

DÁIL ÉIREANN

AN COMHCHOISTE UM GHNÍOMHÚ AR SON NA HAERÁIDE

JOINT COMMITTEE ON CLIMATE ACTION

Dé Máirt, 4 Nollaig 2018

Tuesday, 4 December 2018

The Joint Committee met at 6.30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy,	Senator Máire Devine,
Deputy John Lahart,	Senator Michelle Mulherin,
Deputy Tom Neville,	Senator Grace O'Sullivan.
Deputy Thomas Pringle,	
Deputy Eamon Ryan,	
Deputy Sean Sherlock,	
Deputy Bríd Smith,	
Deputy Brian Stanley,	

In attendance: Deputy Aengus Ó Snodaigh.

DEPUTY HILDEGARDE NAUGHTON IN THE CHAIR.

The joint committee met in private session until 6.40 p.m.

Third Report of the Citizens' Assembly: Discussion (Resumed)

Chairman: I welcome members and viewers who may be watching proceedings on Oireachtas TV to the 14th public session of the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Climate Action. Before I introduce our witnesses, I ask members and witnesses, on the request of the broadcasting services unit, to put their phones on to flight mode or switch them off as they interfere with the broadcasting system.

I extend on behalf of the committee a very warm welcome to Mr. David Joyce, international development officer for the Irish Congress of Trade Unions; Mr. Macdara Doyle of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions; Dr. Tom Healy, director of the Nevin Economic Research Institute; Mr. Willie Noone of SIPTU who is also a member of ICTU's energy and natural resources committee; Ms Yvonne O'Callaghan of SIPTU; and Mr. Jim Dullaghan of Unite who is also chair of congress's energy and natural resources committee.

Before we commence proceedings proper, I will begin with some formalities and advise our witnesses on the matter of privilege. They are advised that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, they are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. If they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Members are reminded of the long-standing ruling of the Chair to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

I now call on Mr. Joyce to make his opening statement.

Mr. David Joyce: On behalf of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and our energy and natural resources sector group, I thank the committee for the opportunity to appear before it. The unions that comprise our energy and natural resources sector group represent tens of thousands of workers in the energy production and distribution sector, all of whom are directly affected by climate change. I understand the committee has been tasked with considering the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly on this issue and how we can make Ireland a leader in climate action. The committee's deliberations also take place in the context of the development of the integrated energy and climate action plan for consideration by the European Commission, a process into which the committee's final report will feed.

Our delegation wishes to focus in particular on recommendation 7 of the Citizens' Assembly report, namely, that "the State should end all subsidies for peat extraction and instead spend that money on peat bog restoration and making proper provision for the protection of the rights of

the workers impacted”, with the majority of the members of the assembly, 61%, recommending that the State should end all subsidies on a phased basis over five years. Clearly, workers in this sector and in other carbon heavy sectors will face significant challenges in the coming years. Congress made a submission to the Citizens’ Assembly which acknowledged this fact and also made the case for a just transition to a low-carbon economy. Unions have been campaigning in this area for a number of years now under the campaign slogan of “There are no jobs on a dead planet”.

The concept of a just transition originates in the international labour movement and, over time, has become the benchmark in terms of how we should respond globally and nationally to this challenge. In essence, it means that workers and their communities must not shoulder the burden. The International Labour Organization recommends that transition policies must therefore “pay special attention to the industries, regions, communities and workers whose livelihoods might experience the hardest impacts of the transition”. In practical terms, this requires governments to “formulate accompanying policies through social protection, including unemployment insurance and benefits, skills training and upgrading, workforce redeployment and other appropriate measures”. Critically, repeated studies of this process and examples of best practice from Spain, Germany and Australia demonstrate the necessity to ensure the process is based on social dialogue, with close co-ordination between the government, state agencies, employers and trade unions. For example, Spanish unions only last month agreed an historic just transition deal with Government and employers in respect of the country’s coal mining industry. The deal will see €250 million invested in the mining communities and supports for the affected workers. It has been hailed by the European Trade Union Confederation as a model of just transition. The ETUC noted: “We don’t need to choose between a job and protecting the environment. It is possible to have both.”

In the Australian town of Port Augusta, unions worked with local businesses and citizens to develop their own just transition plan in advance of the 2016 closure of the town’s coal-fired power station. Their research found that a solar thermal plant was the best option to enable a smooth skills transfer and ensure a long-term clean energy solution. The new solar plant will create 1,800 jobs and save 5 million tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions. It will also help the wider community reap the benefits of a zero-carbon future. In addition, Australian unions, facing the closure of all coal-fired power stations in the near future, recently published a study that highlighted the example of the Ruhr in Germany, a region long synonymous with fossil-based enterprises and now home to new green industry. The secret was planning, social dialogue and co-ordination with all those affected. The study contrasted the success of the Ruhr with the disaster that has befallen the people and communities of Appalachia, where no just transition measures were put in place to deal with the closure of mines in the region.

The issue has been brought to the fore here with the recent announcement by Bord na Móna of a plan that will see the loss of 150 jobs before Easter 2019 and up to 850 redundancies in the peat harvesting business by 2025. It is a devastating blow for the midlands and illustrates the immediacy of the challenges posed by climate change to the workers, their families and the wider communities. Congress responded by calling for the establishment of a just transition forum and we have also initiated work with the Nevin Economic Research Institute and unions in the energy and natural resources sector to develop concrete propositions on how we might achieve a just transition for the region and to identify the supports that will be required to do so, along with the many opportunities that this will present.

As the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC, notes: “Tran-

sitions to low-carbon, environmentally and socially sustainable economies can become a strong driver of job creation, job upgrading, social justice and poverty eradication.” This call was echoed by the former President, Mary Robinson, in a recent keynote address to a climate action conference here in Dublin where she stressed the importance of just transition and the need to ensure that the rights of communities in the midlands are protected in this process. This is why congress has also recently written to the Minister for Communications, Climate Action and Environment, Deputy Bruton, seeking his support for the Silesia just transition declaration at the COP24 meeting in Poland this week and to return with a commitment to develop and implement such a transition here at home. It is our hope that the integrated energy and climate action plan will include concrete proposals on establishing a just transition forum for the midlands and the wider economy. There is no shortage of guidelines and examples of best practice in this area, including those cited here and those agreed by the world’s governments, employers and unions at the ILO. A just transition represents our best chance of tackling climate change in a manner that ensures nobody, including workers and communities in the midlands, is left behind.

Chairman: Before I turn to the members, I have one question about ICTU. Has it carried out a review of the skills base of the current workforce? If so, has it looked at how many skilled workers have extensive knowledge of peatlands, for example, through rewetting bogs and maintaining wetlands or in tree planting or afforestation? Looking to 2030, Accenture states that 85% of the types of jobs available in 2030 have not yet been invented or created. What has ICTU been doing about the reviews and moving towards that transition to a low-carbon economy through the skill set of the existing workforce?

Mr. David Joyce: We are looking into the make-up of the current workforce. I do not have a hard set of figures to give the Chairman. However, Mr. Dullaghan, who is very familiar with the position in the ESB, and Mr. Noone, who is familiar with what is happening in Bord na Móna, may wish to comment.

Chairman: Would Mr. Dullaghan or Mr. Noone like to respond on that?

Mr. Jim Dullaghan: I do not think-----

Mr. Willie Noone: All I can say at this stage is that in the initial engagement with Bord na Móna, we clearly laid out the necessity for a skills audit within the workforce to try to match the current skill set with the skill set that would be required five to six years from now or over the next decade. We are trying to source resources for the training. We hope to get that from the globalisation fund. Also, we want Bord na Móna to get the stakeholder to ensure the resources are put in for the retraining commitment. However, the current skill set for the people on the bogs will not be required into the future. It is as simple as that. Some portions of it may be required but the majority of the skill set will not be required into the future if they are not cutting peat.

Chairman: Knowing that that was coming down the tracks, why was a review of the current workforce not done?

Mr. Willie Noone: That question should not be aimed at us. It should be aimed at the stakeholder and the employer. Our understanding was that Bord na Móna would stay in peak production until 2030 but the policy of the Government has brought that forward.

Chairman: To 2028.

Mr. Willie Noone: Even sooner in many cases.

Chairman: Does anyone else want to respond on that?

Mr. Jim Dullaghan: In regard to ESB, we are talking about the peat generation plants. The proposal in that regard is about moving to biomass, for which a similar skill set is required, but the question is whether it will be biomass.

Chairman: I call the first questioner, Senator Devine.

Senator Máire Devine: I thank the witnesses for their presentations. It is welcome to see the trade unions involved because it is the workers we have to convince to make the change. How difficult was it in the case of Bord na Móna, which has been an iconic part of our history for so long, to engage workers in terms of telling them that changes have to be made to make progress? The witnesses might give a brief background on that and how they engaged workers to get to the table and make an agreement on shutting down the first of the plants. What negotiations are ongoing in terms of retraining or whatever?

We talk about rust belts. This is about the midlands and not bringing about desolation in towns and communities or for the families who live in them. It is about not depleting them of that population when such a significant industry is on its way out and the idea of getting public support for what will take place instead of what is currently in place.

This sector is one of the sectors the witnesses represent. How many men and women are in the sector? I imagine there are more men working in it and therefore the package offered will be weighted towards the men in the company. I refer to the socioeconomic effects of that, as well as the psychological effect, on the smaller communities around them.

In terms of an alternative use for the peatlands that will become free and reclaiming the wet agriculture for forestry, Russia has reclaimed extensive areas of peatland. I accept it may not be a country to compare and contrast with Ireland but it has done that successfully. I refer to common reed for construction material, paper, solid fuel, fish farming and water buffalo for cheese. I cannot think we will have that here but Russia came up with imaginative uses for the reclaimed peatland and reinvestment in terms of some of the workers. On the workers in Bord na Móna, what is the age profile of those who will be directly affected by this development?

In Russia, there have been health benefits from reclaiming the land in that the peat smog has disappeared. Russia is a very large country but the 20 million people who live in proximity to those lands are no longer exposed to that smog and there has been a decrease in respiratory diseases such as asthma and so. There has been an increase in respiratory diseases from air pollution exposure. According to the World Health Organization, 7 million people die from respiratory disease per year as a result of air pollution exposure. The reclaiming of the land has resulted in a significant health benefit for that area in Russia. It impacts on cardiovascular problems also.

As for the reconfiguration, this is the first time Bord na Móna has afforded this country an opportunity to implement the just transition framework. That could be the template for the thousands of workers who work in a carbon-heavy industry. We need to get this as right as possible to bring in public opinion and support for a move to a more sustainable environment.

This affects everything else, and transport is a major aspect. The number of people using transport to get to work has greatly increased and it is having a major impact. We talk about electric cars but people still will be reliant on using their own transport to get to work. Is there a way within the just transition framework to protect the environment and villages, small towns

and even villages within cities, whereby we could have local hubs to which people can go to work? More people will be working from home, which will decrease the level of carbon emissions. Is that being taken into consideration or will all of us have to travel miles to get to work in the future?

What are the other carbon-heavy sectors that the witnesses believe will be impacted upon next? The Bord na Móna workers will be affected in this case but what is the next industry that will be impacted? The witnesses might outline, in chronological order, their size and impact in terms of emissions. I would be grateful if the witnesses could answer those questions.

Chairman: The witnesses can take the questions in any order.

Mr. David Joyce: Some of the questions are for Bord na Móna. Mr. Healy might respond as well.

Mr. Willie Noone: I will answer the ones that are specific to Bord na Móna. On the workforce and how its members have taken to what is occurring, the reaction has been fairly pragmatic. The people in Bord na Móna knew this was coming. They knew there was a plan to get out of peat production in the next decade and they had resigned themselves to that fact. The problem is that has now been fast-tracked. People thought they would have another decade in peat production but it has been fast-tracked and that has put people under a great deal of pressure.

Regarding the age profile, the median age of the people on the bogs is 56, which is fairly high. However, many jobs have been earmarked to be got rid of, for want of a better term, in Newbridge, and the majority of those are not bog-related. Many women work in office jobs. It has been lost on the public that many of the jobs due to end are not just those on the bogs.

On reclaiming the sites and using them for forestry, the problem is that trees do not grow on bogs. Some trees do but the majority of those of any value do not. That is a red herring.

With regard to the way the people in Bord na Móna have been treated, they have been treated abysmally, and people should know that. Some politicians have come out in the media and announced they were doing a great service to the members in Bord na Móna by getting the stakeholder to provide a voluntary severance package. What they did not say was that the voluntary severance package does not give many of these people one cent more than they would get if they were working in non-unionised employment. People over 62 are only getting statutory redundancy. There are people in Bord na Móna who, under this new voluntary severance package, will be told they are in a location with no job. The package only offers such people half of what they would otherwise earn and there is no job for them. They are not getting one extra red cent from this new redundancy package. In fact they are worse off but the politicians who raced to the media did not tell them that. This package denies these people their pension entitlements. Their current pension states, quite clearly, that if they retire before 60 years of age, they can draw their pension if they go voluntarily but there will be an actuarial reduction. That has been taken away. I got confirmation from the company no more than an hour ago, before I came in here, that it will be worse than ever before. That is scandalous. It is scandalous of people from the Government parties to say they are doing a great service to these Bord na Móna people. Deputies from the midlands have said this in their own constituency. They have not said these employees are going to be worse off, however. It is abysmal.

That said, jobs in the midlands will be very hard to get. Bord na Móna has a landbank of big

acreage but it will be confined in what it can do on that. Trees do not grow on bogs. There is a lot of opposition to wind farms and people have objected. There is a lot of not in my backyard, NIMBYism, going on. The company has come forward with some good ideas on alternative employment but many of those projects will take time to get up and running because they are startup businesses. The age profile of current staff members at Bord na Móna means the vast majority of them will not be able to redeploy to new jobs.

We are anxious that whatever would come up for new employment ideas would specifically target the midlands. It is the people in the towns and villages of the midlands who are going to suffer. I am from the midlands myself so I know all about it. They are really going to suffer because of this process.

The next industry to be affected is the ESB in respect of the coal being burned in ESB stations. I am concerned about it because Mr. Jim Dullaghan and I both have members in the sector. ESB is possibly next in line to be caught in this decarbonisation process.

Mr. Tom Healy: The pain involved in the just transition is clearly manifest in communities in the midlands that are affected by these job losses and it is a daunting prospect for people to face Christmas knowing there will be no job there towards the latter end of next year. There are many thousands of jobs beyond that at risk, not just in the sectors we are specifically talking about this evening but also in other areas such as, for example, those connected to the agrifood sector which, as we know, is making a significant contribution to emissions.

There are two points here. One is to deal with the crisis, and it is a jobs crisis and has an effect on the communities involved. There must be a plan to deal with that crisis at a local level with innovative and imaginative alternatives in investment and employment and I can develop some of those points later if the committee wishes. There is a long-term issue where we need to look at the bigger picture. As a country, we have a very high rate of greenhouse gas emissions. That is related to a number of things, one of which is the agriculture sector. It is not just agriculture, *per se*, but the way we do agriculture.

The second important element to bear in mind is spatial planning and the way in which we do construction and planning in the cities, towns and countryside. There is limited value in increasing the cost of diesel or home heating if, at the same time, we do not invest heavily in both retrofitting and an efficient public transport system. It is not just about getting people in and out of Dublin from the midlands or elsewhere. It is about connecting places like Mullingar, Athlone, Tullamore and Newbridge in order that people do not necessarily have to use cars to get to work or to get from one place to another. That is a very important point on transport. The national development plan is heavily reliant on motorway construction. The underlying assumption is that private car ownership will continue to expand, albeit with a transition to electric vehicles. That is not sustainable. We need to think much more in terms of an efficient and green public transport system fit for the 21st century.

This is the bigger picture. It is a difficult and painful transition. When we use the term just transition, we also mean painful transition and it has distributional and regional implications where some regions are disproportionately affected in the short term. This calls for very difficult decisions and choices and people need to be faced with the evidence and difficulties which will inevitably arise as we need to change our consumption behaviour and patterns of production. Ireland will not solve the global climate crisis but it does need to show moral leadership. What we are discussing here this evening is an example that we are going to see repeated again and again when jobs are lost and communities are impacted.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: I thank the witnesses for coming in to help the committee in its deliberations.

I ask Mr. Joyce when was the energy and national resources sector group established. Does the Irish Congress of Trade Unions see its role as an influencer, given that it represents up to 800,000 workers? Does it see itself as an influencer in getting the message of climate action out, as well as dealing with the more practical aspects of the transition in terms of job losses and job creation and all of that? The nub of it is whether ICTU has accepted that the climate is changing. Has it accepted the findings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, IPCC, report?

I am from the midlands and I reject Senator Devine dubbing the area as a rust belt. It is disgraceful and inappropriate to use that kind of language. The entrepreneurs and the hard-working people who live in the midlands deserve better than that kind of language.

The midlands action plan for jobs had a target of 14,000 to be created up until the end of this year and more than 15,500 have been created thus far. I do not think we need be concerned about it. There are, in fact, jobs being created. The key, of course, is to make sure that people are upskilled. While I appreciate there are people who are in their 50s who may have spent a lifetime doing a particular job, they still are well capable of being upskilled and they deserve that opportunity. What do the witnesses see as being a role for the just transition forum? It seems they are saying that it is just on a regional basis. Have the witnesses examined whether that is sufficient, considering we are a small island? I noticed that, in Australia, the example was of a town that put this plan in place in advance of the closure of the power station there. As it is a continent, one would accept they would be obliged to have regional fora there. As we are a small country, should we have a national transition forum? Have the witnesses examined whether the national dialogue on climate action would fulfil that role or whether the regional action plan for jobs implementation committees would fulfil that role? Is there a role for them?

Who would lead the proposed just transition forum? Would it be the unions? I know in other countries, the unions take the lead. There is a great opportunity for new work with the retrofitting that we know is required, particularly on public buildings, local authority houses and so on. There are skills shortages in that field - the Construction Federation of Ireland says it is bringing in workers from abroad - but surely there are highly-skilled people who could be further upskilled who could be part of that and it might be a great opportunity for them.

Have the unions had any further thoughts on the brown to green policy to replace peat with biomass energy? Are there other opportunities for workers in this regard?

Did the unions engage in the public consultation on the national mitigation plan produced last year? It will clearly have a great impact on people across other sectors as well as energy generation and production, with the decarbonisation of everything in addition to electricity, such as the built environment and so on. The unions represent a large number of workers and are a key influencer on this area.

Mr. David Joyce: I will take a couple of questions and then hand over to my colleagues. I might take the easier ones first. On whether we have accepted the science, we did not put the science in our opening statement because we are gone beyond a discussion on whether or not this is happening, so I will not spend any more time on that.

On the matter of what kind of structure would be used, we have used the word “forum”, but

I have seen transition commission and other descriptions. The Deputy is correct. The light is currently shining in the midlands but it is clearly a national question. We have no objection to a national just transition commission. It would not be led by us but we would participate in it. A key point in our opening statement is that this is about involving the relevant stakeholders in a commission which, frankly, should be led by Government which is responsible.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: I asked specifically whether the unions saw the national climate dialogue as the forum or would it be the other ones.

Mr. David Joyce: No, the national dialogue on climate action is an outreach to communities to discuss issues of climate change, such as what they are doing or can do, sharing information and so on. It is not a forum for negotiating a way forward. While it has its merits and we have no difficulty with it, it is not the type of social dialogue that we are discussing in this particular instance.

Mr. Macdara Doyle: On the role of the sectoral group, it was established some years ago but recently reactivated. We have two specific projects at the moment, one a shorter interim report relating to the situation in Bord na Móna and how we might achieve a just transition there, and what measures are required. We expect to publish that soon. There is also a longer term project that looks at the just transition on a national basis, which we hope to complete in the new year. It involves learning from the example of Australia and, more recently Spain, where they achieved a just transition after four or five years of disputes, arguments and rows. The deal on its coal mining sector was only announced in October. The examples are there and there is plenty to learn from, so we do not have to reinvent the wheel.

Ms Yvonne O'Callaghan: The Deputy asked had we engaged in the mitigation plan. Both ICTU and SIPTU wholeheartedly engaged in that process and our submissions can be found on its website. On the national dialogue on climate action and regional meetings, our local shop stewards and workers from these industries and others, because we should be clear that climate action is an issue for all workers, are engaging in that process. SIPTU submitted a document of almost 15 pages to the Citizens' Assembly and was shortlisted for discussion by assembly members.

It was the union movement at international level that put the just transition into the Paris Agreement. The unions pushed hard at the United Nations climate change conference, COP24, this week, and prior to that, to have a just transition statement. What this week's declaration means for workers is that they have a seat at the negotiation table, which is crucial. What we do not have now is social dialogue around these issues. Senator Devine asked about this in regard to the midlands. For the past two years, we asked for the Department, under the Ministers, Deputies Naughten and subsequently Bruton, to undertake research on the impact on the midlands but this has not happened. When the Department was before the committee six weeks ago, officials stated clearly that that research would be ready in January but, in response to parliamentary questions in recent months, they answered that terms of reference for that project were yet to be agreed. While we have campaigned for two years for the research, the Department has not been forthcoming in undertaking it. That research would have been very important for people in the midlands, whether they work in Bord na Móna, ESB or otherwise.

We alluded to a few examples regarding the just transition. An example of somewhere as small as ourselves and also an island is New Zealand, where the government has developed a just transition and economic diversification plan based on social dialogue with the unions and broad stakeholder consultation. In September, the government in Scotland established a nation-

al just transition commission with unions and stakeholders. It is important that the declaration which came out of the Poland conference this week bases the just transition on social dialogue. That is what is needed from Government.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: My question on upskilling somewhat relates to the staff survey. Do the unions see their role as being on of seeing what staff skills are there in the companies impacted or is that for the company itself?

Mr. David Joyce: I would not see that as our role alone. We have a part to play in the discussion but in Bord na Móna's case, for example, it is its responsibility to have that information, as Mr. Noone has said.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: I asked about whether the action plan for jobs regional implementation committees were something that had been examined in trying to advance things.

Mr. David Joyce: I am not overly familiar with their structure but if unions, employers and everyone are around the table, I do not see why they could not be involved. I do not know if my colleagues are aware of those structures.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: I also asked about Bord na Móna's brown to green policy of replacing peat with biomass.

Mr. Willie Noone: There is talk about replacing peat with biomass. While I am new in the energy sector, from my short time working in it, I understand that they would burn half of Sweden to try to keep the power stations going if they were running them on biomass. It is a red herring because they cannot get enough ships to get the timber in sufficiently quickly to get them in the power station. There is a lot of information coming out about biomass but it is something that people need to read up on and educate themselves about what is involved.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: My question was whether the unions had done that. I would have thought that it would be something that ICTU would be familiar with.

Mr. Willie Noone: We are familiar with it. It is a complete red herring to put out that biomass will replace peat; it is as simple as that. There are also anomalies here relating to biomass. I have highlighted at several forums how waste product is going into plants in the Republic, which is being transformed into wood chip and dispatched in lorries, which are burning significant volumes of diesel, to power stations in Derry, for example, yet that same product cannot be brought to Edenderry to be burned because the EPA will object that it is a waste product.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: That is biomass.

Mr. Willie Noone: I know that, but if it was brought up and chipped in the north, it can subsequently be brought back down here. There are currently anomalies in the legislation which do not make sense.

The Deputy raised the matter of a just transition. A just transition in all those formats suggests it should be just and fair. At the moment the shareholder has put out a redundancy package, and I believe the Deputy was on the media stating it was great to get this package out there. What it means in reality is that people in middle management and supervisory staff on a salary of approximately €40,000 to €50,000 are able to get up to two years salary plus statutory payments in a redundancy package, whereas the people on the ground, who are on basic pay of

€350 to €450 a week, cannot do so. That is not fair or just.

That is the reality. It is grand talking about a pan-national just transition, and the Deputy raised the question of whether it should be done on a national or a regional basis. I am a Roscommon man. There are people in my area who have worked at Mount Dillon over generations. However, it does not come under the midlands because Roscommon is not in the midlands, and to have this done on a regional basis and thereby exclude them is not a just transition. They are people working in these jobs for generations. Somebody has to look at this and decide what is fair to the people in the midlands. Is it fair to come up with a plan that will help people in Donegal or Tralee who are not affected by Bord na Mona closing? There are people losing jobs at this time. Can we come up with something specifically tailored for the midlands that will come into effect in the next three or four years? If not, there is no point trying to cod the people in the midlands by saying we are going to do something for the people in Bord na Mona because, in reality, we are not, and we are just having a talking shop about it.

I face hundreds of workers daily who are asking, “What is it going to mean for me in three to four years?” I do not have the answers. I am looking for people in those constituencies, like the Deputy, to get down and meet those workers, to come up with real plans. I want them to tell these people, who may be 61 or 62 years of age, that they are going to get the very same as if they were working in a corner shop down the road, and that they are not going to get one cent extra in their redundancy package. There is nothing specific for this area. That is not a just transition. What we are looking for is something that can be tailored and that can be done.

Who will lead it? From an ICTU perspective, we are not hung up on who leads it as long as it is done. We do not care what political party badge anyone wears. Those workers do not care who delivers as long as it is done.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: Recommendation 3 of the Citizens’ Assembly on climate action was that the carbon tax be increased, having been introduced in 2010. Has ICTU taken a position on that?

Mr. David Joyce: Our economist will answer that.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: The questions we are asking are valid, given we have to produce a report. I am not giving a view, just asking a question. It is important we know where ICTU is coming from.

Mr. Tom Healy: I cannot answer for congress on carbon taxation because the trade union movement has not taken a position on that. I think we should increase carbon taxes but we should do that in a very careful way that does not damage low income households and that takes cognisance of the fact that, in many cases, such as in rural communities, it is not an option to switch to alternatives to diesel or solid fuel heating, for example. It is something that needs to be seen as part of a strategic investment plan.

The role of carbon taxes is twofold. One is to raise money for investment in renewables and in green energy, and the other is to help people to change their behaviour. However, one cannot help people to change their behaviour if there are not other options in terms of, for example, heating or transport. It needs to be a joined-up effort. To that extent, there are good examples in other countries of where carbon taxes can be ring-fenced and part of the benefits of a fund can be paid back to households by way of a dividend, which could be used for better insulation and retrofitting. There is a connection to what we were just talking about in regard to the mid-

lands because a high proportion of the housing stock, particularly in the midlands, is of a low insulation standard. There is a challenge to bring a significant proportion of the housing stock up to A or B building energy rating, and that requires a certain mix of skills and it probably involves a new range of enterprise activity. It also means that households could benefit through a system of dividends paid back from a transition fund which is partly funded from carbon taxes. However, I emphasise the lessons from other countries, for example, France, of how not to do this and of how to create a strong public reaction that sees this as an attack on people's living standards, with regional implications. It is important to get that balance right.

The key point alongside carbon taxes, and even more important than them, is that the State should lead investment through an entrepreneurial effort. ESB and Bord na Móna, in particular, have the opportunity to launch new activities through the development of, for example, solar and wind power. We do not realise how much access we have to solar power in this country, although this might seem surprising, but the east and south east, in particular, have the possibility of developing new energies. This can be done across the bogs by installing giant solar panels. There are also examples in the area of wind power from Denmark, where community co-operatives are linked into the electricity grid. They have made a transition over three decades and, through wind power, have weaned themselves off much of their dependence on fossil fuels and imported energy. The key issue in Denmark, I understand, is that communities were given a stake in these community co-operatives. This is a crucial point. In places like Offaly, Roscommon and Longford, for example, understandably in some cases, there is a strong reaction against some new forms of activity, including wind turbines. One way to get people into owning the problem is to give them an ownership stake. That may also be a possibility for workers who are made redundant. Perhaps there are possibilities of worker co-operatives developing new services and activities.

Deputy Marcella Corcoran Kennedy: A remark was addressed to me by Mr. Noone that I want to comment on. I reassure him that I am very much engaged with the workers on the ground. It is as a result of the workers contacting me directly and asking me for this information that I sought it and received it. That was the only reason I had it. I want to clarify that. I would be happy to meet Mr. Noone at any time. I have not heard from him in a long time.

Deputy John Lahart: I thank ICTU for the presentation. What was always going to be one of weaknesses of the Citizens' Assembly is dealing with the politics of climate change. It very clearly stated what it stated, and it is up to this committee to deal with the reality on the ground. The ICTU witnesses are the first witnesses to have come before the committee to outline exactly what that involves and I thank Mr. Noone, in particular, for outlining what the reality is for people, many of whom may have spent a lifetime working for a company with a particular skillset. Because of the age cohort of some of them, they simply will not work again after this. As he said, the mean age is 56, so the average remaining working life for that group in the company is 12 years. I am 54 and I hope the next 12 years are among the most productive in my life.

I want to focus on one word in the opening statement - "impact". It is a small word and easy to overlook. I do not like the approach which states that people can upskill or train. It is not as easy as that. The word "impact" captures the necessity of that. Someone could have been working for a company for 30 years and it is all he or she knows, which is what Senator Devine was talking about. In the United States, people relied utterly on specific industries and, almost overnight, they disappeared, hence the name "rust belt". It is not a criticism and it does not assign a label to a particular part of this country. It borrows from the experiences of another country where communities were left devastated. That point has to be made. It is too easy for

us to say that people can upskill and do this or that. I am focusing on the word “impact” and on the human element of what people are facing . That involves a range of things. While it can be a significant opportunity for some, it can be frightening for others. That is why I welcome our guests’ contributions. The idea that they could easily transition to other jobs gives rise to fear and is intimidating for people. This was my introduction to this transition forum idea and I thank the witnesses for bringing it to us. Preparation has to be done. People have multiple needs aside from income and work. There is an issue with confidence. Some people do not have the confidence and have to be mentored to move from a phase of employment life into another, which is especially challenging. That is not lost on me but I do not want to labour the point.

Mr. Healy’s contribution was particularly thought-provoking in the context of the opportunities that may lie ahead. ICTU has to persuade people. Some members of the committee visited Tipperary last week. As the clerk to the committee stated , we saw many of the things we had been talking about here in theory. We were grounded by a number of the things we saw happening with the Tipperary Energy Agency. We also heard about communities. What Mr. Noone said about wind energy is interesting, namely, that there has been a loss of appetite for it and that it is controversial. One group we met indicated that a contributory reason for this is that communities were promised a direct benefit from wind energy. They were promised there would be local community fora and buy-in, and that there would be a community dividend when wind energy came to their town. That has not transpired. Corporate bodies have received the dividends. We need to go back and look at wind energy. If it is true that solar panels could be laid across the bog, with all the economic and employment benefits that would derive from doing so, that simply cannot happen without the community having ownership of it. The latter could be ownership in having some energy dividend personally or being involved in the construction. That involves training, etc. We cannot have a situation where a multinational or big corporate company comes in, takes ownership of the bog and does what it wants. Solar or other energy alternatives must come from the community. If there is one lesson we learned from last week, it is that communities lost interest in wind energy because promises about things from which they would have benefited directly were never followed through on. I ask our guests to provide feedback on that.

Reference was made to the ESB and coal. Last week, someone mentioned the book *Who Moved My Cheese?* during our visit to Tipperary. The only criticism I have of Mr. Noone is that the timeline has been brought from 2030 to 2025. I am not a Minister. I am talking as a layman and citizen. That could be brought back to 2020. Mr. Noone must have seen this coming. Other industries must have seen it coming. They must act as persuaders and informers, even sitting down with companies and saying it is coming even if companies say it is not, and not to be surprised when it happens. One can see from David Attenborough’s contribution in Poland during the week that it is becoming more urgent. We have been appallingly poor at addressing this climate change and timelines will probably have to be pulled back in.

Deputy Brian Stanley took the Chair.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Our guests need time to answer.

Deputy John Lahart: Mr. Healy mentioned that there may be more employment opportunities. He spoke about one or two but he might develop that. Another of our guests referred to Bord na Móna having good ideas about alternative employment, Perhaps the person in question might flesh that out too. I will not speak again after I finish. There is a golden opportunity here. It may be particularly challenging for people who are 60 or over-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Our guests will only have a minute to answer.

Deputy John Lahart: Hold on. The previous speaker went on-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): There are other members. I ask the Deputy to conclude.

Deputy John Lahart: I will finish on this point. There is a golden opportunity for retraining and apprenticeships, which we learned in Tipperary with the energy-related retrofitting. It has to be handled sensitively and I think the forum for that is the just transition forum.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I ask our guests to be brief. Many people wish to speak.

Mr. Willie Noone: I agree with everything Deputy Lahart said, except when he criticised me, although he said I should not be surprised. We were not surprised. The workers at Bord na Móna were not surprised that they were going to stop working with peat or that the timeframe for this was brought forward. They could feel what was happening in the recent years on the wind. They are surprised that there has been a lot of talk by politicians and the trade unions, and by all commentators, whether ex-Presidents or the Citizens' Assembly, that the people involved should be treated fairly. This is the third time I will say this: it has surprised them that people are now being told that their jobs are gone and they are not getting one red cent extra. There are people in their 60s who have been told that their jobs are gone and that the package that has been offered to them is inferior to what has been offered to other semi-State workers in the recent past who are not going through a decarbonisation policy. They feel they should come under the umbrella of a just transition. They are surprised that there are people who should be putting their shoulder to the wheel to ensure they are treated fairly who are not doing so. They are not looking for anything beyond what they think their entitlements are. It is very unfair that there are people who are very capable of getting jobs and who have good skill sets, specifically in senior and middle management, who will get a golden handshake and probably walk into jobs fairly shortly afterwards. As the Deputy stated, there are people in the age group who cannot do that and they are being treated unfairly.

Deputy Lahart mentioned a dividend for the wind farms. I agree that if wind farms are coming in, there has to be a direct connection to the community so they can get a dividend from that. The Deputy mentioned solar panels. I do not know if a suggestion of mine will get traction. It is currently Government policy to give a 40% grant for people who put solar panels on their houses. I suggest that the grant be increased and targeted at the midlands. They can be put on local authority houses, including in such places as Banagher, Birr, Tullamore and Mullingar. That will attract work to the midlands and benefit the people in the midlands. It should be easily possible if the political will is present. There is a mountain of ideas if one talks to people in the midlands about what could come about. It is all energy-related and targeted directly at the midlands. The Deputy mentioned solar panels. I think they are the answer on Government buildings and on private houses.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: I thank our guests for their presentations. I acknowledge the work they have been doing. It is important to take stock of the measures they have already taken. SIPTU has prepared a research booklet for members and commissioned Mary Robinson to write an article for *Liberty* in order to educate its members on actions they can take. I know Ms Yvonne O'Callaghan and Mr. Adrian Kane are involved in this work on climate change dialogue. I acknowledge that and the work of IMPACT under the leadership of Joe O'Connor

and Kevin Callinan. I acknowledge that and the work of IMPACT. Under the leadership of Joe O'Connor and Kevin Callinan, it commissioned an Institute for International and European Affairs, IIEA, just transition report on the implications of climate for the workforce. It is not that ICTU is not doing anything, and that is important. ICTU has set up an energy and natural resources committee and it held a conference on this issue. Does ICTU feel supported by the Government with regard to just transition? Do its members feel supported? It is not as if climate change has come about in the last few days or weeks. We have been talking about it for nearly 30 years, since we started to acknowledge it. David Attenborough stated yesterday that the threat facing humanity and all species is looming. He said it is on the horizon. Does ICTU feel its workers and communities feel supported by the Government at this time?

Mr. David Joyce: The committee has heard from Mr. Noone about how the Bord na Móna workers feel. I thank the Senator for her acknowledgement of some of the work. We have been beavering away to try to promote the concept of a just transition, with limited success. There are references to just transition in the national mitigation plan and so forth and it is in the common parlance when discussing climate change but, as Mr. Noone outlined, very little has happened on it. We have all acknowledged that change has been coming for some time and it is becoming increasingly urgent. The science keeps getting worse in terms of what we need to do. No, we do not feel particularly supported. We hope that as a result of our work and our discussions with the committee this evening, and we appreciate the opportunity to come here to talk and the level of engagement we are experiencing, that in the recommendations emerging from this committee we can finally start to put some meat on the bones of what a just transition would look like in Ireland.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: What would Mr. Joyce consider that to be?

Mr. David Joyce: We are open to proposals. We are not arriving here with all the answers to everything. The Senator's party has just published a just transition Bill which we are very interested in and we look forward to further engagement on what that might look like. The main message is that the discussions we are having here are the discussions that must take place in decision-making fora, and workers and their representatives have to be around the table so we can be part of the change that is going to happen rather than just be objects of it.

Senator Grace O'Sullivan: Ms O'Callaghan talked about social dialogue. How is Unite engaging the workers at ground level to prepare? As Mr. Noone said, the transition for the Bord na Móna workers was put out to 2028 and now it has been brought back. We are aware of the level of carbon in the atmosphere and the speeding up of global warming. How will the unions work with its workforces to prepare them for this change? There is a psychological element in what will happen as well as the upskilling or reskilling and so forth.

Ms Yvonne O'Callaghan: There are a number of things to which I alluded earlier. We work with the International Trade Union Confederation and the International Labour Organization, ILO, on these issues. The Irish Government is a member of the governing body of the ILO at present and the ILO has a very strong position on the just transition. It has issued through the workers' group within the ILO very strong guidance on what the just transition looks like in a practical sense. In the work we have been doing over the last number of years we have been trying to get our members to understand the concept of climate change, what is happening and how they fit into that, in terms of not being afraid of it. A just transition is the answer to moving all of our workers, be they in the private or public sector - and not just those in the peat industry or transport sector, which are the immediate ones - into that low-carbon economy.

In fact, at international level trade unions have set up a just transition centre which is looking at best practice in how we engage with workers and also at how governments are putting forward such things as just transition forums across different countries to deal with these issues. I alluded to some examples earlier because those examples are not specific to an industry. They look at how we move our entire country and all our workers into a low carbon economy, starting with the workers in the high-carbon industries and moving onwards. For example, some forums are examining how we counterbalance this by investing in low carbon industries such as care work, where many women are working, the arts or education and how we invest our money there. Those sectors are growing, which is important as well. It is an all-encompassing approach.

Our energy sector committees and other committees deal with the workers who will be impacted upon first. In any union there are shop stewards and committees and we are engaging with them constantly, but what is missing is that social dialogue decision making forum in which we move from the concept and having the just transition on paper to the practicalities of how we do that, discuss it around the table and make a decision on how we move forward. At present, we do not have that. There has to be some leadership from the Government in that regard.

Senator Grace O’Sullivan: Ms O’Callaghan said there is a just transition centre. Is that established?

Ms Yvonne O’Callaghan: Yes, the international trade union movement has a just transition centre which filters through all the best practice in terms of how trade unions are engaging with workers at local and national levels. David Joyce alluded to what happened in Australia and Spain and all of those are filtered through there so we all know what is going on through the centre. It was newly established in recent years and it is important.

Senator Grace O’Sullivan: That sounds very good. Given the scale of the climate crisis, one issue the committee has discussed at length is the importance of everyone being engaged, that is, all Departments, sectors, unions and so forth. Is ICTU collaborating or discussing with Departments to ensure we are all moving together on this? Again, that relates to whether the Government is supporting ICTU.

Mr. Jim Dullaghan: The Senator referred to the conference that was held in May 2017. There were some specific proposals in that conference which go some way towards addressing some of her questions. One was the establishment of a tri-party body comprising the trade unions, employers and the Government to ensure the transition. That was one type of body for action at central level. There was also the question of establishing the just transition fund, which is happening at European level as well, and what that means at national level. Importantly, there is the study of the impact that meeting our goals in the Paris Agreement will have on communities and industry, and legislation backing that up in terms of the principles of the just transition. The committee has been liaising with the Department in terms of research and trying to do research studies but it has not advanced. That is part of the problem. We all recognise that it is a big problem and it has a huge impact. The things we will have to roll out are not going to happen in a piecemeal way. A programmed approach is required for this. This is similar to rural electrification in the past. It must be led by the State and its agencies. That is the point.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I thank the Senator. When we get to four minutes I will intervene to be fair to the speakers and the people replying. Deputy Munster is not present. I will take that slot. I thank the trade union delegation for coming in. As a former

employee of Bord na Móna and from a constituency point of view, I have a particular interest in what happens. We have been highlighting the transition. There is an opportunity in changing from what could be termed the brown revolution to a sustainable revolution and in terms of new industries. Many of the workers are concerned that there will not be the same number of jobs. Mr. Noone is best placed to give a view on this as he is on the ground. What is the best way to find an alternative that can provide substantial employment? The board is looking at a number of options around energy, horticulture and aquaculture. All of us who have been Bord na Móna employees know that neither horticulture nor fuel will create the same level of work as there was in peat extraction. That is a great concern. Has the ICTU looked at other industries? The board has outlined its big three areas. All of us desperately want to see employment. It is very important that it is maintained. We are talking about communities where there was very little until the 1950s. Older people who remember how it was before then will tell us how difficult it was in those areas. We need to ensure that we do not go back to that post peat extraction.

On the climate action fund, there was €77 million announced the other day, all for very good projects, which is welcome. However, the midlands and Bord na Móna did not figure. Do the witnesses feel that some of this money should have gone towards recalibrating Bord na Móna and getting it into a different space in terms of moving along with new industries?

Mr. Macdara Doyle: We are working with the Nevin Institute at the moment on drawing up a report on the midlands region and the response to Bord na Móna, which examines how we can try to ensure a just transition. We hope to have specific proposals around that in the coming weeks.

Mr. Willie Noone: The Acting Chairman asked about retaining the same number of jobs. Bord na Móna has come forward with plans. Our view is that it has made some bad decisions in the recent past. However, we have been told that it has had these plans robustly audited and checked for risk regarding the industries it has proposed. We can only accept its bona fides. Bord na Móna believes the quantum of jobs will be equal to the number of jobs that are being lost. The problem we have is with the age profile in the company. These jobs may not come on-stream quick enough to aid the people who are currently losing their jobs. That is also tied in with the redundancy package, which I keep bringing up. The quantum of the redundancy package is not the issue, in case anyone might think it is. The issue is the fairness of how it is being distributed. The company is telling us it will select people for redundancy on financial criteria. That means it will make whatever selection is most financially advantageous to the company. It will intend to let people with 25 years' service go and keep people who may be in their 60s. As far the company is concerned, it is more financially advantageous to get rid of those who may be in their 30s or 40s. Our view is that it should exit those who are in their 60s and who at this stage are not going to be re-employed in a job that may come on-stream in five or six years because they will be too old. The company needs to let those older people out and re-skill and retrain those who are in their 30s and 40s and who will be able to benefit. That is the issue.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I am mindful of the other members, but just on the climate action fund, is there a sense that we should be making a strong pitch for that, to move Bord na Móna into a different space? Perhaps someone from the Nevin Institute or the ICTU could answer that.

Mr. Tom Healy: Yes, I think there is an opportunity to bring together expertise and funds to co-ordinate and lead. The challenge is that the State needs to step up to play a role of co-ordination and leadership even though many other actors are involved. We need to realise as well that a blueprint is not possible but a broad plan is. We do not know what way technology

is going to evolve. Even in the past five years, the technology for solar power has been transformed. The costs have come down. It is a different situation now from when we went into recession. This is where we need imaginative and creative thinking. It could come, perhaps, from some of those workers in Newbridge who are in an administrative or support role. I do not know the details; Mr. Noone may know more. Why are we laying off workers? Why are we not considering creating new lines of activity and new possibilities? In the main, new enterprises, particularly in the midlands, will probably come from new areas, some of which we are not even thinking about. We need to be ahead of the curve. We have a lot to learn from Denmark about how it made that transition I mentioned earlier in respect of wind generation.

In the 1940s we had a national emergency. Fuel was running out. Imports of coal and oil were very low and people were put to shovel-ready work. That was the spirit behind Bord na Móna. Subsequently, the flourishing of many semi-State enterprises really filled a gap. That is what we need to think about again. It is a different context but the challenge is still there. Just waiting for other people to do it for us, whether they are multinationals or science experts, is not enough. There is a need now to develop some of these new lines of activity. I strongly suspect the urgency is not there is public policy. This is a real crisis internationally as well as nationally. We need to redouble efforts and investment. That needs to be appreciated.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Could I ask that the proposals from the Nevin Institute be forwarded to the committee when they are ready?

Mr. Tom Healy: Sure.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: A lot of issues have been covered by previous speakers, particularly by my colleague, Deputy Corcoran Kennedy. One of the presentations referred to the deal struck by Spanish unions in October 2018 as being a just transition deal with the Government in respect of the coal miners, and that there would be a fund of €250 million invested in those communities. Perhaps we could hear where that money has come from and what the process was for getting there.

We had Bord na Móna here a few weeks ago making a presentation. I am a bit confused listening to Mr. Noone because Bord na Móna indicated to us that the redundancies were being made on a voluntary basis and therefore it was for workers who wished to seek to be made redundant, at least at this juncture. Will Mr. Noone clarify whether that is the case? I would agree with Mr. Healy, as would everybody, I suppose. We have to be innovative in respect of new jobs. When Bord na Móna was here, it cited, for example, a tyre recycling plant that was being established with 50 new jobs in the area. This was an example of the sustainable type of industry that is required. I wonder whether an application has been sought. Has Bord na Móna made an application under the climate action fund? Has it been suggested to it that it should do so? Are ideas forthcoming in relation to what alternatives there might be? We constantly hear that we are not hitting targets and that we are behind. In my view, we are often short on detail on what the alternatives might be. We have all established that there is a problem here that needs to be addressed. We need lots of ideas now, especially because we are drawing up a report. Solar farms and wind farms on bogs have been mentioned as alternatives. I assume that when those farms are operational, there will be an operational fund that will be paid for community benefit or gain. Is that what is envisaged when such alternatives are mentioned? Would the funding pool be used for entrepreneurship and for the development of alternative sustainable energies in this area?

I would like to make a point on a more macro level. The workers we are talking about are

those in the energy and natural resources sector. When we talk about transition, we must focus on the people who have the most potential. I know the main focus has been on Bord na Móna workers. We do not need a crystal ball as we try to look at how this will affect them. The closure of Bellacorick power station in my home county of Mayo caused devastation from which the community is still recovering. The tower came down in 2010. The jobs were lost before that. We already have evidence of what happens in rural communities. I am just getting to my point. It seems possible that the just transition will hit people in rural areas hardest. The national organisations represent workers right across the board. I imagine that those who will have the fewest options are people in rural areas. We are feeding into policies like Project Ireland 2040 and the national development plan. We will have regional plans to implement those policies. To what extent is worker migration being considered? We are all about sustainability. The ideal is that we take workers, the imbalance is addressed and we see more sustainable growth in these rural areas. Do the witnesses feed into national policy in this area? Do they have their own policies on it? Would they agree with my assertion that workers in rural Ireland are going to fare worse than their counterparts who are represented by the unions that are here today? A worker in the fossil fuel industry in Dublin will have way more options.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I ask the witnesses to keep their answers brief because the Senator's five minutes are nearly up.

Mr. Willie Noone: I will answer the questions that relate specifically to Bord Na Móna. The Senator is right when she says that representatives of Bord na Móna were before this committee not so long ago. I am sure they forgot to tell the committee that when they went off to the stakeholder to get a redundancy package, they did not consult the trade unions. We do not know what they actually looked for. When the Government gave them approval for their package, we do not know for what the Government gave them approval. We are only taking their word for it that-----

Senator Michelle Mulherin: I would like Mr. Noone to answer the question. Was it voluntary or not?

Mr. Willie Noone: The Senator is right.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: They said it was voluntary. If it was voluntary, it was for workers.

Mr. Willie Noone: The Senator is right.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: Okay.

Mr. Willie Noone: As the Senator has rightly said, it was voluntary. However, if she says that it was voluntary to the workers who were let go when the briquette factory in Littleton closed and there were no jobs within a 50-mile radius, to the people in the coal depots who are losing their jobs as we speak and there are no jobs in their vicinity, or to a 62 year old worker whose bog is closing down and the nearest job is 30 miles away, they will give her an answer. She is right when she says that people in rural areas, like the area I come from, are suffering. She can try to cod people who are in their 60s by telling them that they do not have to take something on the basis that it is purely voluntary-----

Senator Michelle Mulherin: In all fairness, that is pretty inflammatory language.

Mr. Willie Noone: It is true.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: I am not coddling anybody.

Mr. Willie Noone: It is true.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: I asked Mr. Noone a straight question and he failed to answer it until I pressed him. I asked Mr. Noone whether this is voluntary at this time.

Mr. Willie Noone: The Senator is right.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: I would say that I am as much, if not more, for workers and people in rural areas as is Mr. Noone. I am from a rural area. I have cited the implications. I just asked a question. It is not imposed on workers at the moment. We know things can change. We know that the deadline is 2027. That is the question Mr. Noone was asked. Maybe he should refrain from his inflammatory-----

Mr. Willie Noone: The Senator asked a question.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: We should talk about solutions here.

Mr. Willie Noone: I am not being inflammatory. The Senator asked whether it is voluntary. She is right to say that strictly speaking, it is voluntary.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: Okay. That is all I asked.

Mr. Willie Noone: My response is the same.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: I am not diminishing anything else that Mr. Noone has said-----

Mr. Willie Noone: Sorry-----

Senator Michelle Mulherin: -----so I ask him not to diminish anything anybody else has said.

Mr. Willie Noone: That is fine.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I want to allow the witness to respond. The answer that has been given is that it is voluntary.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: That is fine. It answers the question.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Sorry, just a second. The answer that has been given - that it is voluntary - is very clear. I think Mr. Noone is seeking to explain that it is voluntary with certain conditions. I think he has answered the question fairly. Perhaps the other questions could be answered.

Mr. Jim Dullaghan: I will comment on the impact on rural areas. The electricity sector has been in transition for a long time, with renewables coming in and displacing fossil fuel plants. That has been going on for quite a long time. Obviously, it is accelerating more and more. The big obvious plant is Moneypoint, which is a coal plant. What is the economic input of Moneypoint to the local community, for example in terms of county council rates? How will that be dealt with? There is a timeline for that. It has been well flagged. Again, what is the plan?

Ms Yvonne O'Callaghan: The Senator mentioned worker migration. It is an important point for us to examine. The just transition works in a good few areas because it keeps people

in existing jobs, or reskills and retrains them, and because it looks at how to reinvest in those areas to plan jobs for future workers. This is about making sure there are jobs for future workers and future generations. It is clear from some of the migration figures - I do not have them in front of me - that many young people are leaving these areas because they need to go elsewhere for work. I know that reinvestment is happening in those regions now. As Mr. Noone and others have pointed out, these industries have generations of workers. We want to make sure new generations of workers with new skills for new types of clean energy are coming into these industries. It is important to emphasise that the just transition involves keeping everybody in those areas. It is important for us to keep the worker migration point in mind.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): We are moving on.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: I also asked about applications under the climate action fund.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I ask the witnesses to be brief.

Mr. David Joyce: We are not aware of any such applications. If there are funds that potentially can be used to make progress in this area, by all means-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Okay. We are moving on. Deputy Pringle is next.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: There are numerous funds of this nature.

Mr. David Joyce: We are aware of the funds.

Senator Michelle Mulherin: Yes.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Is Deputy Bríd Smith taking Deputy Pringle's slot?

Deputy Thomas Pringle: No, she is not taking my slot. She has asked for permission to come in before me.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Yes.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: If that permission is not granted, she is not taking the slot.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): She can take the Deputy's slot. That means-----

Deputy Thomas Pringle: This is very serious.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Okay.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I have been sitting here since the start of the meeting.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I want to come in before Deputy Pringle because I have to return to the Dáil Chamber to speak in the abortion debate.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Okay. I ask the Deputy to make it brief.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: She is not taking my slot.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Okay.

Deputy Bríd Smith: No, I am not taking Deputy Pringle's slot.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Okay.

Deputy Bríd Smith: In fact, I want to ask two very quick questions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Briefly.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: Is that agreed?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): If it is agreed by the committee. Is the committee happy with that?

Deputy Sean Sherlock: One hundred per cent.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I ask Deputy Smith to proceed.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I thank Deputy Pringle. Fair play to him for doing that.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): We have to be fair to everyone.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I have to make bits of myself here tonight. I have two questions, the first of which is for ICTU. I thank Mr. Joyce for the interesting presentation. I want to tease out some of the detail of what he has said about the just transition in so far as it relates to the Bord na Móna workers. Three examples of countries where transition deals for workers were done - Australia, Spain and Germany - have been cited as a kind of template, but no detail has been given. Does Mr. Joyce have detail of the deal? He gave a small bit of detail of the €250 million deal that has been agreed by Government employers in respect of the coal-mining industry in Spain. Given that the Spanish coal-mining industry is massive, €250 million does not sound like a massive figure. Could such examples be applied to the sort of thing about which Mr. Noone was talking? What sort of redundancy payments will be made? Will the workers who have been transitioning over to other types of work retain their pay, conditions and pensions etc.? That sort of detail is being demanded by workers in Roscommon, Dublin and Clare who want to know whether they will have security in their pay, terms, hours and pensions. If they are to be made redundant, they need to know they will be looked after properly. If we do not get this right, we are in for a pile of trouble. If we do not bring people with us and treat them fairly, we are in for a pile of trouble because we do not have a lot of time.

My second question relates to the carbon tax itself. Several references have been made to it. What has happened in France with the yellow vests, the *gilets jaunes*, has really changed the narrative on this. For example, the Taoiseach, Deputy Leo Varadkar, said in the Dáil today that we have to be careful about how we introduce the measure. This is the first time this was said. The yellow-vest protests and the climb-back of Macron's Government have had a real impact. There is probably a lesson in this for the Bord na Móna workers in that if they want just transition, they will probably have to fight for it rather than expect it to be delivered.

On the carbon tax, is it not now time to say the carbon tax has to be delivered as a tax on profit and wealth rather than a tax on ordinary people, who are not benefitting from just transition and did not create the climate change problem?

Mr. Macdara Doyle: With reference to the Spanish example, we are seeking detail from the unions on the specific terms. We hope to have a speaker over to brief us on it. Initially, the plan in 2012 under Rajoy's Government was to shut down everything immediately. The unions

fought that. They successfully turned it around. I refer to the plan announced last month. The number involved in coal-mining in Spain has diminished significantly in recent years. There is not a great number involved and the industry is confined to three regions in the north of Spain, including Asturias and Castilla y León. It is a €250 million arrangement but this is coming entirely from the state, as far as I am aware. It is for retraining and early retirement for those who are of a certain age.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Does Mr. Doyle know anything about retaining pay and conditions? Is Mr. Doyle looking for that detail?

Mr. Macdara Doyle: We are looking for that detail from the unions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I call Deputy Pringle.

Deputy Bríd Smith: Could I have a quick answer on my question on carbon tax?

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Very briefly.

Mr. Tom Healy: The Deputy made a fair point. There is a role for corporations to contribute. It is a matter of how that is done. A carbon tax, by its nature, is a tax on the consumption of certain products, such as oil and gas. The important point is that households also have a contribution to make, but the way this is achieved is crucial.

Corporate contributions comprise a much bigger challenge. It is a European challenge and that is one reason the European Union has an important role to play here. It could be that some form of consolidated common tax base, which I know is controversial, would have a role. There is a link here. Some of that could be linked to a Europe-wide investment programme in decarbonisation. That could be one channel through which corporations, particularly large multinational corporations, could make a contribution.

Deputy Bríd Smith: I thank Deputy Pringle very much and I look forward to his Bill being passed tomorrow.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Deputy Pringle has been very patient. He has been here from the start.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I have. What is happening is amazing. It is a discussion for another day but the way the meeting is conducted, whereby members who are here at the start end up being the last to contribute, is not on.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): There is a rota here-----

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I know there is a rota but-----

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): You might be near the end today but I hope that next week the Deputy will move up the list.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: We will see what happens. I take it the clock is starting now.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Lean ar aghaidh.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: I thank the witnesses for their presentations. Many of my questions have been answered so I do not have much to add. I thank the delegates for the information on Bord na Móna. It was certainly presented to the committee that Bord na Móna was

fantastic and doing everything for the workers to have a very just transition. It is useful to hear the other side. That will be important to the committee in its deliberations.

There was a notice on the ICTU website about a conference in May on just transition. It outlined four points, including the establishment of a tripartite body comprising unions, employers and the Government, the establishment of a just transition fund, and a study of the impact of meeting our goals under the Paris Agreement on fossil fuel-dependent communities in Ireland. With regard to all of these, what response has been received from the Government? The Minister addressed the conference, which is interesting.

The delegates have more to say about climate change and just transition than any of the departmental representatives who appeared before this committee. That is a sad reflection on the Government and how it is responding. I am not saying the delegates have had a great deal to say but they have had more to say than the Government. Something needs to happen in this regard. We need to operate beyond the Government. Maybe the Dáil, the delegates' bodies and civil society could form a body to address this because the Government is certainly way behind everything we are doing. There does not seem to be any will to catch up or to come on board. What response, if any, has been received from the Government on this matter?

Mr. Healy said wind is the solution. In my neck of the woods, wind is not regarded as the solution. Public acceptance is gone and I do not believe any argument will restore it. Therefore, we have to examine alternatives. Perhaps this is an issue the delegates should consider also.

I would like answers to those questions, after which I might have time to ask more.

Mr. Jim Dullaghan: With regard to the establishment of a tripartite body, as a result of the conference the Deputy mentioned the Minister invited us to be part of the national dialogue on climate action. We took the approach of “suck it and see”. As I stated, the dialogue has a role but it is not the kind of forum we were looking for. It has a completely different structure. In that regard, we are still awaiting a response.

I understand there are discussions at European level on a just transition fund and on whether it will be a separate fund or part of a broader adjustment fund. Nationally, the climate action fund has been referred to. Perhaps it is a potential source in supporting some of this work. I do not know.

There were four topics, one being on the goals. A recent parliamentary question revealed to us that the terms of reference for the study have not been agreed. That is a source of much disappointment.

Deputy Thomas Pringle: That is why I am making the point that we have to work beyond the Government. The Oireachtas, the delegates and civil society may be able to do this. I am worried about the statement that it is entirely up to the Government to respond. It is to a certain extent but it has gone beyond that at this stage. The Government response will not happen. Maybe we have also to respond. The manner in which we do so is important. We have to come on board also.

Mr. David Joyce: I take that point. Tomorrow there is to be a mass lobby involving the committee members and colleagues from Stop Climate Chaos, who include as part of their agenda the concept of just transition. We have not only engaged with the Government and employers but also with environmental and other civil society groups in this area. We are really happy that they have taken on the idea also.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Does the Deputy want to ask another brief question?

Deputy Thomas Pringle: With regard to wind energy, acceptance is gone. I urge the delegates to be careful in regard to it.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I thank the speakers for appearing before us today. I want to extrapolate a little from the Bord na Móna scenario. For us, it was to be the exemplar for the just transition. It was to be the example to which we could all refer as the big glorious project in which the workers transitioned and were treated fairly. We are getting a very strong sense today, however, that the workers are not getting packages that are commensurate with their years of service. This committee has to take that very seriously. When the Bord na Móna representatives were before us, they spoke about the 11 town hall meetings they had. I hope no gloss or spin was put on that. They spoke about renewable energy projects at a number of wind farms and aerobic digestion facilities. They spoke about aquaculture and afforestation of 20,000 to 30,000 acres to develop the biomass biochain. Mr. Noone has expressed some views on that. They spoke about recycling and tourism. My question is simple. There was mention of town hall engagement with workers but do workers who are not seeking to subscribe to the voluntary redundancy scheme have a legitimate expectation within Bord na Móna currently to transition to other areas in the company? From the perspective of the congress or SIPTU, is there an expectation among workers that they will be redeployed into one of these areas of activity and there is a legitimate expectation to retain a job or employment?

Mr. Willie Noone: I will answer that as simply as I can. The 11 town hall meetings mentioned by the Deputy were generated by the company and they took place following the announcement of the redundancy package. It was a *fait accompli*. The kernel of the issue is the make-up of the package and the selection process. The age profile is very high, as I stated earlier, and I have absolutely no doubt sufficient people will fill it. I hope that will happen. If a sufficient number take the package, it will be easier to exit people etc. The fairness of the package is causing much disgruntlement with people. We believe the scheme will be oversubscribed and the company will then select the people who will leave, and that will be done unfairly. I know there are people in the company with 42 or 43 years of service and although they expect to retire, they will be told they are not allowed to go and will have to stay until they are 65. There are people in their late 50s who will look to get their pension and although they can leave, they will not get any pension. It is a change from what was in place three months ago. If those people had gone three months ago, before the package was developed, they could have received their pension but they are now being told they cannot get it. It is crazy stuff.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: Are the goalposts being shifted on a constant basis by the management?

Mr. Willie Noone: That is correct. We need a conversation with representatives of the company before it goes to the Department to sanction the package. We knew the age profile and expectation of workers but we were only consulted after the fact. We gave our views in the consultation but they were not taken on board. At our last meeting with company representatives, we told them clearly that we do not believe the stakeholder understood the packages outlined for staff. No politician who is in any way fair-minded at all would allow the package to go out in the way that it has.

The expectation of workers is that they should get out but many people will be disappointed. The company is clearly saying it will make the decision on who is going to get out and who will

not. We are probably singing off the same hymn sheet with perhaps 75% to 80% of the people who want to go and should be allowed to go but approximately 20% of people should get out but the company will look to allow a different 20% of people to leave. It will cause major problems. It has been mentioned that this will happen outside the Government. At this moment, we may have to go to the streets on this and have public protests. It is not fair that people in their 60s in Bord na Móna, a semi-State company, are being told their job is gone, although in theory the process is voluntary. In reality, people will be told there is no other choice.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I outlined the six activities that were articulated to us. From Mr. Noone's perspective, there is no understanding that workers will transition to these areas of activity.

Mr. Willie Noone: No. With the age profile and the timeframe in which the jobs are to come on stream, the majority of workers believe that although there may be jobs, they will not be working. It will be a different cohort of people. They may be Bord na Móna employees but it will not be these workers.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: There is the language of the just transition. It is important for us to acknowledge as a committee that recommendation No. 7 speaks of making proper provision for the protection of the rights of the workers impacted. There was an overwhelming mandate. Today's interaction has been very useful and we are now beginning to develop the language of the just transition and tease it out. Does the witness agree with the language of the just transition, what it means and how it would be populated in terms of funding, specifically the types of structures set up? It is very much an iterative process but there must be some formal process and the Government must be a key stakeholder in that. It will take pounds, shillings and pence. If we are talking about the social protection element of the just transition, the State and the Government will have to fund that activity. Taking the Spanish example of transition, €250 million was spent, which is not an insignificant amount of money. We are talking about a serious funding pot that will have to be made available by the Government if we are talking about decarbonising the economy. Does the witness agree with the proposition?

Mr. Willie Noone: I agree with that. It is a pity Senator Mulherin has left as she was trying to make the point that this is purely voluntary. When we scrape through the surface of what has gone to the public, it means people could be moved and not facilitated with voluntary severance. They could be earning €42,000 per year. They will get a job but the company is saying when they get a job, there is no commitment that the earnings will be retained. They may be given a job 25 miles away on €15,000 per year less. The package is purely voluntary but people do not want to go 20 miles away or earn €15,000 per year less. It is the reality and when people scrape the surface, they must see that detail.

Ms Yvonne O'Callaghan: The Deputy spoke about people transitioning into new jobs and having new elements coming on stream. As my colleague, Mr. Noone, has said, that may involve a new cohort of people. A just transition is also about retaining the terms and conditions in Bord na Móna for new employees coming on stream. It is not about creating new terms and conditions for new employees. That part of the just transition is very important.

There are social protection elements and Deputy Pringle alluded to an all-government approach. We need the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Social Protection and others to work together. It is not just down to a particular Department trying to achieve this just transition. It is why we come back to having a national forum, as there will then be an all-Government approach. Otherwise, it is siloed into a particular sector, group of workers or

Department. It is important to consider in this regard.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: The midlands has a particular geography. Mr. Healy has mentioned deep retrofitting schemes and the housing stock in an area that might have potential. Has congress engaged with the company on the retraining and upskilling potential? Is it something that must be elevated beyond current talks or dialogue with the company on terms and conditions, voluntary redundancies and so on? How do we as a committee take the language of the just transition and deal with a very bespoke example like the peat industry? Rather than speaking rhetorically about what we need to do, what action is required? Is there any activity from agencies in the engagement, or even from academic institutions like Athlone Institute of Technology who could help in figuring out how to transition workers? Is there any experience of that?

Mr. Willie Noone: I can give the specifics of the Bord na Móna case. I have had engagement with the company and a member of the European Parliament about accessing some of the globalisation fund. There must be a certain quantum of employees involved. At this time we do not know how many people will exit the company and from what locations. The moneys that may become available from that fund are purely for training and upskilling. Two types of Bord na Móna worker will be involved. There will be the Bord na Móna worker who will stay working in Bord na Móna for the foreseeable future and he or she will have a certain training requirement and there will be the Bord na Móna worker who will exit Bord na Móna and he or she will have a certain training requirement. We have discussed whether people exiting Bord na Móna who want to avail of a course and travel to Athlone Institute of Technology, for example, will be afforded expenses for travel. We believe such expenses are attainable. We have also discussed in some detail the possibility of getting experts in to upskill the remaining workforce but first we must carry out a skills audit to assess what we have, what will be required into the future and match that with training. That work is being done as we speak in this current round of talks.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: Is the skills audit live?

Mr. Willie Noone: Yes.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Deputy Ryan has returned and he has five minutes.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: I realise that a vote have been called in the Dáil. I beg the indulgence of the panel. Are they willing to wait for five to ten minutes while the vote takes place? I can return afterwards and ask my questions. In truth, the Acting Chairman knows that we will have to run out the committee room door in 60 seconds time and I would like an opportunity to ask three questions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): The vote will take about 15 minutes.

Deputy Sean Sherlock: I would say that Deputy Ryan will have time to ask his questions.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I suggest that Deputy Ryan asks his questions because, in fairness, he came in at the end of this debate.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: The future of the Labour movement will go hand in hand with the environmental movement. I mean green is the new red and red is the new green. Senator Grace O'Sullivan has commended some of the work that has been done. Likewise, I thank Mr. David

Joyce for the work that he did, and that we did together, at the climate gathering in terms of a series of sessions where we considered this issue over recent years. He brought over the head of the International Trade Unions Movement who said that it is the absolute truth that there are no jobs on a dead planet and we must work together on this.

I appreciate the commentary by the witnesses on our just transition commission. Do they agree that the main structure we seek is a mediation service? I mean an independently fully resourced and skilled team who can be brought in and used when areas are designated to be in need of a specific just transition plan. I do not have a long tradition in the negotiating process. However, I know that the mediation process is not binding. I know that it is fully State resourced and has all of the expertise that we can marshal to provide a mediation service between workers, employers and communities in the just transition process. Do the witnesses think that structure is the right approach in terms of establishing a just transition commission to assist in this process?

I will ask all my three questions and the witnesses can answer them together. I agree very much with Mr. Dullaghan when he said that the State will have to lead a lot of this work. We are going to back to our future in terms of State leadership unlike the electrification of our country. I was very disappointed that Bord na Móna, in its new strategy, did not see the opportunity I see that the company must have in the €50 billion project to retrofit buildings, which we need to do in the next ten, 15 or 20 years. I see Bord na Móna having a role in that. Rather than laying off people in Newbridge, Bord na Móna will have to employ hundreds of additional people in Newbridge to set up apprenticeships for 1,000 carpenters, 1,000 heating engineers, 1,000 plumbers and 1,000 glaziers to manage its biggest and most important project. If we can go back to Bord na Móna and say, “rather than excluding that from your option of menus and just going with the options that you have set out, go big in terms of the State showing that we can be brilliant at creating an apprenticeship system that gives the youth of the midlands a future.” Do the witnesses agree with such a strategy option?

Engagement on this should be a continuation of the record that we also have in partnership. To me, the partnership process has served this country well. The governance structure of this initiative will see it centred around the Taoiseach’s office. In other words, Mr. Martin Fraser, Secretary General, Department of the Taoiseach and the Secretary General for the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment would set the sights of the Action Plan for Jobs at the core of the State. The unions have a good connection with the Department of the Taoiseach through the partnership process. Does such a governance structure make sense to the witnesses? I refer to where the central co-ordination of this exercise takes place.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): The bell is ringing for the vote but we cannot hear it in this room. The time is ticking and I suggest one of the witnesses commences.

Deputy Eamon Ryan: Realistically, the time is very tight.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I urge the witnesses to give brief answers.

Mr. David Joyce: Yes, we would be very interested in the mediation structure described by Deputy Ryan. He also talked about marshalling all of the expertise that is needed in particular situations, which is the kind of model we aspire towards. As we have said, we welcome the Bill that has been published and look forward to exploring it in more detail with the Deputy outside of this room.

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Social partnership does not really exist in the sense that it did many years ago.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): Under Bertie.

Mr. David Joyce: There are lots of different views on social partnership. There is a Labour Employer Economic Forum that discusses issues but does not seek to agree a way forward or anything like that. Can just transition benefit from the lessons learned from social partnership? Sure. There are aspects of that that could be very useful in developing this idea. Finally, I agree with what was said about apprenticeships.

Acting Chairman (Deputy Brian Stanley): I thank the panel for their attendance, for answering our questions and for their patience. There is no further business arising and the committee will adjourn.

The joint committee adjourned at 8.40 p.m. until 2 p.m. on Wednesday, 5 December 2018.