

Unraveling Global Trade Unions' Just Transition Strategies

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While workers and working-class people contribute the least to the climate crisis, they also bear the majority of risks. Accordingly, questions of fusing environmental and social justice demands have been increasingly on the agenda of trade unions. Just Transition as the dominant trade union strategy and contribution to climate change debates tries to address this by demanding the avoidance of negative impacts on workers in the transition to a greener economy. By asking how trade unions rationalize their own political position in climate change debates this study analyzes the differences between Just Transition strategies of Global Trade Unions. A critical discourse analysis was applied on expert interviews and policy papers of five major Global Union Federations and the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). The analysis has identified two distinct approaches, one that is invoking an eco-modernist, managerial framework called “Green Economy” and a more radical, holistic “Green Transformation” approach with a higher degree of awareness towards relations of power. The results indicate that there exists a struggle in the international trade union sphere over not only what shall be understood under Just Transition but eventually also the course of actions, i.e., trade union practices, to achieve a just relation between labor and nature. The study suggests that transformative approaches that are conflictive to the hegemonial narrative provided by neoliberal climate change transitions have a better potential to build union power and empowerment of workers.

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