

Sean Sweeney <ss266@cornell.edu>

“GREEN NEW DEAL”: A NEW GLOBAL POLICY AND ORGANIZING FRAMEWORK FOR INTERNATIONAL LABOR?

The confluence of the financial crisis and the climate crisis has generated discussion in trade union and progressive circles on the need for a “green new deal” (GND) with global dimensions. While there have been variations in terms of scope and content, GND proposals are invariably inspired by Franklin D. Roosevelt’s recovery program during the 1930s. GND advocates imagine capital being mobilized for long-term investments aimed at rebuilding communities, creating employment, and advancing climate protection.

Global Unions have recently embraced the concept of a GND. In its statement to the emergency meeting of the G20 countries in Washington during November 2008, Global Unions articulated an unusually bold program for a new economic management aimed at distributional justice, environmental protection and a new role for global finance. For unions and their allies, the GND should have a global reach, one that offers hope to the 1.3 billion people who are unemployed or underemployed, and sets the world on a clear pathway to low-carbon and sustainable development.

Needless to say, the GND is offered as a clear alternative to the short-term, finance-dominated and anti-social neoliberal model. It is also seen as a framework that can manage financial markets and reestablish social and environmental priorities. Above all, it redefines and restores government as a key driver of economic policy, thus reversing the practice of the past several decades where government policy was expected to conform to the needs of markets.

This paper will:

- Lay out the main features and underlying assumptions of the GND perspective.
- Describe both what’s new about the GND approach in terms of the overall orientation of the trade unions to global economic management and development, and what’s more or less a continuation of the trade union policy and positions adopted in the neoliberal period.

The paper will also attempt to consider a number of questions important to trade unionists. These are:

- Do GND scenarios imply a political division between business interests concerned with long-term sustainability and those still driven by short-term profit considerations? Will ‘brown’ capitalism clash with ‘green

capitalism’? Could this redefine present conceptions of social partnership?

- Can a social movement be built and sustained around a GND? To what extent might the GND, as a program for action, reconfigure or promote new alliances between unions, those representing workers in the informal economy, small farmer’s organizations and environmentalists?
- To what extent can a GND establish a new political role of unions and redefine their relationship to state administrations?

The paper will not attempt to consider these questions in any great detail, but will instead try to lay out some issues for unions to consider as they engage and perhaps participate in policy discussions that might fall under the heading of a GND.

Methodology:

Examination of key policy statements issued by global trade union bodies and leaders over a 10 year time frame. These statements will be viewed and assessed through a broader historical lens in order to establish the evolution of trade union thought over the last 30 years or so. The influence of other movements on trade union policy will also be considered.

e-mail: glu.india@tiss.edu

Internet: www.global-labour-university.org