of participation which emerge from the new Latin American constitutions or as demands of social mobilization, while preserving the unique and indispensable role of workers organizations regarding the representativeness, legitimacy and synthesis achieved.

2. Participation and consultations with communities in their territories

The territories constitute a fundamental aspect of public policies. At the same time, they have been a factor of permanent tensions, as territories are largely shaped under the

influence of the power of national and/or transnational capital, following an extractionist logic, in which whatever lives in a place or inhabits it will be considered a commodity. The consideration of territories as commodified resources runs thru the economic and investment policies of countries and corporations and activates the colonial idea, in which the territory and whatever lives there and inhabits it at the service of obtaining benefits.

It is precisely in the territories, where we can appreciate the strong links between the attacks against democracy, violence and the environment.⁷ Democratic and participatory management and planning are the key to implementing a just transition, but these basic elements are not safeguarded in the regional political scenario. Therefore a comprehensive analysis at different levels is needed that considers the local, regional and national reality of the countries and the commons they share with other countries, in order to bear in mind the existing productive, economic, environmental, cultural, social and gender features.

A democratic territorial management involves the participation and autonomy of collectives, communities and organizations and their decisions. The centralized management commanding the preparation and execution of policies in the past has turned into an outdated tool with some authoritarian nuances with regard to the social transformations we are going thru, where the collectives have stopped accepting that decisions, which involve them, are taken without their effective participation and opinion. A territory is a common space, where cultural, ancestral, religious and social meanings are shared as well. Every transition that pretends to be just will have to address the challenge that the interventions, which might take place, act as a reassurance of democratic and participatory mechanisms.

3. Gender and generational perspective

Policies for a just transition must include the gender dimension and the problem of inequality and violence as overarching aspects of their planning and implementation and

⁷ The circumstances surrounding the fires in the Amazon region of Brazil in 2019 are a dramatic example of such a link. During the first eight months of Jair Bolsonaro's government in Brazil institutions and regulations meant to protect the environment were dismantled, their budgets and control tools were reduced, mechanisms for social participation were disassembled, and policies benefitting the expansion of agrobusiness were put in place. A declaration published by TUCA in August of 2019 headlined "La Amazonia como expresión del ataque a la democracia en Brasil" (The Amazon as an expression of the attack against democracy in Brazil) posits that "the attacks against democracy and the measures implemented, which benefit the economic elites and the market at the expense of workers, were the prelude of the events we are witnessing today with the fires in the Amazon region." The declaration quotes as precedents the coup d'état against president Dilma Rousseff, the murder of counselor Marielle Franco, the attack against of Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and his imprisonment, and the murders of peasant, indigenous and environmental leaders.

pay special attention to the role of women both in the energy systems and the territories involved in energy production, generation, distribution and consumption. It is imperative to include the existing structural inequalities in society in the analysis and to understand them as such to make sure that the policies applied don't increase them, but rather work towards reducing them.

Dedicated research about public policies generally underlines the importance of designing such policies with a focus on inequalities and rights. There is a tendency to believe that policies for a just transition can be designed in institutions which are dedicated to energy, industry, mining, the economy, finance or, at best, labor. Even with the participation of institutions specialized on labor issues it will be essential to implement an analysis that highlights the existing inequalities in the sectors, populations and territories, where such policies will be implemented.

In any context there are some questions that need to be answered at a national level:

Which jobs are at risk and may disappear as part of an energy transition? To which sectors do they belong? How many people do these sectors employ? How many of them are women? How many are young people? Are there jobs that are indirectly at risk? In which branches? How many jobs are informal? How many women and how many young people make a living out of such jobs? These are just a few questions which will be essential for the design of policies for a just transition and which may serve as a basis for the dialogue between trade unions, governments and companies.

At the same time it will be necessary to think about the jobs related to a new model of production and consumption and its associated energy system. The existing indications reveal the possibility to develop countless jobs and employments associated to the sectors concerned. Where can they be found? What is the role of caring work in a new production model? Which forms of organization are predominant in these sectors?

Dimensioning the current state of energy poverty in each country and, more specifically, among women and in households headed by women will require special attention.

Moreover, the climate and environmental crisis has a differential impact on persons according to their social class, gender, ethnic or racial origins, geographic location and the territory they inhabit. The most vulnerable populations and collectives already suffer the worst consequences of the climate crisis, including the loss of their means of living, their jobs, their income, their homes, the impossibility to access drinking water, air and seeds, and the exposure to safety and health risks, among others. The policies imple-

mented to mitigate and adapt to climate change and the transition to different systems of production and consumption will have distributive impacts that must be addressed.

As part of its programmatic approach the region's trade union movement is considering how to address the inequalities generated by the impacts of the climate crisis, as its resolution of the 4th Congress of TUCA points out the need to develop

a critical perspective on environmental racism, as it considers that Afro-descendant and indigenous communities, which also suffer the impact of other inequalities like the lack of access to drinking water, sanitation and waste disposal, are more often and more intensely affected by contamination and environmental deterioration.⁸

4. Comprehensive integrated policies

In each country the policies for a just transition must be designed and implemented in a comprehensive way. As the transformations are focused on an economy and society with zero greenhouse gas emissions, they must be systemic and structural and have to be planned in a coordinated and integrated way. Therefore it is necessary that the State, not the market, lead this process and take the environmental, social and economic priorities into consideration.

The energy transition must be designed and implemented as part of a change of our energy systems, in order to reinforce the idea that this is not only about a transition of energy sources (conservative vision), but rather about a change in social relations, which implies the reformulation of the production and consumption model (transformative vision).

Although the transition is first and foremost considered in energy terms — as it is the sector with the main responsibility for emissions —, energy is not the only aspect to address. The transformations in urban and rural mobility must be thought of with a view to changing the way of life and the safeguarding of rights, in other words, starting with the right of persons to move around and inhabit urban and rural territories.

With regard to energy, it is imperative to put a strategic aspect at the center of the debate, which could be encompassed by the expression *democratizing energy*. Under the umbrella of this expression social organizations and movements such as trade unions called for energy to be considered a human right, not a commodity. A strategic reformulation of the role of energy for the development of projects for

⁸ TUCA (2021). Resolution of its 4th Congress, "Trabajo del Futuro en Democracia: con sindicatos fuertes y más derechos" (The Work of the Future in Democracy, with strong unions and enhanced rights), 2021.

social transformation will be necessary, and this implies re-discussing the property of energy throughout the energy system and engaging in dispute for power with the main economic players which control the industry and are accountable for its commodification: the transnational companies.⁹

In the same direction the proposal recovers the fundamental role of public control over energy, which does not necessarily its control by the State. A number of different community-based and decentralized forms can be explored, with a focus on preserving the public domain and safeguarding the character of energy as a human right. In a situation in which human rights materialize (if they materialize) under the tutelage of and subordination to private and business property rights, this proposal becomes even more relevant. Even the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in its sixth assessment,¹⁰ pointed to the effect of scaling down regulations due to the exposure of climate policies the threats and demands of transnational companies of the fossil fuel industry.

5. Social protection

The evolution of the social protection systems reflects a number of phenomena: economic growth, historic changes in production modes, demographic changes and their impact on the labor market, technological progress, and cultural developments. The policies with regard to risks and safety at work should accompany the diagnosis of the most frequent diseases in a given society at a specific time.

Given the current situation of a possible exit from the COVID-19 pandemic it becomes even more urgent to ensure universal access to health beyond the medical assistance for workers who contribute to social security, to make sure that nobody will be left behind when dealing with the impacts climate change will have on people nor with regard to the effects of new diseases and pathologies resulting from the degradation of soils, territories and biodiversity. The COVID-19 pandemic is just one example of the health and

social challenges inflicted by the loss of biodiversity and the diseases it possibly provokes. In the case of the existing social protection systems in the Latin American region the challenge of climate change adds to the preexisting problem of the instability, insufficiency and/or inexistence of social protection systems.

Therefore, over the past few years the debate on the global institutional stage of the United Nations has begun to consider the social protection of persons as an aspect that needs to be included in the negotiation of policies dealing with the environmental crisis.

Social protection is an issue of fundamental importance for the trade union movement of the region, and in order to address this priority TUCA has added to the complexity and scope of the aspects involved, as expressed by the resolution of the 4th Congress:

A national strategy for the defense of the health and security of workers' lives must take the influence and impact of climate change into account. Special emphasis must be put on contexts related to activities in the areas of extraction, mining and energy, the chemical industry and its products, as well as agriculture, where both the workers and their communities in their territories are overexposed to deteriorating health conditions. Environmental health is a basic condition for safeguarding of the human right to health.

Following the same argument, TUCA has expressed the complexity of social security systems with a capacity to respond to multiple crisis. And while the defense of a social security system is upheld which is universal, solidarity-based, public, non-discriminatory, inclusive, redistributive and managed by the State as a safeguard of the protection of all persons, there is also the need to include "new contingencies related to the recognition of unpaid care work from a perspective both equitable and respectful of diversity".

Moving ahead one more step, in the 27th negotiating process between the sessions of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Conference on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the region's trade union movement positioned itself with regard to the role of social protection in the climate crisis and presented the diversity of aspects that must be addressed in order to consider the crisis. For that matter, social protection also refers to safeguarding the right to food:

The crisis of 2008 exposed the repercussions which financial crisis can have regarding the access to food, especially for the most vulnerable sectors of the population. Within the context of an armed conflict with global repercussions and a regional and worldwide rise in prices, it is essential to include public policies for food security and sovereignty as components of social protection, above all to respond to

⁹ Research focusing on the identification of obstacles against a just transition and the democratization of energy, which was carried out by TUCA, Friends of the Earth Latin America and the Caribbean (ATALC, for its Spanish acronym) and REDES-Amigos de la Tierra Uruguay, highlights the role of regulating frameworks that were created during decades of neoliberal consolidation in order to transfer power to transnational players with the help of privatization, deregulation and commodification. At the same time the research shows, where the main obstacles against implementing a truly just transition can be found and how the human right to energy can be recovered. From a regional point of view, these are the first research inputs developed from the perspective of social organizations and movements that clearly identify the key components for moving forward towards the structural, strategic transformation of the energy systems. This collective project also included the preparation of a *Cartilla pedagógica* resuming the shared findings of the research and the document *Lineamientos para una política pública regional sobre transición justa y democratización de la energía* (Guidelines for regional public policies regarding just transition and the democratization of energy).

¹⁰ IPCC, 6th Assessment Report, 2022.

the increased impact of the famine on the most vulnerable populations, including children and elderly persons. Hunger continues to be a reality in most countries of the region.

Key elements of the struggle for a just transition

If we take into account that there is no single formula for a just transition in all countries, the following is a broad and by no means exhaustive set of key elements for the struggle, which have to be adapted to the daily reality of each country, trade union and territory.

These elements share as common features the centrality of work and union representation; the role of the democratic State as a strategic player for planning and promoting sustainable development; the safeguarding of rights and commons in the ecological transition; and the refusal of false solutions that guarantee nothing but the sustainability of profits and deepening inequalities.

1. Create *new labor sources* for workers, whose employments will disappear as a result of energy or digital transition.
2. Guarantee the persistence of *trade union representation* and try to extend affiliations in branches in transition.
3. *Revert and stop regressive labor reform processes* by combatting increasing precariousness and safeguarding the transition rights of the working class.
4. Guarantee the income and/or the means of living of communities in the affected territories in accordance with the *overriding, cross-cutting principle of decent work* from the unions' perspective of just transition.
5. *Effective social participation* in the design, implementation and evaluation of public policies with a focus on just transition. Adding to this, the respect of the indigenous communities' and people's right to inhabit their territories and decide about them.
6. Wisdoms acquired in formal and informal education, working and professional experience achieved, and *life-long learning as fundamental pillars* of any transition.
7. Safeguard the continuity of *labor conditions*, wages and other benefits according to the motto that workers should not pay the cost of transition with their work or deteriorating working conditions.
8. Safeguard the *unrestricted respect for fundamental labor rights* in any initiative concerning energy transition throughout the value chain, including special accountability for the companies involved in energy systems.
9. Include the problem of *energy property* trying to democratize, deconcentrate and decommodify not only a part of the transition or the energy system, but the entire system and all its components.
10. Claim *energy as a right*, with a focus on the energy-related questions: for which purpose and for whom.
11. Decarbonization is necessary, but not with the help of *false solutions* like carbon compensations. False solutions reproduce the system's rationale without providing real answers to the climate and environmental crisis.
12. Introduce *impact evaluations* ex ante, ex post and during the application of any plan and initiative towards transition. Such evaluations must be comprehensive, consider the entire energy system, not only isolated initiatives, and include effective mechanisms to measure and report social, political, economic, labor, environmental and gender impacts.
13. Transition *planning* must begin with a clear analysis and diagnosis of the obstacles against a truly just transition due to the existing legislation and regulations. These evaluation has to consider the effects and risks free trade and investment arrangements pose to the policies planned.
14. Enhance investment in *research, science and technology* as cross-cutting components of a just energy transition backed by dialogue with workers, communities, organizations and people.

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The FES Regional Trade Union Project (FSR) has as its main objective to work together with the Latin American and Caribbean trade union movement, and in so doing, to contribute to strengthening its capacity to develop proposals and strategies to address the multiple challenges it faces at the national, regional and global level.

The Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) is the most important regional trade union organization of the American continent. It was founded in Panama City on March 27th, 2008 and has 48 member organizations in 21 countries, which represent 55 million workers. The TUCA is the regional organization of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC).

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ENERGY, ENVIRONMENT AND WORK

A working class perspective vis-à-vis
the transitions of our times



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