

Remarks by Richard Trumka (President of TUAC and the AFL-CIO) OECD's Third Ministerial Council Roundtable on "Economic Recovery: Strong, Resilient, Green and Inclusive – Making a Green Recovery Work for Jobs, Income and Growth"

Secretary General and Ministers, I am Richard Trumka, President of the Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD, and in my country, the President of the AFL-CIO, America's labor movement. TUAC thanks the OECD for this opportunity to participate in this third ministerial council roundtable.

We are currently in the midst of the deepest global crisis since World War II, with an unprecedented fall in global GDP and a massive increase in unemployment.

To make matters worse, the COVID-19 crisis is occurring in a world struggling with a climate crisis and rising inequality, with workers around the world living increasingly precarious lives in what is now a multi-decade trend.

Low wage gains, middle class families under pressure, and angry young workers with few options didn't occur by chance, they are political and policy outcomes.

Millions of workers, even in the world's wealthiest economies, are facing the pandemic without unemployment insurance, without health care, without paid sick days and without safe working conditions. This is not an accident. This is the consequence of political and policy decisions.

And in many nations, none more acutely than the United States, the stain of racism has finally, painfully, been forced into the mainstream public discourse. Racism divides us and hinders progress on everything under discussion at this meeting.

Let me be plain: austerity, inequality and racism create a politics that makes a competent response to the climate crisis more difficult, or worse, blocks serious action at the national level.

Specifically, the degradation of labor market institutions across the advanced economies has created a profound imbalance of power from the steady and effective attacks on worker's institutions, and brought us to a place where in many countries working people have no confidence in policy processes acting in their interest, and no bargaining table at which to negotiate the terms on which the transition to a low carbon economy will occur.

The result is that the policies that keep working people down are preventing us from a consensus to move faster on climate. If something doesn't change the resulting gridlock may be catastrophic.

The only thing that can change that is to strengthen the institutions that give workers a genuine voice in the economy and in the workplace, because they are necessary to

restore the strength of our democracies. Without that, there will never be enough support in society for the structural reform of our economies needed to protect the climate.

That means genuine social dialogue, and socially-determined public investments that include mandates that green jobs be good jobs, with transition funds and industrial policies. For that to happen there must be guarantees of labor rights and companies and governments must come to the table and agree to recognize workers' right to a voice and negotiate collective agreements.

Any other path means growing inequality, stoking resentment and division. It means pushing societies away from stability, away from democracy, and away from action on climate.

In this sense, either there will be a just transition or there will be no transition. An attempt at an unjust transition will fail.

But together we can avoid those outcomes, and the AFL-CIO, the TUAC, and the rest of the global labor movement are ready to work with anyone who shares that goal. We note with appreciation recent work by the OECD that has called attention to the importance of collective bargaining as an important positive force in both economic and social terms, and urge the OECD to look particularly at the implications for this work for taking on the threat of climate change.

Because this is our chance to "build back better", in every sense. A chance to restore growth, give workers and indigenous communities a voice, and create decent and good paying jobs with a strong focus on addressing the urgent challenges of climate change and environmental degradation.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views, and we look forward to the urgent work of making real the agenda that you are discussing today.