



Securing jobs and livelihoods under stringent climate mitigation transcript

Dr JEFIM VOGEL: Climate researcher and ecological economist, University of Leeds and University of Barcelona: Hello and welcome to this interview on how jobs or livelihoods can be protected and the transition to a zero-emissions society. My name is Jefim Vogel and I am the author of this course, and a climate research and ecological economist at the University of Barcelona. And I'm here today with Dr Halliki Kreinin, who's an expert in sustainable work and senior research associate at the Research Institute for Sustainability, Helmholtz Center Potsdam in Germany. Welcome to Halliki.

Dr HALLIKI KREININ: Senior Research Associate, Research Institute for Sustainability, Helmholtz Center, Germany: Thanks so much, Jefim. Great to be here with you.

JEFIM: So, Halliki, we know that tackling the climate crisis requires big changes in society – phasing out certain industries like the fossil fuel industry and expanding other industries like renewable energy or public transport. What does all of this mean for jobs and livelihoods?

HALLIKI: So, there are lots of things we will need more of in the future, like renewable energy, or more care workers, public transport, retrofitting, permaculture and so on. So, these activities could provide us new jobs. At the same time, of course, there are many sectors that will need to decrease or be phased out completely like the fossil fuel industry, car manufacturing, flights, cruises, meat, dairy products and so on. So, there will likely be less work in

those sectors. So, we will to some extent, probably see shifts from some sectors to other sectors.

JEFIM: Right, okay. Sometimes strikes me as ironic perhaps in this context is that we're, kind of, faced with these industries, some of which, quite literally, destroy the basis for human civilisation. And yet some people claim society can't phase out these industries because those people employed in those industries would then lose their jobs. So, clearly, I don't know – something's wrong there, if we're dependent on something that destroys us, I would think, what's the problem there?

HALLIKI: Yeah. When we talk about these jobs in the fossil sector, car industry or so on, people really try to ask how can we protect these jobs against whatever the climate crisis. But really, that's the much better question is, exactly, how can we make sure that everyone can have a good life, independent, also wage labour, but at the same time, in our current economic system, of course, people are dependent on jobs for their livelihood. So, whether you can even afford basic necessities such as food, housing, education and so on. So, within this system, it kind of makes sense that you're obsessed with jobs. We do know that most workers in the North Shore oil industry in Scotland actually, would like to transfer out of the sector because they are aware of workers as human beings, right – they're citizens, their fathers, their grandfathers, brothers and so on. They are aware of the environmental crisis and people don't want to cause harm.

And again, while you're in this wage labour system, you have to provide for your family, maybe put bread on the table. So, people are forced into these jobs as well, but we know that there is a will to change jobs and so on; it's just that there's not enough jobs perhaps available. I think what makes this transformation difficult is also that we live in a work society and work ideology

where work is thought of as a moral good in itself. I think, due to this ideology of work and morality of work, we currently also use jobs as a way to justify environmental degradation. So, we really need to move away from this type of thinking towards considering work as something that can be useful, but also something that can't be harmful to the environment, right. So, we have to really reconsider what types of work and tasks are needed, and what types of tasks and work can we not afford any more in a climate crisis.

Currently, most work is performed for profit, for companies that don't necessarily produce goods or services that are needed for society or environmentally useful, but about to run to maximise profits. And, of course, as part of this, there is also pressure to always have productivity growth which means replacing jobs with typically energy materials – intensive new technologies. Of course, we also see the impacts of digitalisation and AI and so on. So, even in the current system jobs are disappearing and jobs are changing.

So, it's not just environmental crisis that should make us rethink how we organise work to make sure that we provide members of society with what they need for a good life. It's very important that we implement policies that secure the livelihoods both of those currently working in industries that need to be phased out, and in general, secure society against job losses. Moving beyond welfare based on wage labour.

JEFIM: Right. So, what could that look like?

HALLIKI: We do have many policies that can do that. So, for example, within the wage labour system itself, we could have retraining programs in Estonia, for example, oil shale workers are automatically entitled for early retirement and paid, sort of, retraining programs where they can be trained to work in the forestry and the care sector, in many other industries, renewables and so on.

Another policy would be an eco-social or a green job guarantee. So, this would mean that the state would act as the employer of last resort employing people to do tasks that are socially or environmentally necessary. Jobs guarantee is really important in the current society, in the current systems that we live in, which are based on welfare, is based on which labour, a policy that would take us away from the current work society and work ideology would be working time reduction.

So, again, if there is less work needed overall and less production, if we share the work that is needed between everyone; this would mean that there would be fewer inequalities and perhaps even a rise in the quality of life for everyone because working less does have health benefits and so on – the mental health benefits, for example, if we work less we have more time for friends, family and living our lives. Another policy proposal that perhaps the most important policy proposal is strengthening the welfare state or universal basic services. So, this would mean cheap or free available services in housing, in mobility, in education and health care, and perhaps even price controls for essentials such as food and energy.

So, a minimum amount of energy would be provided for everyone – very cheap enough. And then, of course, you would have higher prices for more energy use and so on. The more basic services you can provide for people, the less pressure people have to stay in different jobs. Minimum income guarantees or basic incomes, I would say, could be on top of this universal basic services or strengthening of the welfare state but shouldn't replace it. But basic income policy that give everyone in society a lump sum money or for example, care incomes that give carers a lump sum can be also very useful giving workers agency and security in the face of transition.

So, it's interesting that actually universal basic income, universal basic services, jobs guarantees – all these policies are very popular; there's a lot of public support available for them. And of course, all of the policies that we mentioned, we need democratic movements to be able to implement these actually in government. So again, I think the key question is how can we really activate people also as citizens and not just as workers but also as citizens to fight for change?

JEFIM: Great. That sounds like a great note to end on – I like it. Thank you so much for joining us for this interview; it's been really great to chat to you.

HALLIKI: Thanks so much for having me. Just remember to challenge the morality of work.

Thanks Jefim.

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