“As workers and activists, we know that the only way to win is to fight. Articulating a vision that is bold and transforma-
tive is one of the most crucial and difficult components of
the fight.”

These wise words were uttered by Green Jobs Oshawa orga-
nizer and laid-off GM worker Rebecca Keetch on a webinar this past April. Her statement has become more relevant as
the intertwined health, economic and climate crises con-
tinue to unfold, and as work for a just recovery has begun.

A “just recovery” is a national economic plan that responds
to the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by prioritizing the
needs of people and communities, not corporations. It is
part of a Green New Deal that calls for rapid, inclusive and
far-reaching transition at all levels of government to slash climate emissions, meet the demands of the multiple crises
we face, respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples, and create
over 1 million jobs in the process. Hundreds of organizations
from across Canada have worked together to establish six
principles for a just recovery to guide our society as we build
out of these crises – principles that should help us build a
better and fairer world than the one we had pre-COVID.

The work towards a just recovery and a Green New Deal is
already happening in communities across the country. One
example is unfolding in Oshawa, Ontario.

Green Jobs Oshawa (GJO) is a coalition of workers, com-
munity leaders, environmentalists, labour and social justice advocates who have come together to bring the
almost-empty GM Oshawa auto assembly facility under
public ownership in order to repurpose it for socially ben-
eficial manufacturing. GJO is a great example of a just re-
covery brought to life.

MANUFACTURING A JUST RECOVERY
In its early days, GJO had a vision to produce electric vehi-
cles for public fleets at the Oshawa facility, and hoped that
these vehicles could be used by services like Canada Post
or public transit systems. Then, when the COVID-19 pan-
demic struck, GJO members saw other auto manufactur-
ing plants in North America immediately retool to produce
life-saving medical equipment and products.

“It came down to the fact that if they could build it in the
States, they could build it here,” says Keetch, pointing to
the GM facility in Warren, Michigan, which was quickly
converted to manufacture masks. Seeing what was possi-
ble elsewhere, GJO issued the call for medical equipment
to be produced in Oshawa and just six weeks later, the fed-
eral government signed a contract with GM to make 10 mil-
ion surgical masks. By mid-July, workers in Oshawa had
produced 1 million of them.

GJO’s vision brings to life the principles of a just recovery
and a Green New Deal. We can use public funds and public
powers to control the manufacturing industry in Canada to
produce things our communities really need. We can ensure
workers are paid fairly and treated with dignity and respect
while making critical products that can help us through the
multiple crises we’re facing. If we can break free from the
idea that the only way to have a manufacturing sector is to
let it be controlled by private corporations and billionaires,
then we can work quickly to transform all kinds of public in-
frastucture and services to move us into a low-carbon econ-
omy – and we can create good jobs while we do it.

A GLIMPSE AT WHAT IS POSSIBLE
The short-term success of producing surgical masks was
an important steppingstone in GJO’s larger vision. Be-
cause our understanding of COVID-19 transmission has
evolved through the crisis, health care workers are de-
manding that policy makers use the precautionary prin-
ciple and equip workers with a high level of personal
protective equipment – beyond surgical masks and face
shields. So GJO organizers have set their sights on their
next goal: producing N95 face masks in Oshawa.
MAUDE BARLOW STEPS DOWN AS THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS’ HONORARY CHAIRPERSON

On June 1, 2020, with deep gratitude and respect, the Council of Canadians’ Board of Directors announced Maude Barlow was stepping down from her position of Honorary Chairperson.

The Board expressed immense gratitude for all that Maude has contributed to the organization, right from the Council’s formation in 1985 to the present day. She provided unparalleled leadership, commitment and dedication to the Council of Canadians, its values and efforts to bring people together to drive progressive change.

“Maude Barlow is one of a kind. The wisdom, thoughtfulness and experience she has shared with the Council of Canadians over so many years cannot be matched,” said John Cartwright, Chairperson of the Council’s Board of Directors. “We are so thankful for her years of tireless dedication to fighting injustice and protecting the common good.”

“It has been the honour of my life to have served the Council of Canadians for over three decades and I know the Council will continue to fight for social justice for all,” said Maude.

The Council of Canadians’ board members, staff, chapter activists, members and supporters thank Maude for her tireless and inspiring work to make a better Canada – and a better world – possible.

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While the government has made some arrangements to improve the overall stock of personal protective equipment (PPE) in Canada, it’s not enough. These contracts are with private companies that continue to be driven by profit motives rather than public health. The contracts are also falling short. The federal government has ordered 154 million N95 respirators, but as of September 2020, had only received 61 million of them.

WORKERS SUPPORT GREEN JOBS OSHAWA

It’s no surprise this campaign is getting support from across the labour and climate justice movements. What GJO is proposing could help save lives of health care workers and others.

The rate of COVID-19 infection among health care workers in Canada is much higher than in other countries. According to the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions, frontline health care providers like nurses and long-term care workers accounted for 16 per cent of Ontario’s COVID infections – a rate twice as high as China and 60 per cent higher than Italy. This is just one reason health care workers are calling for greater domestic manufacturing of and access to PPE.

GJO has garnered a broad base of support from organizations such as ours, the Canadian Union of Postal Workers, the Canadian Federation of Nurses Unions, the Ontario Council of Hospital Unions and 350.org.

GREEN NEW DEAL COMMUNITIES

The Council of Canadians is proud to be supporting Green Jobs Oshawa through our Green New Deal Communities project. We’ve been able to help make connections across movements to boost support for GJO’s work, and we’re working with organizers on digital engagement strategies to promote their work even further.

Through our Green New Deal Communities project, we’re partnering with community organizers to support local campaigns like GJO that are rooted in Green New Deal principles and are building transformative changes at a local level. Like Rebecca Keech said, “Articulating a vision that is bold and transformative is one of the most crucial and difficult components of the fight.” By providing direct support to local organizers, linking people together to create a network of inspiring local campaigns, and sharing stories like this more broadly, we want to inspire a bold and transformative vision for our collective futures.

To join the Green New Deal Communities project email greennewdeal@canadians.org. Visit canadians.org/greennewdeal to learn more. To learn more about Green Jobs Oshawa, visit greenjoboshawa.ca.

ROBIN TRESS IS A CLIMATE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE CAMPAIGNER WITH THE COUNCIL OF CANADIANS