

Pursue a Just and Sustainable Transition

Demanding Fairness for All

“Just and sustainable transition” is a principle, a process, and a practice that suggests a healthy economy and a clean environment can and should co-exist. The process for achieving this vision should be a fair one that must not cost workers or community residents their health, environment, jobs, or economic assets. Any losses should be fairly compensated. It means that the people who are most affected by pollution – frontline workers and frontline communities – should be in the leadership of crafting policy solutions. Communities and workers that have suffered from unsafe workplaces and environments must be helped to transition to healthy, viable communities with sustainable economies.

The world has witnessed many transitions in the past, from automation to the decline or relocation of entire industries. Unfortunately, some governments, businesses, workers, and communities have a tendency to protect the status quo, in the hope of saving jobs and livelihoods. History shows, however, that prolonging the lifetime of declining industries often leads to subsidies, higher costs for worker retraining and unemployment, health and environmental costs, and missed opportunities for the diversification of an economy.

The fossil fuel industry exemplifies how the intransigence of its players to accept progressive change has created an existential threat to life on earth and economic decline in communities in which it operates. Big Oil continues to deny the science of climate change, lobby for government subsidies, build bigger and more dangerous pipelines, exploit oil extraction from public lands, employ disastrous techniques like fracking, and avoid advanced strategies that would help save us from the worst effects of the climate crisis. The industry’s addiction to greed and the status quo – even in the face of declining profits – must be resisted for the sake of all peoples, their communities, cultures, and the flora and fauna we so treasure.

Capitalism has forced many communities to sacrifice culture and tradition for economic survival. It has also defaced and destroyed land held as sacred. Creating a just and sustainable transition must include opportunities for all traditions and cultures to flourish, recognizing them as integral to a healthy and vibrant economy. It should also make reparations for land that has been stolen and/or destroyed by capitalism, colonialism, patriarchy, genocide, and slavery.

Many countries are already transitioning to low-carbon energy, and this transition is creating secure, good-paying jobs. In the United States, nearly 335,000 people work in the solar industry and more than 111,000 work in the wind industry, compared to 211,000 working in coal mining or other fossil-fuel extraction.