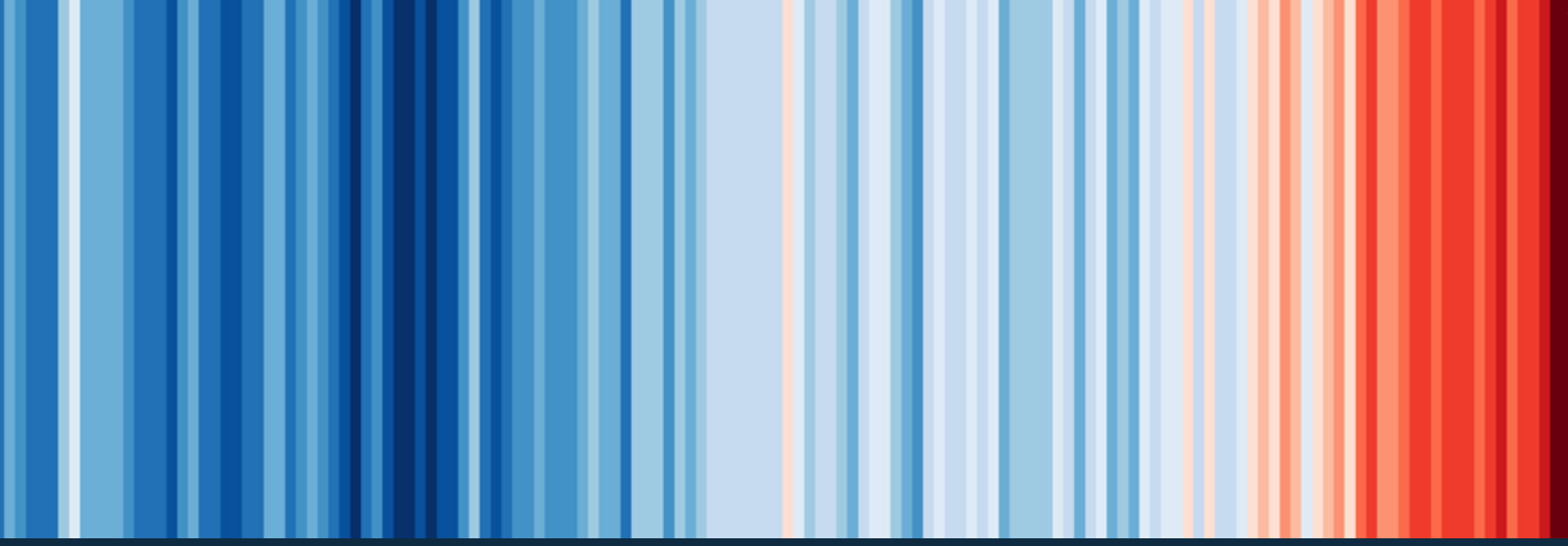

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Union Power

BC's Clean Industrial Strategy for Workers, Communities and the Future

November 2026

BCFED

The heart of this study is the perspectives of the working people who shared their time and their experiences so generously with us through an earlier phase of this project. From the beginning, it was clear to us that any successful economic and climate policy must be grounded in those experiences and shaped by those voices.

We dedicate this report to the workers we spoke with, and to workers throughout BC who are navigating these uncertain times—and whose experience, expertise and solidarity hold the key to a prosperous, resilient future.

UNION POWER: BC's Clean Industrial Strategy for Workers, Communities and the Future

November, 2026

AUTHORS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The BC Federation of Labour would like to thank the workers, affiliates and representatives who participated in this work. The report would not have been possible without the support of various affiliates who provided reviews of chapters along the way. A special thank you to the Climate Justice and Jobs Committee at the BCFED for initiating and believing in this work, and for supporting as broad a scope as possible.

This report was funded by a generous grant from Vancity Credit Union, and we give them a special thanks for supporting worker-led and labour-focused research in British Columbia. Financial support by Vancouver City Savings Credit Union (Vancity) for this project does not necessarily imply Vancity's endorsement of these contents or findings.

Graphic design by Hands on Publications

ABOUT THE BC FEDERATION OF LABOUR

The BCFED is a federation of labour unions representing more than half a million workers from every sector and every region of British Columbia. We advocate for union and non-union workers alike, and we take inspiration from our slogan, "What we desire for ourselves, we wish for all."

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Executive Summary

Union Power is a focused industrial strategy that puts workers at the centre of a prosperous, fairer economy and a sustainable, liveable climate. Developed through dozens of focus groups and interviews with more than 400 workers and labour leaders, it's based on three pillars:

- **Energy redistribution,** with an ambitious public build-out of renewable electricity generation and critical mineral mining;
- **Energy efficiency,** including retrofits, a forestry strategy, a public transit and transportation vision, and the circular economy; and
- **Wealth and power redistribution,** ensuring our economy benefits workers and communities, expanding opportunities for training and education, and delivering environmental justice.

Our strategy creates 79,000 new jobs and protects nearly 100,000 existing forestry jobs. We do it not by choosing jobs over the environment — our plan has BC reaching net zero by 2050 — but by integrating a clean-energy, net-zero future into our province's economy and our communities.

We put workers, their communities and their futures front and centre — the only real way to build an economy that works for everyone, and for the long term.

NET ZERO

Net zero means our economy only puts as much carbon into the atmosphere as nature and other measures can remove. A net-zero economy relies on zero-emission energy, such as hydroelectric power.

On the Front Lines of a Disrupted Economy and Damaged Climate

We spoke with hundreds of workers from across BC. And we heard remarkably consistent themes coming up repeatedly, with BC workers experiencing economic and climate anxiety as different aspects of the same uncertain, difficult time in their lives.

Working conditions: Heat, wildfire smoke and flooding affect workplace safety as well as worker income — from care workers caring for their patients while their own communities were being evacuated, to migrant workers who went unpaid during the flooding of the Fraser Valley.

Cost of living: Pressures on the cost of living — especially for necessities like housing and groceries — affect workers and their families across all regions, sectors and income levels. One impact: climate action becomes a lower priority as people need to focus on their immediate needs.

Identity and place: Resource and rural workers report taking great pride in their work; it's a core part of their identity. And with many communities relying heavily on a single industry, disruptions like mill closures can deal a huge economic and social blow.

Anxiety and young workers: Young workers as well as teachers describe widespread climate anxiety and a bleak outlook for the future, along with a sense of pressure to choose between a liveable climate and making a living.

Failing infrastructure: Many public buildings, roads and other infrastructure would be facing the challenges of age even in normal times. But the stresses of weather extremes and climate disruption threaten to erode them even more quickly. And for communities with only one road out of town, the prospect of flood or fire can be doubly threatening.

Waste, outsourcing and management: Workers see waste all around their workplaces; in the public sector, they tie it directly to outsourcing and privatization. And they report out-of-touch management and consultants who fail to trust the first-hand expertise workers have gained over years of experience.

AI and automation: Many workers report feeling growing pressure to adopt AI tools without adequate (or, often, any) training and to keep up with an ever-accelerating pace of work, as management demands increased productivity. They're skeptical of the environmental claims being made around automation, and concerned over the loss of entry-level jobs.

> Workers do not experience climate anxiety on one side and economic anxiety on the other. They experience them together, as overlapping and compounding features of a single difficult moment.

Urban/rural divide: Rural workers feel disregarded and disenfranchised, with decisions that profoundly affect their lives being made far away without consultation or consideration. Instead of shipping raw resources out of their community, they want local value-added industries keeping logs and jobs at home.

In the face of these challenges, BCFED's clean industrial strategy offers a way forward.








Renewable energy: about 24,000 construction jobs on average to 2050 to build the electricity system this report proposes, plus roughly 9,800 permanent jobs to operate it.

Critical mineral mining: an average of about 1,400 direct jobs in operations and about 1,460 during development at each of the 20 proposed critical mineral mines.

Energy efficiency and retrofits: about 3,100 jobs from the public retrofit spending the report recommends for homes, public buildings, commercial buildings and industry.

Forestry: nearly 100,000 jobs maintained, including almost 43,000 direct jobs, through the Working Forest and a Forestry Jobs Protection Act. The Mass Timber Action Plan the report supports adds about 4,400 job openings in total by 2035.

Public transit and transportation: an average of 40,500 jobs from the 10-year public transit plan, 16,800 in construction and 23,700 in operations.

Circular economy: roughly 1,300 jobs, direct and indirect, from the three main initiatives: a mill for the province's own scrap, a deconstruction standard and a province-wide organics requirement.

PILLAR I: ENERGY REDISTRIBUTION

Nearly all of BC's electricity (97%) comes from renewable sources. But zoom out, and electricity makes up less than one-fifth of the total energy BC uses; petroleum and natural gas account for two-thirds. To reach net zero, we'll need to shift our energy mix to emission-free electricity — with a big build-out of capacity.

Renewable Energy

Meeting BC's energy needs requires us to double electrical production by 2050. That's an ambitious goal, but we can meet it by building just over 35 GW (gigawatts) of capacity over the next two and a half decades.

That will include:



Wind (12 GW), with construction throughout BC



Solar (9 GW), including installations on roofs, over parking lots and beside buildings



Hydro (5 GW), including new major projects and a host of smaller ones



Marine (1 GW), drawing on tidal and wave energy



Geothermal (0.3 GW), including repurposing old spent gas fields and wells



Storage (8 GW), using batteries and pumped hydro to absorb electricity when wind and sun are plentiful

Generating that electricity is part of the picture, but we also need to get it to where we'll use it. That requires doubling our transmission capacity across BC, along with stronger transmission connections to Alberta and elsewhere, contributing to a resilient East-West national grid.

Our strategy commits BC Hydro to a fully net-zero grid by 2050, letting its remaining gas and biomass contracts expire without renewal.

Job Impact

- 24,000 workers employed every year on average through 2050 for construction; and
- 9,800 permanent operating jobs.

Responsible Critical Mineral Mining

Critical minerals are the building blocks of the clean economy, sometimes dubbed "the new oil." Demand for copper, lithium, cobalt, nickel and more is skyrocketing, and BC has some of the world's most important deposits.

Expanding the mining and refining of those deposits is a key part of our strategy, supplying both our province's needs and the global market. But our vision brings in a much-needed layer of accountability and responsible practice. That includes:

- Improved health and safety, with mining at last brought under the Workers Compensation Act, and employers paying full-time worker-elected safety reps;
- Agreements to ensure mining operations guarantee well-paid jobs, benefit the community and adhere to strict environmental safeguards;
- Mine-to-mill processing and recycling within BC;
- Stronger oversight to ensure companies meet their employment, environmental and community-benefit targets; and
- Union-led skills training in partnership with the United Steelworkers, to ensure we replenish a workforce that in many cases is heading toward retirement.

- A provincial partnership with the BC First Nations Energy and Mining Council to ensure benefits and opportunities are shared, including reforms to the Mineral Tenure Act

Job Impact

- 1,400 direct jobs in operations and 1,460 during development at each of the twenty proposed critical mineral mines.

PUBLIC OWNERSHIP

We're calling for as much of the new energy generation as possible to be publicly owned. That lets us take advantage of the government's lower borrowing costs, as well as ensuring that, once construction is complete, the people of BC have a new, valuable long-term asset. And it keeps those assets in BC hands at a time when energy sovereignty is especially important.

Our strategy replaces BC Hydro's calls for power with *calls for partnership,* with joint public and First Nations ownership. We're also calling for these projects to be delivered under *community benefit agreements or project labour agreements*, to maximize the benefits to local economies, the number of secure, well-paid jobs created and the training opportunities provided, including to groups traditionally under-represented in the trades.



Energy conservation is a central pillar of our plan. An Insulator recognized their fundamental role in this work: "Our job conserves energy. So that'd be good for us."

PILLAR II: ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Generating more electricity is only part of the picture. Using it more efficiently is critical. It's the one measure that cuts emissions without asking anything new of the land.

Retrofits

Retrofitting our buildings and infrastructure to make them more efficient will save a huge amount of electricity—200 petajoules a year (about one-fifth of the energy we use today) by 2050. That's energy we don't have to generate to meet BC's growing demand.

We'll do that with coordinated action on several fronts:

- A new public agency, Efficiency BC (proposed by MoveUP), will run retrofits through union contractors. The target: 65,000 homes a year, more than eight times the pace in 2024/25.
- Retrofitting BC's many public buildings like schools, hospitals and government offices will have a dramatic impact, while saving taxpayers on energy costs.
- Our strategy makes it mandatory to report emissions from commercial buildings, with limits after 2030 along with incentives for retrofitting.
- We'll bring in industry-specific targets for 2050 with five-year milestones, and introduce job retention, union consultation and domestic procurement conditions to the CleanBC Industry Fund.
- Our plan will include thermal networks in provincial energy planning.
- We'll lay crucial foundations for success with stable funding, protection for trades certification, re-regulating heat-pump installation and putting in place local content rules for equipment, stimulating local manufacturing.

Job Impact

- 3,100 jobs (from public spending).



Forestry

The crisis in the forestry sector has hit the workers and communities that rely on it hard. Yet it remains a major job producer for British Columbia. And it can play an important role in decarbonizing BC's emissions and improving energy efficiency — for example, in construction with mass timber.

Our strategy includes:

- A working forest approach, based on the model proposed by the United Steelworkers, that aligns conservation, restoration and reconciliation with jobs and economic security;
- An independent forestry Jobs Protection Commissioner, inspired by the success of a similar role created in 1991, with the power to broker binding job agreements and redirect fibre access to help enforce companies' employment and domestic processing commitments;
- A province-wide plan for fibre supply, including an inventory and wildfire salvage;
- A stronger commitment to mass timber and value-added production, and a firm link between public funding and public benefits — especially employment; and
- A permanent provincial Forestry Sector Council empowered to initiate policy to secure the long-term future of BC forestry.

Job Impact

- Nearly 100,000 jobs maintained, including almost 43,000 direct jobs, and the Mass Timber Action Plan adds about 4,400 job openings in total by 2035.

Public Transit and Transportation

Our *Connecting BC* plan, released in 2024 and updated for this strategy, sets out a vision for a modern province-wide public transit system, getting British Columbians where they need to go affordably and efficiently — and reducing both our carbon emissions and overall energy use. Better public transit was easily the top priority raised in our engagement with workers.

Our plan includes:

- A new province-wide inter-community express bus service;
- Tripling the number of buses in BC Transit local services over the next decade;
- Expanding HandyDART service province-wide with an upgraded electric fleet, and ending privatization;
- New regional rail connections along historic rail corridors in partnership with First Nations communities;
- New passenger ferry options between Vancouver, the Gulf Islands, Sunshine Coast and Vancouver Island;
- Accelerating TransLink's 10-year Access for Everyone plan for Metro Vancouver, to complete it in half that time;
- Expanding free transit to youth aged 13 to 18, to help develop the habit of using transit, and to people on social assistance who are not already included in the BC Bus Pass program; and
- A provincial shipbuilding strategy, including
  - buy-Canadian rules that include building BC Ferries' vessels here in BC;
  - an active government role in bringing shipyards and investors together to expand capacity;
  - a workforce development strategy to expand training and apprenticeships.

Job Impact

- An average of 40,500 jobs from the 10-year public transit plan, 16,800 in construction and 23,700 in operations.

Better public transit was easily the top priority raised in our engagement with workers.

Circular Economy

BC is a national leader when it comes to composting organic waste — everything else, not so much. Waste that ends up in the landfill represents not just the loss of material, but of the energy required to make it.

Our circular economy plan includes measures that will support hundreds of jobs while conserving energy and recovering valuable physical material:

- Battery recycling, with rules that tighten producer responsibility, bring electrical vehicle (EV) batteries under BC recycling rules and ensure safer workplaces, particularly where EV batteries are involved;
- "Urban mining" to divert more valuable materials (for instance, ferrous metals) for reuse;
- Rules on waste reduction and salvage for deconstruction rather than demolition of buildings and other structures;
- A scrap steel mill, creating about 490 direct jobs; and
- Tighter rules to keep organic waste out of landfills, with labour conditions attached to public funding of organics facilities, stronger successorship protection for unions in the sector and tougher health and safety rules and inspection.

Job Impact

- Roughly 1,300 jobs, direct and indirect.

PILLAR III: WEALTH AND POWER REDISTRIBUTION

Workers across BC made it clear to us they want action that responds to their economic uncertainty and climate fears at the same time. They know that they're the first to feel the impacts of both, and want to see bold initiatives that work for them and their communities. Our approach keeps the strategy worker-centered.

Who Pays, and Who Benefits

So often in the past, working people have borne nearly all of the cost of disruption. A key to our approach is making sure the costs and benefits of change are shared fairly as we fund public investments and manage revenues:

- An excess profits tax can help to raise revenues that would otherwise mostly flow out of the country into the coffers of multinational corporations;
- A wealth fund, along the lines of the Columbia Basin Trust or Norway's sovereign wealth fund, can help ensure benefits flow to communities and initiatives where they can do the most good;
- A stronger royalties system will secure BC's fair share of the value of resources being extracted from our province; and
- Tax reforms to shift more of the burden onto corporations and the wealthiest British Columbians, as well as rules to end the misclassification of employees as contractors, will help to close public funding gaps.

> "Environmentalism without class struggle is gardening." Brazilian trade union leader, Chico Mendes

Making Workers and Communities the Foundation

Ensuring economic policy benefits workers and communities first and foremost seems like a natural goal — yet the structure of our economy so often puts them near the end of the line.

Our strategy recognizes that workers are the engine of our economy, and it's only when workers and our communities succeed that our economy succeeds. And it addresses the well-founded skepticism workers feel over slogans like "just transition" with specific, tangible actions like:

- Tying public investments to public benefits, with Community Benefit Agreements and Project Labour Agreements that ensure training, local hiring and recruitment that opens opportunities for careers in the skilled trades to under-represented groups;
- Taking a regional approach that recognizes the distinct character, needs and strengths of BC's regions, and allows local communities to have a stronger voice in shaping their own futures;
- Supporting public ownership and worker-owned co-ops to keep profits and benefits here at home;
- Taking action on the hazards extreme weather poses in the workplace, ensuring workers' compensation policies reflect our changing climate;
- Ensuring workers' voices are part of the decision-making process from the beginning, and using sectoral bargaining to allow workers in small, scattered workplaces — such as solar and wind sites — to organize;
- Investing in the public services working families rely on, including the care economy; and
- Leaning in to value-added processing that diversifies economies in resource-dependent communities.

Training and Education

BC has some of the most skilled, experienced workers in the world. But we're still catching up with the demands of today, let alone the future. It's time for a dedicated clean economy workforce plan, built in partnership with labour.

Our strategy includes:

- A workforce development plan to ensure we can meet the demand for new clean energy jobs by 2050, with particular focus on northern BC and more funding for union training centres and public post-secondary institutions;
- Coordinated project planning to ensure continuous work for apprentices and a supply of skilled workers;
- Expanded skilled trades certification, with more enforcement and an approach to microcredentials that strengthens Red Seal certification instead of undermining it;
- Supporting occupational training for non-trades industrial work, such as in the mining sector;
- Greater value and respect for the skilled trades and industrial work, including earlier introduction into these areas as career options and treating Red Seal certification on par with a four-year degree;
- More work to remove barriers to careers in the skilled trades and industrial work for traditionally under-represented groups, drawing on the success of union strategies, CBAs and PLAs, and the BC Centre for Women in the Trades (which should receive stable, long-term funding);
- More pathways for young workers into the skilled trades and industrial work, including steps to address the shortage of tech-ed high school teachers and an expanded Youth Climate Corps with sustained federal and provincial funding; and
- Public education on the benefits of the clean economy and the consequences of inaction.

Climate Justice

For many years, BC's economy has excluded and marginalized large groups of the people and communities that call this place home. Our strategy changes that fundamentally, grounded in principles of Reconciliation, inclusion and equity, including:

- Recognizing how Indigenous and racialized communities have borne far more of the environmental consequences of industry in BC;
- An independent provincial environmental justice advisory body, along with tracking and reporting on race and environmental disparities;
- Measures to address ongoing injustices and disparities including culturally informed emergency response; protection from violence, particularly for Indigenous women and girls; an end to the three-month delay for MSP and more;
- Recognition of First Nations Title, Rights and Treaty Rights, upholding the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action; and
- Integrating disability perspectives into BC's economic and climate planning.

Workers are ready for bold leadership

The strategy we set out in Union Power will deliver almost 80,000 jobs. It addresses not only BC's economic and climate agenda, but urgent issues around affordability, health care and community safety. And it puts BC on the road to greater self-sufficiency and energy security.

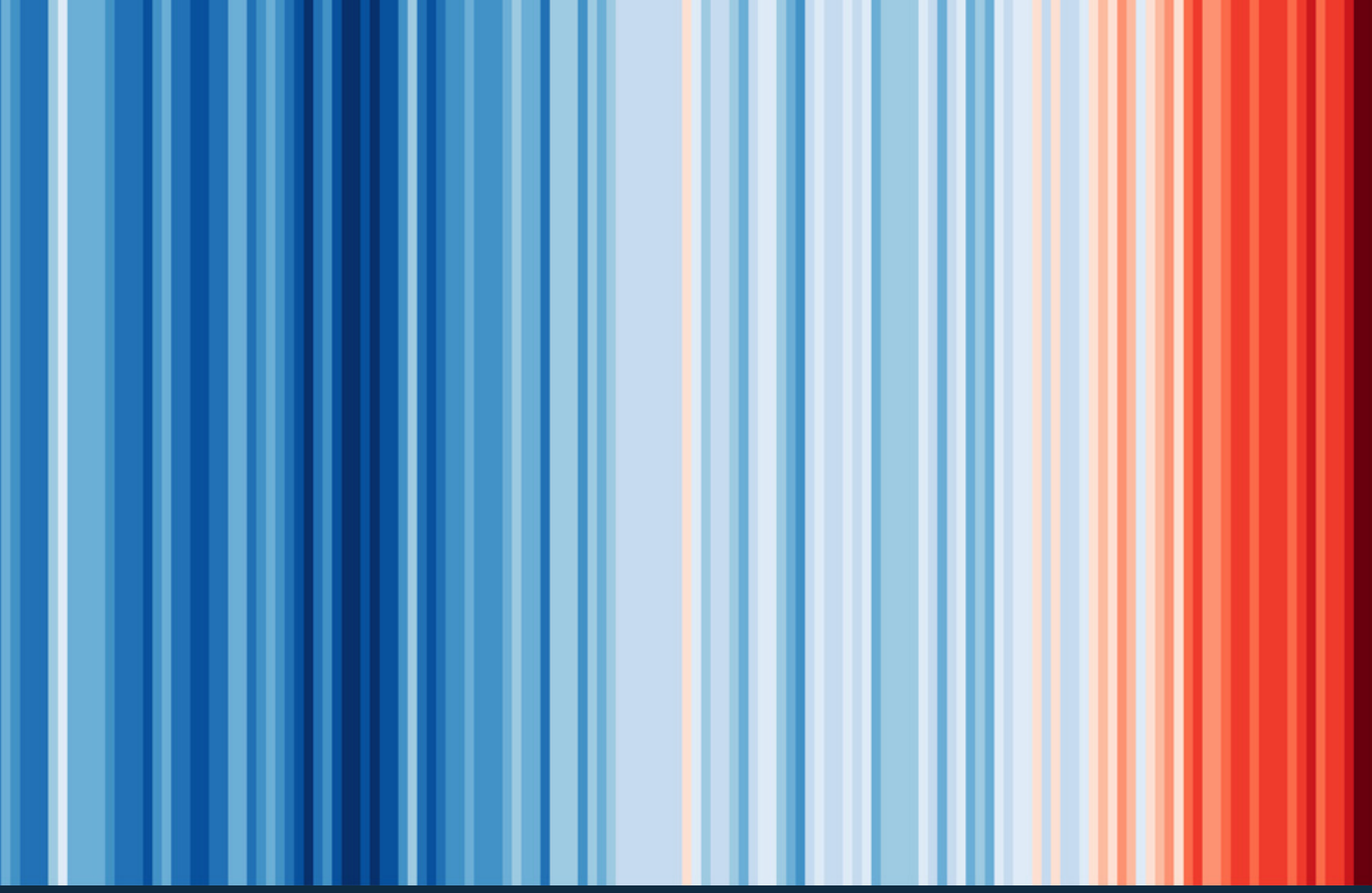
The targets and recommendations in this strategy may seem ambitious, but they're grounded in practical, real-world successes. And that very boldness is exactly what workers are seeking from their leaders.

We know change has to come. What workers demand of leaders at every level, and in every part of BC society, is that workers and our communities play their rightful role in shaping that change — and that their well-being, now and into the future, be the measure of its success.



“There are no jobs on a dead planet.”

— Sharan Burrow, General Secretary of the International Trade Union Confederation from 2010 to 2022 and President of the Australian Council of Trade Unions from 2000 to 2010



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