

Workshops of the Whole, CPUSA Convention 2019
Digest of Table Discussion: U.S. Working Class, Climate Change, and the Green New Deal

I. In our clubs and districts, how can we work to connect Green New Deal organizing with other ongoing struggles in our neighborhoods, campuses, unions and workplaces? Please share your experiences and formulate suggestions.

1. Connect

—Re-frame: this is not something to add onto what we already do; this connects naturally already in our communities. The question is finding the connection, within every organization and every region.

—Bring the Green New Deal into all the coalitions we work with such as housing, sustainable food, Fight for \$!5, all organizations that fight for change and progress.

*Connect agricultural workers, artists and cultural workers, and the peace movement to the GND

*Connect churches and clergy with GND and moral imperative of environmental movement

*Talk to other socialist groups such as DSA, SP about supporting the GND.

*Talk as much as possible, so discussing the issue becomes normalized

*Be willing to go out of our comfort zone for this issue and connect with new groups

—Connect with people where they live. Don't just shame and preach. Talk to people about what's really possible.

*point out the connections between climate change and other issues such as racism, education, healthcare, wealth inequality, immigration, war.

*When does alarmism play? When does hope play?

—Connect local fights to the GND: such as the fight against tainted water, the fight against fertilizer run-offs, slag heaps of South Chicago, clean up of Bridgeton Landfill, lead crisis, water crisis in the west.

*In urban settings, make it clear that such problems are “green,” environmental problems (it's not just about rainforests, polar caps etc.)

*Connect local examples: the struggles are the same; the underlying issue is the same

*Also make it clear that all places are interconnected: shit flows downriver; what A does affects B, C etc. Cross the urban/rural divide using this issue; connect industry to agriculture.

—Try to get environmentalist organizations (Sierra Club) to incorporate the labor movement into their agenda, overcome the split.

—Send at least one member per club into the Sunrise Movement and GND coalitions; send one delegate to Labor Network of Sustainability

—We shouldn't reinvent the wheel. There is a Blue-Green Alliance. 14 unions and some environmental groups are working together. We should support the Blue-Green Alliance.

—Respect the longstanding connections between Indigenous Peoples and the environment: how many left groups really respect that connection, or reach out to those who are already doing this work?

2. Learn and Teach

—Connect the Green New Deal with our Marxist School, with Marxist education. The GND will take education. At a grassroots level, in neighborhoods, on campus, people need to be educated on the danger that will confront us in the future. Let people know we have to live on the planet called Earth or we will perish.

—Read Mark Brodine's book in book clubs throughout the district. Study more and learn what to say to co-workers.

*Hand out "Has Capitalism Reached a Tipping Point?"

*Print and distribute more copies of the actual GND, which is relatively short and clear.

—Add GND to the worlds of our people. Add it to door knocking, surveys. Draw up a simple piece of literature to hand out. Make it relatable. Bring in the neighborhood; put it on all the club agendas. Survey: include questions that further explain the GND. Include it in arts activities.

—Attend city council meetings to start discourse. Engage with radio and other media: call-in radio shows; write letters to the editor.

—Arrange local speakers and e-forums on environmental justice. Invite Green professors, climate scientists to speak; Sierra Club, other major organizations.

—Meet with IBEW rep to determine best approach to environmental issues, i.e., electric movement away from coal: share research on best practices in other areas that are complimentary to the Green New Deal

—Educate people about the original New Deal, which provided many social benefits, but do not take it for granted that Labor groups will take it as a positive.

—Those with connections to labor unions: bring it up with them. In California, 519 K green jobs already created. Take this as an example. Research what's been working, but also what didn't work. How is the Green New Deal going to be better than Old New Deal?

*Work through trade union leadership, though some unions (LIUNA) have leadership that pushes Trumpism. Have to find a grassroots strategy.

*Highlight the way in which the GND positively impacts contract negotiations for unions.

*Emphasize profitable, economically feasible alternatives. Emphasize government subsidies to retrain workers & no pay cuts.

*Redwood Protection Act of 1978 is a good example of job security to look at.

*Labor needs to be unified and find one voice in the protections for displaced workers, e.g. 4 year wage guarantee, no cost housing and education. Plan Labor Summits about this.

*Help those in fossil fuel industries prepare for transitions.

—Class/union consciousness provides leverage against bosses, support for GND.

—Some groups, such as farmers, understand that climate change is happening but continue to support Trump anyway. We need to find new narratives to help them become environmentalists and support the GND.

—Don't allow anyone to get away with the false claims that GND is too expensive or costs jobs.

*Last year \$649 billion of American taxpayers' money was given to fossil fuel industries.

—Create green apprenticeships/job training programs with AFL/CIO in connection with wind industry

—Address the consumers as well, but look away from hyper-individualistic solutions. Individual choices cannot solve the problem. Collective action is necessary. Look to the producers.

—Correct the liberal media when they present this issue in a very isolated, partial sense. It's about owning the narrative. Share People's World articles.

—Young people support the GND, but need to prioritize. Help them keep it in focus.

—Connect with communities who have been affected by climate change (Occupy did that with Hurricane Sandy)

—Combat hopelessness.

—Help children, especially children in urban environments, experience connections to nature, appreciate the impacts of pollution. Talk to our families about GND; encourage them to bring it up in their classes, workplaces.

3. Pressure the government at all levels

—Do research on how legislators at the state/federal level are voting, then talk to the ones voting the wrong way. Expose candidates that are not making climate change a part of their agenda. Oust politicians who claim climate change is a hoax.

—Petitions: Where the representative is receptive, petitions are not even necessary. Need to put heat on more moderate representatives.

—Organize delegations to congressional folk. Make it concrete for them.

—Support strengthening the environmental arm of the federal government

—The politicians will need to face off against the economic engines of some states, such as big agriculture, the military, and fracking. They will need massive public support to crush big business opposition.

— Pressure politicians to keep their promises to incentivize sustainable growth (e.g. the Colorado Governor)

—Convince the 45% of population who do not vote that they should vote because this one issue is so important. It's about their grandchildren's lives, not just their own.

—1970s saw high bi-partisan support for environmentalism. That should be the goal. Use fact-based statements to show people the urgency, get around partisanship.

—During contacts with elected officials, point out that disaster brings disorder, loss of life. Harsh weather, increased rain putting stress on infrastructure (collapsing roads, etc.) Taxpayers on the hook for damages.

—We can work with the Sunrise movement, but also we have ties with labor and political movements, can initiate conversations on GND

—Push for more labor representation on state coalitions or boards on economy/jobs and climate change.

4. Continue to refine and improve the GND

—In the 1990s, one comrade was trained out of a program of defense conversion to make electric vehicles, but no actual jobs were available when he and others were done. Other workers have had similar experiences. We need to clarify why this program will be different. We need to make sure this program actually is different, providing more than a benefits package; providing very specific new jobs for people through a public jobs program (not private contractors).

—The GND must add an explicit public works alternative. “Public worker” should be redefined, the category broadened.

—The Pentagon is the largest polluter. Anti-war should be a focus of the GND. Make sure military personnel who lose their jobs are included in new job programs.

—Look to state banks as mechanisms for funding.

—Do not eliminate jobs; find other jobs workers can transition into. For example, out of mining, into clean-up or weatherization. Provide jobs renovating houses for better energy efficiency, especially low-income housing.

*Raythorn Missile Plant: workers liked the idea of manufacturing light rail instead.

—Work in phases to implement and improve mass transit. It should be less expensive for riders. Give local governments control.

—Consider early retirement for workers: universal retirement for workers in fossil fuel industry (fed subsidized)

—Make unemployment benefits automatic, no employer approval.

—Oppose all wartime weapons with poison effects on plants/animals

—Reclaim utilities as public property for better regulation

—Low income housing and program and general infrastructure program (government not private) should be part of the GND. Jobs program to rehabilitate subsidized housing to be energy efficient.

—The workers that lose their jobs because of the GND should be compensated at same level of wages and benefits by government using tax money from rich and corporate taxes. (We work toward taxing the rich and corporations.)

— To work, the GND needs a massive movement that addresses and includes different groups of impacted workers. Do not ignore workers who are not skilled tradespeople.

—GND must abolish Right to Work laws

—The GND is very ambitious, revolutionary; transforming the whole economy; need to come up with particulars.

*What does it take to convert workers in fossil fuel industry to support green future?

*Where are future jobs going to be? What kind of jobs?

*What work in the society needs to be done, i.e. fixing infrastructure?

*Where is money to come from?

4. Some states provide good models, others provide warnings

—In California the work is relatively easy. We already have about 519 K jobs in the Green Energy sector. Moving forward for the GND is just a matter of continuing forward—use materials like Comrade Brodine’s book to pressure locally for progress, like eliminating fracking, while continuing with education and new job creating—and thusly pressure state politics forward. As progress is made in the state, that itself becomes a source of pressure to move forward at the national level.

—Denver Ballot Initiative, Colorado Office of Climate Action and Resiliency, will use fund rebates, scholarships to help those affected by climate change: resilientdenver.org

—Hurricane Harvey in Texas: disproportionate impact on working class people of color

—In Ohio, the labor movement, aside from displaced workers, is worried about the hemorrhaging of jobs from Ohio because of trade policies. Trumka is speaking about new Nafta, and the labor movement is behind fixing that. E.g. Lordstown. If we want labor to work with us on the GND, we need to be with labor on their issues: new NAFTA and the Protect the Rights to Organize Act. (Proact).