Contribution ID: **24** Type: **not specified**

A just and green transition post-covid to a carbon-neutral society? union strategies and social dialogue at global level and their local implementation

Thursday, 16 September 2021 14:15 (30 minutes)

Key to the recovery of industrial relations post-covid and the form this takes is the development of a green economy and securing a just transition to a carbon-free world. Global and European union organisations play an increasingly active role in global climate and just green transition politics. This paper addresses the range of their interventions, the challenges to developing policy proposals, and how effectively these are enacted at regional, national and local levels. It is based on findings from a research project, 'Just Green Transitions and Global Union Organisations', part of a Canadian supported programme on climate change and work. The paper assesses in particular the strategies that emanate from the food and agriculture unions, IUF and EFFAT, and the building and woodworking unions, BWI and EFBWW, based on analysis of written declarations, policy proposals and in-depth interviews. The effectiveness of these is tested in two in-depth cases given as examples of just transition policy enactment: bio-economy in the sugar beet industry in Denmark and sustainable forestry in Sweden.

Whilst the notion of just transition provides a frame, unions take a multi-pronged approach to climate change, seeking to integrate traditional concerns with employment and working conditions with action to combat climate change. In arguing for a comprehensive social transformation, they are driven by current global targets and goals as well as sector-specific concerns. It is shown how engagement with climate change is necessitating a more political strategy and wider social dialogue, directing unions to represent more than the interests of their members.

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Session Classification: 1.2

Track Classification: Track 2