

Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians

A collection of texts in response to
*Acting on Climate Change:
Solutions from Canadian Scholars*,
a consensus document released in March 2015





ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

CENTRALE DES SYNDICATS DU QUÉBEC

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The Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ) represents more than 200 000 members, nearly 130 000 of which are educational personnel. It is the largest trade union organization in education and early childhood in Quebec. The CSQ is also active in health and social services, childcare, municipal, leisure, cultural, community and communications sectors.

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PARTICIPATION OF THE CSQ AND EVB IN THE PAST "ACTION CLIMAT" MARCH IN QUEBEC

Contributed by

CENTRALE DES
SYNDICATS DU
QUÉBEC

The Role of Workers in the Transition to a Low-carbon Economy

An Interview With Erik Bouchard-Boulianne, CSQ

Conducted by Ms. Divya Sharma, *Sustainable Canada Dialogues*

Original text in French available at www.sustainablecanadialogues.ca/fr/vert/versundialogue

This contribution is an interview with Erik Bouchard-Boulianne, economist at Centrale des syndicats du Québec (CSQ) specializing in public finance issues, the role of the state and public services, and the distribution of wealth.

Question from Sustainable Canada Dialogues:

What can we do to ensure that a transition to a low-carbon economy does not negatively impact workers?

Erik Bouchard-Boulianne: It's really important for us all to be concerned about the effect of the transition to a low-carbon economy on workers. All provinces will experience major changes. There will be winning sectors and losing sectors. We must realize the transition will create many jobs (for example, in the fields of home renovation, improving energy efficiency of buildings or public transportation infrastructure). Some research has

shown these sectors require a lot of labour and create more jobs than carbon-intensive sectors^{3,4}.

In Quebec, the transition would be advantageous because oil imports represent a very large share of the deficit in our trade balance. In 2014, we imported about C\$18 billion in petroleum products. Reducing such imports in Quebec would be beneficial to the overall economy. Nevertheless, still using Quebec as an example, there will be winning sectors and losing sectors, so it is important to take into account the effects of the transition, especially on workers.

3 Lee, M. and Card, A. (2012). A Green Industrial Revolution: Climate Justice, Green Jobs and Sustainable Production in Canada. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, pp. 63, <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2012/06/Green%20Industrial%20Revolution.pdf>

4 Blue Green Canada (2012). More Bang for our Buck: How Canada Can Create More Energy Jobs and Less Pollution, pp. 26, <http://bluegreencanada.ca/sites/default/files/resources/More%20Bang%20for%20Buck%20Nov%202012%20FINAL%20WEB.pdf>

1 <http://www.evb.lacsq.org/accueil/>

2 <http://www.un-documents.net/our-common-future.pdf>

The transition will be more complex where scaling back is geographically clustered. I think of Alberta, an oil-producing province, where the effects of transitioning could be greater. Significant support will need to be brought to the regions hardest hit. Otherwise, it will be impossible for the people of these provinces to support the transition to a greener economy. Just an anecdote: when I went to study in Calgary, I went to buy things for my apartment. Everyone from whom we purchased furniture worked in oil production: an engineer who built depots for trucks in the oil sands, a subcontractor in the oil sector, and so on. These people would obviously be hard hit by the transition to a low-carbon economy.

The question is: What can be done to ensure that a transition to a low-carbon economy does not negatively impact workers? It's simple: we have to implement support programs for workers who will be affected – those who lose their jobs, for example. And so, we'll need strong, well-developed re-qualification, training, and unemployment insurance measures that are very strong and very developed.

The latest federal government reforms have reduced the capacity of the system that assists workers, the generosity of benefits and access to employment insurance. These reforms do not go—at all—in the direction to support the transition to a low-carbon economy. People who lose their jobs must be assisted as much as possible to find work in

other sectors. Assistance measures needed are twofold: training, but also benefits that allow workers to live during the transition period.

Another element of the transition to a low-carbon economy affects perhaps less specifically workers, but more generally the poorest segment of the population. The first key policy orientation of *Acting on Climate Change: Solutions from Canadian Scholars* is to "put a price on carbon." Pricing emissions through a tax or a cap-and-trade system is entirely justified from economic and environmental perspectives, but will inevitably have the effect of raising the price of gasoline or heating oil, which will affect most severely the poorest in society. We must find a way to support these people so they aren't negatively impacted and their quality of life is not affected (for example, needing to lower the temperature of the home to 10-15°C because heating has become too unaffordable).

We must take into account the effects of measures, including that of carbon pricing, on the most vulnerable. It's therefore important to consider not only workers, but the overall population. This is a key factor perhaps not sufficiently taken into account to date. I'm thinking of the carbon tax in British Columbia, for example, where support measures like tax credits for the poorer members of the population deserved to be a bit more generous. This would also have enabled an increase in the level of tax, thereby accelerating the transition.



ABOUT THE INITIATIVE

SUSTAINABLE CANADA DIALOGUES

This contribution is part of a collection of texts, *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians*, stemming from interactions between Sustainable Canada Dialogues, an initiative of the UNESCO-McGill Chair for Dialogues on Sustainability, and business associations, First Nations, non-governmental organizations, labour groups, institutions, organizations and private citizens.

Sustainable Canada Dialogues is a voluntary initiative that mobilizes over 60 researchers from every province in Canada, representing disciplines across engineering, sciences and social sciences. We are motivated by a shared view that putting options on the table will stimulate action and is long overdue in Canada.

Together, the contributions enrich the scope of possible solutions and show that Canada is brimming with ideas, possibilities and the will to act. The views expressed in *Acting on Climate Change: Extending the Dialogue Among Canadians* are those of the contributors, and are not necessarily endorsed by Sustainable Canada Dialogues.

We thank all contributors for engaging in this dialogue with us to help reach a collective vision of desired pathways to our futures.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, VISIT OUR WEBSITE

sustainablecanadialogues.ca/en/scd/acting-on-climate-change