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Leap Manifesto unites broad forces, builds climate justice campaigns

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“The Truth and Reconciliation Commission has acknowledged shocking details about the violence of Canada’s near past. Deepening poverty and inequality are a scar on the country’s present. And Canada’s record on climate change is a crime against humanity’s future.”
â€”The Leap Manifesto

Five hundred Toronto-area supporters crowded into a west-end school auditorium March 29 to support the Leap Manifesto [1], launched early this year in support of a rapid, “justice-based” energy transition to a renewable economy.

The movement was launched in January 2016 to popularize the ideas of Naomi Klein’s influential book on climate change, *This Changes Everything*. Klein pointed to the need for a mass social movement addressing both the urgent need for climate action and an agenda for social justice.

Participants at the rally represented a wide range of social movements, particularly in the city’s West End. Featured speakers included three members of parliament (two New Democratic Party, one Liberal), union leaders (postal and public sector workers), environmental groups (Greenpeace and 350.org), and Indigenous groups (Idle No More).

The Leap Manifesto, with more than 34,000 signatories, calls for varied measures toward the goal of a society “caring for one another and caring for the planet.” The list is headed by respect for Indigenous people’s “inherent rights and title” to the land; immediate action for a 100% clean economy by 2050; and a halt to “infrastructure projects that lock us into increased extraction decades into the future.”

Other points highlight longstanding goals of the workers’ movement, such as investment in public infrastructure, “an end to all trade deals that interfere with our attempts to rebuild local economies,” a national childcare program, and expanded and affordable public transit.

The Manifesto’s diverse goals are interlocking and mutually supportive, its supporters explain. Thus at the March 27 meeting, lead-off speaker Bianca Mugenyi described achieving the target of 100% renewable electricity generation in 20 years as “a healing process from colonization.”

Our calendar’s leap year itself is “a recognition that it’s easier to change our human systems than to alter the cycles of nature,” Mugenyi said. Shifting her metaphor, she pointed out that bringing climate change under control requires “thinking big”: “Small steps are no longer enough. 2016 is our year to leap.”

Mugenyi stressed the need to hold Canada’s Liberal government, headed by Justin Trudeau, to the sweeping promises made when it was elected to act on climate change. “They are not connecting with our sense of the urgency of the moment,” she said. For example, the Liberals have promised \$3.4 billion over three years for mass public transit, “which won’t even meet the outstanding transit repair budget in Toronto alone.”

Mugenyi noted that the Leap Manifesto has sparked interest in the social-democratic New Democratic Party. More than 20 NDP local constituency groups have called on the party to adopt the Manifesto.

Megan Whitfield, president of Toronto’s postal workers, presented a program worked out together by her national

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union and Leap to convert the threatened Canadian postal service's unequalled network of 6,800 retail outlets into centres of community service and community action on climate issues, as for example through the introduction of postal banking. When the government acts on its decision to cease sending cheques through the mail, she said, "this will provide a way to receive pension payments for all those who can't get an account in a conventional bank."

Leap's March 29 meeting in Toronto – the most effective held here on climate justice issues in several years – embraced an impressive range of activist forces that could lend support to the Leap/postal worker program and similar projects. Inevitably, a text aimed at encompassing such diverse viewpoints must be more limited in scope than the bold measures presented in Naomi Klein's *This Changes Everything*. But to focus on the manifesto's omissions would miss the point.

The manifesto has proved its capacity to unite a broad range of social forces and to pose the challenge of climate justice within the mainstream organizations of Canadian working people. It is an eloquent contribution to the debate the Trudeau government is initiating on a national climate action plan.

Moreover, public attitudes in Canada to climate-related issues are radicalizing, encouraging us to elaborate key issues that the Leap Manifesto touches on only briefly. For example, the Manifesto's third point states, "There is no longer an excuse for building new infrastructure projects that lock us into increased extraction decades into the future...." Prime examples of such projects are the oil industry's unpopular projects to build pipelines across the country.

Pipeline opponents include the Chippewas of the Thames First Nation. They are taking their legal suit against Line 9, which runs from Sarnia to Montreal, to the Supreme Court. At the Toronto rally, climate activist Jesse McClaren appealed for donations to meet their legal costs.

In response, Avi Lewis, a co-founder of the Leap effort and facilitator of the Toronto meeting, saluted the positive work of coalitions against pipelines and the importance of the Chippewa case. Referring to Naomi Klein's chapter on pipeline activism, entitled "Blockadia," Lewis continued, "It is super clear that we have to stop the veins and arteries of the fossil-fuel economy."

Lewis called for an end to subsidies for the fossil fuels industry and highlighted a new Alberta-based website, "Iron and Earth," established by tar sands workers committed "to incorporating more renewable energy projects into our work scope." "The workers should be supported, not the corporations," Lewis said.

The March 27 Toronto rally shows that the Leap Manifesto has become an effective organizing tool that deserves support from all sectors of Canada's climate justice movement. The pending debate on national climate policy should enable us to greatly expand support for the Manifesto and its goals.

[1] <https://leapmanifesto.org/en/the-le...>