

Green Pathways out of Poverty

A group of Toronto union activists travelled to Pittsburgh in March to join 800 others in a historic event – the first U.S. National Green Jobs Conference. Co-sponsored by the United Steelworkers, Sierra Club and the governor of Pennsylvania, it featured an powerful alliance of voices from labour, industry, government and environmental groups outlining a common agenda for a green jobs revolution in America.

The spirit of the two days was captured in this article by Carl Pope of the Sierra Club.

“Van Jones, of Green for All, raises the bar this morning at the Good Jobs/Green Jobs conference. Describing his efforts over the years to reassure the African-American community in Oakland that, yes, there would soon be jobs for their children, Van confesses, “But I was lying. I didn’t have a vehicle to keep those promises. Now we do. The new green economy needs to be the vehicle that reaches out and includes the people and the communities we have thrown away.”

He lays out the choices that government faces: “Today, our government is on the side of society’s problem makers -- the polluters, the incarcerators, the job destroyers. They get the subsidies, they get permission to break the rules, they don’t get held accountable for what they do, and they have the support of

the state and all its power. We need to change our government and to put it on the side of the problem solvers -- the people who are trying to create jobs, clean up the environment, heal communities, and solve crime. Problem makers are getting billions, while problem solvers get pennies.”

He points to training inner-city youth as solar installers. “Then they become electricians, even electrical engineers. Train them to install double-pane windows to lower the heating bills in inner-city apartments -- and suddenly they become glaziers.”

He gets -- as always -- a thunderous ovation. I count myself fortunate that I’ve had to follow him to the podium only once. But he is not alone in sensing that something large is building here. As the economic order of the last thirty years crumbles, destroyed by its reckless dependence on indulging America’s insiders and sustaining their habit of gambling with everyone else’s money -- which is really what the credit collapse is about -- people are seeing that it’s not enough to say of this election, as Bill Clinton once did, “It’s the economy, stupid.” People are beginning to think that “We need a new economy -- period.” And that new economy can, indeed must, be green.

Think 1929, not 1992.”



GOOD JOBS
GREEN JOBS