
Speech by TUC General Secretary
Brendan Barber
ILO, Geneva, 15 June 2009

Building a green economy on the rubble of the greed economy

[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Thank you chair.

And on behalf of the British trade union movement, thank you for inviting me to speak.

I address you in the midst of an economic and environmental crisis that has profound implications for working people everywhere.

With countless millions of jobs at risk, with so many people trapped in poverty, and with our planet overheating at a catastrophic rate, we desperately need to create a very different global economy.

Where success is measured not by how much wealth is created, but by how widely it is dispersed.

Where decent work and public services are seen not as a hindrance to growth, but as a pre-condition for it.

And where the climate challenge is not detached from the task of economic renewal, but instead is the driver of it.

These are the noble causes that together we must advance.

And we have a unique opportunity to do just that.

The trade union movement welcomes the trust the G20 placed in the ILO to take forward the idea of a Global Jobs Pact.

Our focus must be on the employment emergency.

Creating decent jobs that pay well, including new minimum wages where none exist; that provide a stimulus to domestic demand and prevent deflation; that build the green skills a sustainable recovery needs.

But none of this will happen by accident.

Only if governments and international institutions have the courage to ditch the stifling neoliberal consensus of the past 30 years will this vision become a reality.

And surely the most pressing task we face is to rebalance the global economy.

Rethinking the relationship between state and market; labour and capital; and debtor and creditor nations.

Addressing profound inequalities between and within countries.

And moving to an altogether more stable model of globalisation.

Where growth is driven not by mountainous debt and financial speculation - but by the spending power of ordinary workers.

Conference, never has the ILO's famous dictum that poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere been more resonant than now.

That's why the Jobs Pact needs to be backed by resources; why developing countries need policy space; and why there can be no retreat from collective bargaining or ILO standards, nor from the social protections that must accompany them.

And we have reached a critical moment.

Some commentators believe the recession is over.

It is certainly true that aggressive policies to head off the collapse of the financial system did their job.

But while the world economy is not in freefall - at least for now - that is not the same as recovery.

Inevitably manufacturers who have run down their inventory now need to restock, but where are the export markets?

Too many banks, businesses and consumers are still riddled with debt.

The price of oil has shot up, ready to choke off growth.

Of course we should welcome any green shoots, but a few statistics that may or may not turn out to be blips do not make for a recovery.

Nor will a technical end to recession mean much, if we just bump along the bottom without creating jobs.

With global unemployment set to grow for months to come, it does not look like much of a recovery to the millions who fear for their jobs.

I see a hidden agenda at work here.

If the economy is on the mend, the neoliberals say, then we can go back to how it was before - with no need for action on jobs, regulation, or tax havens.

But this argument is fatally flawed.

Because it's only when people are back in work - in good jobs that pay decent wages and support demand - that this crisis will finally be over.

And unless we build a green economy out of the rubble of the greed economy, the next global crisis will surely be even worse.

So the choice we face is clear.

To retreat into the global comfort zone of business as usual.

Or to give globalisation a human face, and our planet a fighting chance of survival.

Let's make sure we do the right thing.

Thanks for listening.