



Good Jobs, Green Jobs 2010: Using Green Energy Manufacturing To Solve the Jobs Crisis Is Shaping Up To Be a Very Tough Battle

By Carl Davidson, *SolidarityEconomy.Net*, May 16, 2010

Washington DC's DuPont Circle area is best known for foreign embassies and sidewalk cafes and a lively nightlife. But for three mild and sunny spring days this May 4-6, nearly 3,500 people stayed inside the Hilton Hotel for the 2010 'Good Jobs, Green Jobs' conference, trying to solve the country's economic problems and the world's climate change crisis.

This was the third and largest gathering to date on the green jobs theme organized by the Blue-Green Alliance, a coalition of several hundred environmental, community and trade union groups pulled together primarily by the United Steel Workers and the Sierra Club. Last year's gathering of 3000, fresh from Obama's victory and several new recession-fighting initiatives, was highly spirited and visionary.

Now a tough year had passed and the mood had shifted. There was still plenty of idealism and optimism, especially among the younger activists, but many were sobered by the fierce resistance of the GOP and finance capital to any timely or significantly large reforms. Climate change was being denied, clean energy legislation was stalled, stimulus spending for jobs was too small, health insurance reform was barely acceptable, and the wars were dragging on.

Nonetheless, the organizers here were determined to find ways to continue and deepen their struggles.

"We must seize this opportunity to turn the economy around and end global warming," said Leo Gerard of the Steelworkers. "If the Republicans take majorities in the House and Senate in November, only Heaven will be able to help us. For our children, our grandchildren, and all the future generations we cannot allow this to happen." His summarizing statement was aimed as much at the White House and the Democratic Party leadership as it was at the conference participants.

The conference had three components: first, a series of large plenary sessions alternating with smaller workshops; second, a Green Innovation Expo featuring booths from more than 100 green nonprofits, unions, government agencies and a variety of 'high road' green energy companies, including McKinstry Corp., AT&T, ArcelorMittal, UPS, the American Wind Energy Association, and the Solar Energy Industries Association. Throughout the conference, there was frequent mention of GAMESA, the Spanish wind turbine construction company, which now has major investments in the United States. Third, there was a final day of lobbying on Capitol Hill.

The main attraction at the opening plenary was House Speaker Nancy Pelosi. "In Congress, we have stood strong in the drive for good, green jobs," she declared. "We understand that the 21st century will be led by those who invest, innovate, and act. We've said all along that clean energy is about four things: jobs, jobs, jobs, jobs." Pelosi summarized the work over the previous year. "Creating jobs," she explained, "was central to the President's budget, founded on three critical components of our nation's prosperity: health care for all Americans, education and innovation; and clean energy jobs. In keeping with the budget, the House took another bold step forward by passing the Waxman-Markey bill, the American Clean Energy and Security Act, which would create 1.7 million jobs, reduce our dangerous dependence on foreign oil, and cut the pollution that causes global warming.

"This legislation," the Speaker continued, "is an opportunity to transform our economy and create jobs that cannot be shipped overseas. It's a chance to further unleash private sector investment in clean energy and make America the leader in global innovation. It will promote new, clean energy technology - made in America, by American workers, to power America's households. The House has acted. We hope the Senate will act soon. We all need to work together to get a final bill to the President's desk."

What Pelosi didn't say, however, was critical to frustrations expressed throughout the conference: tax credits were no substitute for purchase orders, programs had to have greater scale, and the ongoing costs of wars abroad and Wall Street recalcitrance to being taxed was gutting program after program. She was followed by Hilda Solis, the new Secretary of Labor, who was very popular with the union crowd at the gathering.

Solis handed Leo Gerard a poster as she began her remarks: "I brought you this poster, Leo, because I know you'd appreciate it. It has a quote from Mother Jones, 'Pray for the dead, but fight like hell for the living.' We lost 29 miners in West Virginia, 7 steelworkers in Washington State and 11 workers lost off that oil rig in the Gulf Coast. I think everyone in this room can agree no one should go to work afraid that they might not return home safe after their shift. Whether it's a dramatic explosion or slow steady exposure to unsafe chemicals, we can and we will hold employers accountable and say NO MORE to preventable accidents and injuries! That's why green jobs must be safe jobs." She received an enormous ovation.

The workshops had something for everyone. Titles included things like "New Markets and Clean Energy Supply Chains" and "Capitalizing the Green Jobs Movement" for the green investors; "Recycling, Jobs and Climate Change" and "Youth in the Great Outdoors" for young eco-activists; and "Clean and Safe Trucks for Empowering America's Ports" and "Utility Scale Solar Jobs" for labor organizers. Any one person could only handle six, so a wide range of learning

experiences was inevitable.

One workshop on the first day promised a big picture: "Can Green Jobs Solve the Biggest Unemployment Crisis Since the Great Depression?" Chaired by Les Leopold of the Labor Institute, it featured Robert Kuttner of American Prospect magazine, Carole James of Canada's New Democratic Party, Robert Atkinson on 'Innovation Economics' fame, and Juliet Schor, author of 'The Overworked American.'

There was little optimism around the central theme of the workshop. The panelists, each in their own way, believed it was possible for green jobs to be a big part of the solution to the crisis, but everything depended on a good number of less likely 'ifs...' "We have to get out of our silos," said Leopold, referring to the practice of single-issue isolation. James stressed the frequent passivity of elected officials: "Government can't sit on the sidelines," but it also had to be a "smart partner." Schor argued for a redistribution of work through the six-hour day.

The big problem was that U.S. had fallen behind in innovation, added Atkinson. "In 2000, we were number one. Now we're number six. There's too much money in the financial sector with no place to go, mainly because of stupidity and greed." Capital needed to be shifted into innovation in design and into developing the productive forces, he argued. "A carbon tax will not get us to electric cars, but better batteries will."

Robert Kuttner noted that President Obama's election last year may yet turn out to be "a turning point of history on which history failed to turn." He was echoing the British historian A. J. P. Taylor's description of the 1848 European revolutions that were crushed by reaction. Obama's team did a number of good things, he explained, but not to scale. Short-term solutions were applied when longer-term solutions were required. He argued that a high-road green manufacturing industrial policy could set us on the right path, "but right now we have no industrial policy and no one wants to talk about one."

Kuttner was mostly right, especially on exposing the desire of too many top Democrats to declare 'industrial policy' off the table. The unstated problem was that the country does have an industrial policy, but it's a military-oil-industrial policy. And strategically, it has to be replaced with the green energy and manufacturing alternative if we are to recover and thrive, even if no one inside the Beltway wants to talk about it.

The conference, unfortunately, placed very little emphasis on war and militarism. One exception was at the workshop on Infrastructure and Jobs Creation, questions were taken in writing on index cards, including one, unsigned, but from Ted Pearson, a national committee member of the Committees of Correspondence for Democracy and Socialism, which was picked and read: "Would not cutting the military budget and ending the wars, and investing the money in green infrastructure and technology development do more to create jobs than is now possible?" This drew loud applause from the audience. U. S. Rep. Emanuel Cleaver (MO-5th) quipped, "There's a real left winger in the crowd," which drew more applause and laughter. But both panelists, Cleaver and Rep. Keith Ellison (MN-5th), agreed that Pearson's point was true.

The second day opened with a plenary featuring Richard Trumka, president of the AFL-CIO, and

Senator John Kerry (D-MA). Kerry was trying to push a major bill on carbon emissions through the Senate, while Trumka was making the case for the AFL-CIO's fight for jobs.

"We're 11 million jobs in the hole," Trumka declared, "and that's on top of the unemployment that already existed. All in all, at least 17 million Americans are out of work. And those who are still working are up against wage freezes, hollowed out health care, and shredded retirement plans." Taking on the resistance of the GOP and Tea Party rightists, including where it had gained a foothold in the working class, he went on to explain:

"So it isn't enough for environmental advocates to make the case for change -- compelling as it is. We have to persuade working Americans that change will work for them and not against them. We know what America needs to do. Many of you are doing it already. We need to produce and use more clean and renewable energy. We need to build in more energy-efficient ways. We need to rebuild our electrical grid and make it smarter. We need to improve and expand our mass transit systems and build high-speed rail lines. And we need to prepare millions of workers to do these jobs."

Trumka closed by saying, "Now is the time to reject false choices and make forward-looking choices. Now is the time to invest in new technologies that generate energy, grow the economy, and create good green jobs. Now is the time to build the alliances, present the plans, and fight the fights that will create a cleaner, greener, more prosperous and more just America."

Senator Kerry had a more difficult task. He had to rally the support and energy of conference participants for a comprehensive energy and climate change legislation that was being weakened and gutted even as he spoke. "I know some of our critics, even some of our friends, have suggested that we settle for an 'energy only' bill. But as tempting as that may be to some, it is an approach that ignores the fact that America today is confronting three interrelated crises: an energy security crisis, a climate crisis and an economic crisis. Our best response to all three is a bold, comprehensive bill."

Kerry did best in framing an historical context for the discussion: "In 1931, not long before he died, the famous inventor Thomas Edison had a conversation with his friends Henry Ford and Harvey Firestone about the energy needs in the future. He told them: 'I'd put my money on the sun and solar energy. What a source of power! I hope we don't have to wait until oil and coal run out before we tackle that.' Edison wasn't an environmentalist, by any means. But he did recognize that oil and coal are finite sources of energy. And if we intend to maintain our standard of living, if we want to remain competitive in the world economy, if we expect to continue protecting our national security, we're going to have to find new, renewable and sustainable clean sources of energy - solar, wind, biomass, geothermal and hydroelectric."

Kerry's reference to 'national security' pointed to an unofficial sub-theme of the conference, an American nationalist context in how various issues were argued. At one extreme was a booth at the Green Innovation Expo that featured a large picture of Iran's President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, who was labeled a 'terrorist' and the U.S. needed energy independence to isolate and defeat Iran. At the other, was the effort of the USW to insure that the tax dollars of American workers were primarily used to develop new green manufacturing industries with jobs for U.S

workers in the American 'Rustbelt' heartland hit hard by deindustrialization. There were a range of views in between, often focused on China-some accusing it of taking unfair advantage of trade agreements, while others marveled enviously at the Chinese green industrial policy being developed in a socialist market economy.

Bob Baugh of the AFL-CIO's Industrial Union Council expressed a typical view: "In the last two years we have seen our country stumbling toward an industrial policy. We support 'Buy America.' As we move forward and spend public monies, like transit investments, we need to spend them here. We should try to find American vendors here."

The workshop on 'Using the Recovery Act to Scale Up Clean Energy Manufacturing' went into the topic in some detail. First up was Benjamin Goldstein, an official with the Dept. of Energy. "Unofficially I'm called the 'Buy American Czar,' but being a Czar of anything is dubious these days," he joked, but he went on to explain how recovery funds were to be spent. Both components and sub-components of industrial and service purchases were to be made domestically, but they could be bought globally under certain conditions: if they were not available in the U.S. at required quantities and quality. Purchases could also be made abroad if it spent cost savings would be greater than 25 percent. Finally, restrictions could be lifted or tightened under an 'inconsistent with the public interest' clause that was mainly deployed around bargaining over competing trade issues. The bottom line is that domestic purchasing was supported, but not in a protectionist manner that unduly blocked competition.

Linda Androus, a legislative counsel for the Steelworkers, added that, "people inside the Beltway just don't understand this at all." She pointed out that since 2007, 40,000 U.S. factories had shut down and moved abroad, and another 70,000 were "at risk."

The next plenary featured Senator Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Dr. Steven Chu, Obama's Secretary of Energy. Recently returned from China, Chu said China is "gearing up" to lead in the next revolution and is "going heavily into solar. China, he noted, intends to be the leader in clean energy technologies. "Quite frankly, the United States is still ahead of China and why don't we be the leader?" "We can take the leadership role," he added, "but you have to send first a long-term signal to the people of the United States, to industry, that says 'yes we're going to have a cap on our carbon, and we're going to ratchet it down.'"

Chu made two relevant and simple predictions. One, the price of oil will be more expensive. Two, we will live in a carbon-constricted world. Unfortunately, he didn't add the constriction of burning uranium. His advocacy of building new nuclear plants is the main objection many green activists have to his otherwise fairly progressive views on energy matters. Chu is also a Nobel Prize winning nuclear physicist.

Senator Merkley opened with a similar theme: "We have to seize this moment to build things in America. We want to see America building turbines and shipping them to the world." He promoted Oregon Iron Works, a leading company not only producing modern mass transit for his state, but exporting as well. "Oregon has a strategy," he asserted. "It's producing tens of thousands of jobs. Now we need a national strategy."

Another round of workshops followed. 'What Green Jobs Mean for the African American Community' was one where the jobs issue came to a head. The Rev. Lenox Yearwood of the Hip Hop Caucus had done a good job of opening up the subject. "I just spent seven days on the road talking with African American communities, mostly young people, in Indiana, Missouri and Arkansas about clean-energy, on the Hip Hop Caucus Clean Energy Now! Tour," he said. "We have officially put our elected officials on notice: 2010 must be a year of action on clean energy and climate legislation." Yearwood was followed by Emily Enderle of EarthJustice and Maya Goines of the Department of Labor. Enderle stressed the fact that Black communities are located in areas loaded with toxics and other pollutants, while Goines described the potential impact of various new programs.

But it was in the question period that things got hot. "Are there really any jobs?" asked one organizer, who described himself as someone working with dozens of young men recently released from prison or otherwise part of the long-term unemployed. "Or are we just talking bureaucratic run-arounds? Is there an office somewhere where we can go and sign up for a job today? I mean the folks I'm working with are desperate. They've got nothing, not even a place to live."

He got convoluted answers, but nothing concrete. "So again, are there really any jobs?" he persisted. "Tell me where we go!" Finally, Goines was straightforward, and told him, no, she had no jobs to hand out, only programs and projects that were being planned, and that hopefully would come to scale in the near future and reach into his community.

Still the youth present in this workshop were upbeat. Their numbers in the conference overall was a real step forward. They were Black, white, Latino and Asian American, and came mainly from the Sierra Club, the Apollo Alliance and the "Corps Network" as well as Green for All, which stood out last year. The Corps Network involves 29,600 young people--43% white, 30% Black, 17% Latino, and 10% others. Those without high school diplomas make up 45% of the youth, with only 28% having some college or a degree. The Corps Network has a Civic Justice Corps focused on offenders and at-risk youth; a Clean Energy Service Corps focused on employment in retrofitting homes and businesses for energy efficiency; and a Public Lands Corps patterned after the CCC of the Depression years.

One of the more inspiring workshops was held at the end. Entitled 'Using Community Investment to Create Green Jobs You Can Own,' it featured the newly created Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland, Ohio, and started with a 10-minute video highlighting three worker-owned coops--an industrial laundry, a solar panel assembly and installation firm, and a huge greenhouse/community garden growing fresh produce in the city on a large scale.

The Evergreen Coops are part of a wider 'Green City on a Blue Lake' strategic planning initiative bringing together nonprofit foundations, city government, schools and universities, and labor unions and community organizations and residents in low-income neighborhoods.

"If having a green job is a good thing," said Ted Howard of the Democracy Collaborative, "then owning a green job is an even better thing." Inspired and partially modeled after the Mondragon Coops in Spain, the Evergreen Coops in Cleveland grew out of years of frustration with job-

training programs that ended with people trained for non-existent jobs, or jobs with businesses that had left the country in the meantime. "The problem is 'how do we anchor capital,'" Howard explained. "And the answer lies in public and worker ownership." The organizers have three functioning businesses now, with 50-100 worker-owners, but seven more are planned, and several dozen more after that. "We want this to truly come to scale," added Lillian Kuri of the Cleveland Foundation.

To sum it all up, the 'Good Jobs, Green Jobs' conference, and the Blue-Green Alliance behind it, is part of a new historic bloc against the GOP, Blue Dog Democrats and the far right. Its core is a three-way alliance among trade unions, environmentalists and advocates for inner city youth and the unemployed. It reaches up to include top officials and sectors of the Obama administration, Members of Congress, leaders of 'high road' green industries, and state and city government. What makes it stand out from other Beltway 'letterhead coalitions' is that it actually has a dynamic variety of local mass organizations of workers and youth as an active base.

The year's gathering was clearly challenging for them. They have learned enough over the past few years to see that their fight has only begun, that it is going to be very difficult, and that it will involve some political debates and tensions among their own broad alliance of forces. At the same time, they have an inspiring vision of change, and a firm commitment to keep building their strength. What the future holds is anyone's guess, but almost all of them are convinced that it matters a great deal.

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