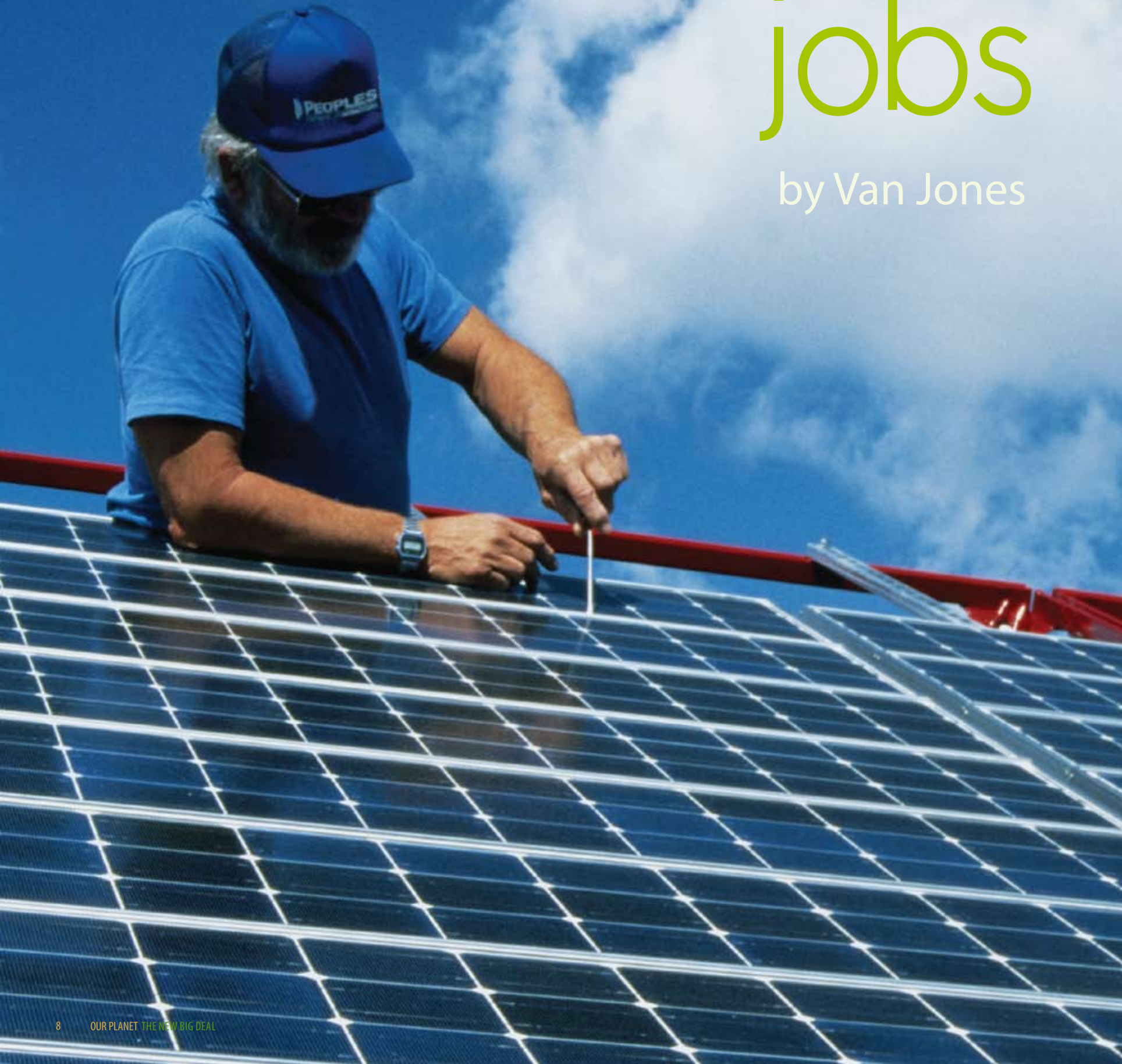


# green collar jobs

by Van Jones



Global warming and global recession require the world to have a new paradigm for development. If we are to ensure both ecological survival and economic success, we need a 'green growth' revolution — centred on expanding green collar jobs and opportunities for all people. Green collar jobs are essentially blue collar jobs, upgraded to better respect the Earth's living systems. Green collar employment is essential in rebuilding human civilization to waste fewer resources and run on clean energy.

The key insight that will enable such a paradigm shift is this: everything that is good for the environment is a job. Solar panels do not install themselves. Wind turbines don't manufacture themselves. Buildings do not weatherize and retrofit themselves. Urban trees, green roofs and community gardens do not plant themselves. All these activities require human labour. Recognizing this simple fact helps to undermine the myth that ecological restoration must always be at odds with economic performance.

The key for a sustainable world economy — and a restored United States one — is to foster activity where positive financial returns meet ecological renewal and rebirth. Hundreds of millions of people worldwide need work. And there is much work that needs to be done. By connecting the people who most need work to the work that most needs to be done, humanity can fight pollution and poverty at the same time.

PhDs — with their scientific discoveries — will be very important in this. But their contributions will matter little without the contribution of the Ph-DOs — those well-trained workers in green hard hats, who will DO the hard work of retrofitting the world's infrastructure and rebooting its energy systems. The global proliferation of such jobs — especially family-supporting career paths in the clean energy sector — must become the cornerstone of a new world economy.

In my own country, the green collar revolution will be critical to the U.S. economic recovery — and its reinvention. Sometimes something really bad has to occur before something really good can happen. As Barack Obama has repeatedly said, this is our decisive moment.

In September, we suffered a financial catastrophe. It tore the economic floor out from under the American people. But then, in November, we witnessed a spectacular political breakthrough. That historic election lifted the ceiling off our people as well. So the floor is gone. And the ceiling is gone. Today, we now are free to fall — or free to fly. It is up to us.

Before the world's most important economy can begin to soar again, we need to understand the cause of our crash. The reason for our precipitous decline in the U.S. is simple: for the past 30 years, both major political parties have promoted economic policies based on three fallacies. The first was the idea that the U.S. economy could go on forever powered more by consumption than production. The second was that we could run our economy based on endless debt and credit, rather than the smart savings and thrift practiced by our grandparents. And the final one was that we could base the economy on environmental destruction, rather than ecological restoration.

Those three fallacies — promoting endless consumption, credit and waste — define an unsustainable economy. The U.S. became the most important economy in the world — not as the biggest producer, but as the biggest consumer. And all countries — especially China — have therefore been

expected to distort their internal economies into export machines to meet our consumer demands.

In recent years, the system got so out of balance that poor countries like China began loaning money to rich America to finance our endless consumer appetites for their products. This was possible because Americans spend too much and save too little. Meanwhile, our sisters and brothers in China save too much and spend too little. As a result, China always has a big pile of cash, available for lending. And Americans always have a big pile of credit cards, looking for someone from whom to borrow. Over the past decade, we built up our entire economy on cheap credit and hocked homes. The crash we are experiencing was inevitable — and it is causing shockwaves around the world.

In future, nobody in China — simply to earn more than one dollar a day — should have to leave her village and cram herself into a smog-choked megacity just to make crap for Americans to buy. There is a better solution for Asia and other developing regions — and for the U.S. too. Each country needs its own strategy to generate employment in wise, locally rooted green economies — powered by homegrown, clean energy. That will require a global U-turn away from the three fallacies and toward their opposites: local production, thrift and ecological stewardship.

As the world's leader (per capita) in greenhouse gas emissions, the U.S. must take the lead here too. Doing so will both be good for the Earth, and lay the basis for the next American economy. As one important step: the U.S. government needs to stop paying the big polluters (through tax breaks and other supports) and start making them pay for dumping megatonnes of carbon into the atmosphere. The dollars generated can be returned to consumers to cushion the blow of any rise in energy and food costs — and can also be invested in mass transit and new technologies.

The government also should help cities weatherize and retrofit millions of buildings. It could establish a massive 'revolving loan' fund, replenished by money that green loan recipients save on energy. And we need to build a national power grid that connects our clean energy power centres to our population centres. We can power our way through the recession by repowering America with clean energy.

The good news, again, is that everything we need to combat global warming is a job, or a business contract or an entrepreneurial opportunity. The entire world must abandon the last century's 'low-road, high carbon' path to economic development. To fight poverty and pollution, all nations must choose a 'high-road, low-carbon' pathway to prosperity.

Of course, the green growth revolution must expand beyond questions of energy and climate. We must also find solutions to the crises in water, food, toxics, over-population, excessive consumption and waste. A clean energy revolution by itself will merely give us solar-powered bulldozers and bio-fuelled bombers, on a crowded and strip-mined planet.

Therefore, the road to true ecological and economic sanity will be a long one. But with vision, courage and leadership, the U.S. can go from being the world leader in pollution to the world leader in solutions. Green collar jobs will give millions of people around the world both a paycheck and a purpose — helping us to save our sister and brother species, as well as our own human family. 