

The question is 'Given that the Green New Deal has provisions that Labor normally supports - jobs, retraining, union rights - will Labor support the Green New Deal?'

Let's take a quick look at the current state of Labor in the US, and then at what the Green New Deal offers, and see if we can reach a conclusion about Labor support.

First, we should define 'Labor' with a capital L. That means unions, organized workers, a small part of the total American work force, and getting smaller all the time. How small? Briefly put, at its peak, which was the mid 1950's, unions represented about a third of the US workforce. There were very few 'public sector' unions then, so that was almost all in the private sector. That high level of unionization - union density - didn't last long. Beginning in the mid 1960's, it started to fall, and has been falling ever since.

Today union density in the US is about 10%.

That percentage includes both private and public sector workers, and the vast majority of union members today are in the public sector. In the private sector, only 6.4% of workers are in unions.

So, at first glance you might say it just doesn't matter whether or not Labor supports the Green New Deal - Labor is just too small these days to make a difference. And that's fundamentally true - organized labor has nowhere near the political clout it used to have.

But although its numbers are small, and although the vast majority of private sector workers do not belong to unions, certain industries which could be impacted in a big way by the Green New Deal do have decent levels of union membership.

In public utilities, almost 25% of workers have a union. In transportation about 18% of workers are union, and in construction, where union density used to be quite high, 15% of workers are still union members. All of those are much smaller percentages than in the past, but higher than that paltry 6.4% of the total private work force.

So, it's likely that Labor will have a bigger say than its membership numbers alone would indicate in determining whether or not the Green New Deal gets the necessary public support to actually become law, and it's safe to say that Labor support will be important for the Green New Deal.

So, back to our original question: will Labor - with whatever influence it still has - support the Green New Deal?

That depends.

If the Green New Deal is presented and pursued in its entirety, with its very ambitious goals, then I think Yes, it will have Labor support. If it gets watered down, if it becomes something less ambitious and less comprehensive, then it's likely to get very tepid Labor support. And it's probably a good idea to keep in mind that Labor is not a monolithic structure. Even though the Republican Party has been very successful in scaring Americans with the evil potential of 'Big Labor' for decades, in reality labor unions are a diverse group politically. Most unions can be considered mainstream Democratic Party supporters, but there are lots of union organizations, local and national, to the left and right of that political position.

Overall, unions are very skeptical of promises of policies and programs that will supposedly help them. This is especially true of promises or predictions about new jobs and about retraining programs for workers whose jobs end. Unions' experiences with such promises and with such programs have been grim.

The US has a horrible track record of when it comes to retraining its workforce, and there's very little political support for unions in any newly created jobs, especially if those jobs depend on government funding. When the TSA was formed after 9/11, it could only get funded after it was written into law that TSA agents would not have full collective bargaining rights. And fifteen years later, although many TSA agents now belong to the Federation of Government Employees - the union representing many federal employees - they still don't have full rights to bargain. Their salaries, benefits and working conditions reflect this.

As for retraining programs, here's how those usually worked while the US manufacturing sector was being decimated in the 1980's and 1990's: a worker lost a union job paying about \$25 an hour, with health insurance and good benefits, was put into a dislocated worker program, given about 3-6 months training in something like welding or computer programming or dental hygiene and then offered a non-union service sector job at about \$8-10 an hour with lousy benefits.

With that history in mind, here's what unions are now saying about the Green New Deal:

Climate strategies that leave coal miners' pension funds bankrupt, power plant workers unemployed, construction workers making less than they do now...plans that devastate communities today, while offering vague promises about the future...they are more than unjust...they fundamentally undermine the power of the political coalition needed to address the climate crisis."

Richard Trumka, President of the AFL-CIO

The AFL-CIO sent a letter to Representative Ocasio-Cortez shortly after the Green New Deal was introduced expressing strong reservations about the Green New Deal: *We welcome the call for labor rights and dialogue with labor, but the Green New Deal resolution is far too short on specific solutions that speak to the jobs of our members and the critical sections of our economy."*

So, in regards to Labor support the big question is: how strong a Green New Deal will we get? A real New Deal, or just more of the same old half-measures?

Let's look at how much the Green New Deal might offer, by looking at some descriptions of it by its supporters:

The Green New Deal is a fundamental shift in economic policy for the United States.

“Climate change is an emergent property of a bad economic system.” That outmoded economic system - “neoliberalism” — is the real target of the Green New Deal.

The Green New Deal is not just a climate change policy. It is a vision for a new kind of economy, built around a new set of social and economic relationships. It is not merely a way to reduce emissions, but also to ameliorate the other symptoms and dysfunctions of a late capitalist economy: growing inequality and concentration of power at the top.

The Green New Deal is, at its heart, a form of social-democratic populism. Its intent is to involve the entire citizenry in the shared project of adapting to the 21st century, and in so doing materially improve the quality of life of the poor and middle class. It is an attempt to rebalance the economy and the political system, away from a monomaniacal focus on private goods, toward a more generous view of public goods and public purpose.

A national mobilization of the size and scale of the Green New Deal presents an unprecedented opportunity to not only combat the climate crisis, but also to eliminate poverty in the United States and to make wealth, prosperity, and security available to every person who participates in the transition. Thus, the goals of the Green New Deal represent both what is needed to effectively address climate change and what is needed to transform our current economy to one that is just, prosperous, and sustainable for all Americans.

The Green New Deal described in those comments would be sure to get support from Labor. But keep in mind that opponents of the Green New Deal will use exactly these kind of comments to organize against the Green New Deal - to paint it as a socialist plot meant to destroy our freedoms. Such arguments have almost always been very effective in killing support for progressive legislation in the US. The very aspects of the Green New Deal that will garner strong Labor support are the aspects likely to be most fiercely opposed.

Given that, I am much more worried that centrist Democrats will join with Republicans and business interests to help kill any chance for a Green New Deal than I am worried about Labor's position.