



JUST  
TRANSITION  
CENTRE

DECENT JOBS ON A LIVING PLANET



# JUST TRANSITION IN QUEBEC

Patrick Rondeau  
FTQ

## QUEBEC IS FACING THE CHALLENGE OF AN ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL TRANSITION, AND IT MUST ACT SOON.

It also needs to ensure that this transition brings social justice. The Fédération des Travailleurs et Travailleuses du Québec (FTQ) has been preparing for this for the last four years. With 600,000 members, we have affiliates in every energy sector in Quebec.

Polluting industries such as cement plants and energy producers will be the first to feel the effects of change. It is hard to put a figure on the impact this transition will have in terms of jobs, but it is safe to say that between 400,000 and 700,000 jobs could be affected. Unfortunately, the proposals currently being put forward by the government of Quebec are based purely on financial criteria, however financial measures should be one tool among many others in this transition, and not an end in themselves.

FTQ began looking at our role on climate change and the action we should take in 2014, and we identified three obstacles to overcome; our own members, environmental groups, and financial credibility.

First, how could we convince our thousands of FTQ members that they have to act on climate change without causing panic? It's obvious that when it comes to jobs/the environment, they will choose their jobs.

So, in 2016, we launched a consultation of our members in Quebec ahead of the FTQ national centre's 31<sup>st</sup> Congress, with the aim of having our members take part in drafting a policy statement on the environment that would guide us over the coming years.

An important observation made during the various meetings was that participants were aware of climate change, but they could not explain the phenomenon in detail. The lesson drawn from this was that time was needed to explain what we were talking about, to calm fears about job losses and to generate enthusiasm by showing the opportunities that Just Transition can offer. When workers have a role to play, they are more willing to support the action taken. Moreover, thanks to this exercise, FTQ made more progress than it had hoped for, notably in the willingness to fight against the use of hydrocarbons, the review of production systems, of consumer habits, and more.

The next obstacle we had to overcome was conflict with environmental groups such as Greenpeace. Initial discussions between the two groups took place informally at the People's Social Forum in Ottawa in August 2014. In April 2015 we joined a March against Climate Change in Quebec organised by environmental groups and attended by 25,000 people. The following day, despite the initial reticence of the members of the two organisations, FTQ and Greenpeace organised a joint forum that concluded with a mutual challenge; FTQ was to speak more about climate justice while Greenpeace would take more account of the economy and jobs. Taking up their respective challenges, the two organisations have been allies ever since.



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In December 2016, FTQ joined the biggest coalition of environmental organisations in Quebec; the Common Front for Energy Transition. Our participation helped prepare the ground for a new definition of Just Transition in Quebec, which includes not only the labour dimension but also communities affected by climate change, and which has also triggered discussion on our economic system.

The third obstacle was financial credibility. How can financial tools be used to bring about social justice and climate justice? We had already set up an investment fund bank, the FTQ Solidarity Fund, in the early 1980s, with members as shareholders. The fund has its own governance, although FTQ plays an active role. The Fund is an institution to be reckoned with in Quebec, investing in hundreds of enterprises and with net assets of over 14 billion dollars. It also has unquestioned credibility on the financial markets. The Fund reviewed its climate change practices, divesting its investments in thermal coal reserves in September 2017. A committee on responsible investment, of which FTQ is a member, presented its conclusions in September 2018.

The Just Energy Transition Summit was held on 23 and 24 April 2018 at the Palais des Congrès in Montreal. The Summit was organised on the initiative of the FTQ in collaboration with the Solidarity Fund and the organisations involved in the Just Transition discussion; Greenpeace, Fondation, the David Suzuki Foundation and the Confédération des Syndicats Nationaux (CSN). Over 300 people took part, from the trade union, environmental, political, student, scientific and business worlds.

The aim was to agree on a joint definition of Just Transition with all those active in Quebecois civil society. The Summit concluded that Quebec has the tools to deal with accelerating climate change without exacerbating social inequalities; now is not the time for more analysis, it's time for action. However, concern was expressed that the Quebec government lacked ambition and would not achieve their targets.

The right-wing Coalition Avenir Québec (Coalition for the Future of Quebec CAQ) has been in power since October 2018, and has no specific plans for combatting climate change, and the influence of other Canadian provinces and the United States is raising fears of a return in force to the extraction of hydrocarbons and shale gas.

The Summit partners are already working on a series of joint demands which will be unveiled at the COP24 in Katowice in December 2018. Ambitious campaigns on transport and construction are being planned, and we in FTQ are going to take action by supporting our affiliates by means of 'Just Transition laboratories'.

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## CONCLUSION

Faced with the evidence of a global climate crisis, the desire to act is being paralysed by our resistance to changing our consumer habits. The tools for a real Just Transition are there, but not the will. Time is running out.

The solution is political, and it cannot be left in the hands of parties who refuse to act or who try to take advantage of the crisis. It is not the first transition the labour world has had to undergo. We have seen enormous technological change in the last few decades. But this is the first time that the survival of the whole of humanity is at stake.

We have to do the right thing and do it now.

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