



degradation. In various forms, economists from the days of Robert Malthus in the late eighteenth century have argued that population growth is also the cause of poverty. However, the world produces more than enough food to feed its current population. For example, enough grain is produced to give everyone on earth two loaves of bread a day. Even more could be produced through more efficient use of our agricultural resources. The real problem is one of distribution — of poverty and wealth. Most poor countries could feed their own populations through agricultural and economic development. Done right, that development could occur in ways that do not cause environmental damage.

In fact, development also is linked to population. It is no accident that rich countries are approaching stable populations, while poor countries must deal with rapidly increasing numbers. Persons in impoverished societies tend to have more children, because children,

and what they can earn, are essential to survival. Population growth cannot be limited without a worldwide attack on poverty.

In 1992, the Rio Conference on Environment and Development linked the issues of economic and environmental sustainability on a global basis for the first time. Its Third Principle reads, “The right to development must be fulfilled so as to equitably meet developmental and environmental needs of present and future generations.” The Kyoto Treaty of 1995 on global warming was a direct outgrowth of this historic conference. Each year since Kyoto, the Conference of the Parties to the Climate Change Convention (COP) has met to take measure of the progress achieved by the global community.

In December, 2005 the COP-11 was hosted by Canada in Montreal. At this conference representatives of the USW appeared with other NGO representatives of the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions and argued strongly for immediate engagement by the governments of the U.S. and Canada on the critical goals of the global warming treaty and economic and environmental sustainability.

In the era of modern globalization, we will be unsuccessful in solving critical environmental challenges without also solving the challenges of global poverty and the political and social instability that accompanies it. In a fundamental sense, the connection between economic justice and environmental sustainability on a global basis has linked the labor and environmental movements in every country. Without the two movements acting in concert, neither movement can succeed.





**SECURING OUR CHILDREN'S WORLD**  
Our Union and the Environment

*A Union Issue?*

### A Union Issue?

The problems of global warming, acid rain, ozone depletion, oceanic pollution and world poverty remind us that we can no longer think of ourselves solely as citizens of the U.S. or Canada, or even as North Americans. The potential catastrophe is global. The environment must be a global issue.

But is it a union issue? Should we work to protect the environment merely as good citizens, or is there a special role for our union to play? And what about industries where environmental regulations are opposed by the employers where our members work? Whose interest should we support, the environment or the employer?

In a global economy, the issues of labor, environmental and human rights have become inseparably linked. During the last fifteen years, we have seen the devastation that lack of labor standards in trade agreements caused industrial communities. Millions of manufacturing jobs were destroyed in North America, relocated to low-wage, poorly regulated economies.

Middle class communities deteriorated. Living standards declined rapidly in economically abandoned areas of both our countries.

The enormous downward pressure of the global economy has eroded environmental standards as well. Common sense solutions to cleaning up the environment have been replaced by corporate recklessness in the face of mounting evidence that the effects of global warming are already upon us.

In a global economy, sustainability should be the true measure of both corporate conduct and public policies. The union must now ask on behalf of our members whether a company's policies are

sustainable over the long run. Or will they only benefit a few shareholders for a few short years? For instance, we must have sustainable forest management practices if our members' jobs in the forest products and paper industries are to last and their communities survive.

Sustainable economies recognize strong labor rights. They also promote sound environmental practices. And they stabilize the climate, avoiding the disastrous consequences of global warming.

The answer to our question is clear. The environment is an essential union issue, the same way that globalization and trade are essential union issues. If we are to be successful in pursuing a world that is more economically just and sustainable in the long-term, environmental work must be part of our mission at every level of the union.

### First, we must protect our children's world.

Steelworkers have always fought for a better life for their children. Most of us are the descendants of immigrants who came to the United States or Canada seeking a better future, not just for themselves, but for later generations as well. They sacrificed enormously to build a finer tomorrow for their offsprings. They created this union as a force to ensure that their sons and daughters would have a better life.

Today, the greatest threat to our children's future is the destruction of their environment. Some of the worst consequences of environmental damage, such as global warming and the death of the oceans, we once believed would not occur in our lifetime. But today we realize that many of these problems are upon us now and, if we do nothing, will devastate the world of our children.

The Bush Administration believes we can ignore the problems and simply adapt. Others still believe that we can leave the problem to future generations — that is a delusion. Like a bad debt, the cost increases every day. CFCs were first developed in the 1930s. By the early 1970s several scientists warned about their capacity for damaging the ozone.

However CFC manufacturers, led by DuPont, argued for delay. CFCs were banned from aerosol sprays in the U.S. and Canada in 1978, but other uses quickly filled the gap. It took almost ten more years to achieve an agreement cutting the use of CFCs, during which time 15 billion pounds were produced. The ultimate damage has been much greater as a result.

The longer we wait, the worse it will get. It will cost billions to clean up toxic waste problems that could have been avoided for far less money, and with far fewer cases of death and disease. It will cost our children much more to tackle these problems than it will cost us. Leaving it all to them is the worst sort of irresponsibility.

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But if we act today, many of the problems, particularly global warming, can be solved in a way in which far-reaching economic benefits are realized by the people of North America. As we have stated before, the global economy can be restructured in a way that raises standards of living worldwide and insures environmental sustainability. The alternative, the current path of globalization, traps all of us in a race to the bottom in which short-term corporate profits demand ever lower labor and environmental standards.

**Second, protecting the environment ultimately protects our jobs.**

In the 1970's when the environmental movement first started winning legislative victories cleaning up our air and water the common assumption was that protecting the environment would destroy the jobs of thousands — maybe millions — of workers in our basic, smokestack industries. What actually happened?

In hindsight, the great loss of manufacturing jobs in North America over the last three decades had very little to do with the rise of environmental regulation and everything to do with the integration of the world economy. At the time it was easy for manufacturers to point at environmental costs and blame them for the decisions to close or relocate factories. Today, we can recognize that companies were really making these decisions based on the long-term profitability of operating in low wage countries. The auto industry didn't outsource its part suppliers to Mexico and China because of environmental costs, but because labor costs could be reduced by as much as 90 percent. New mines were opened in South America and Indonesia because of lax labor laws and low labor costs. In the last five years, we can clearly see that the three million manufacturing jobs that vanished from the U.S. economy had almost nothing to do with domestic environmental regulation, and everything to do with U.S. corporate trade policy.

In a technological sense, the solutions to environmental problems are well within our grasp. Some may require continued research while we take the first steps, but none are beyond our technical capacity. Air and water pollution can be virtually eliminated by redesigning manufacturing processes, switching to cleaner products, installing good control technology, and recycling more of what we currently throw away.

Many toxic chemicals can be replaced by safer ones. Those that cannot, can be confined to closed manufacturing systems and recycled after use. Abandoned waste dumps will be with us for a long time, but they too can be cleaned up through a concerted program.

Acid rain is caused by a particular form of air pollution — oxides of sulfur and nitrogen.

Acid rain can be controlled by capturing those pollutants through the use of scrubbers and other devices installed on power plants, certain industrial sources, and automobiles.

The ozone layer is being restored by phasing out the chlorofluorocarbons and other chemicals that destroy it. The international agreements on ozone depletion and the successful use of substitutes show that even worldwide problems can be solved.

Solutions to global warming will be much more difficult. Cutting carbon dioxide emissions will take a massive worldwide effort — but it can be done. However, the U.S. must engage in the international process initiated by the Kyoto Treaty. Technological barriers are not the problem. Political barriers, thrown up by the oil and coal lobbies are.

Immediate gains can be made by more efficient use of energy, such as better building insulation, greater automotive fuel efficiency, new mass transit systems and improved energy recovery in industrial plants. West Germany and Japan, for example, are almost twice as energy efficient as North America, as measured by the amount of energy it takes to produce an equivalent amount of gross national product.

The future energy needs of the U.S. can either be met through the construction of 120 plus new coal-fired power plants or through investment in alternate nonpolluting sources of energy-like wind, solar, and biomass. Today, Germany directly employs 40,000 people in its wind energy industry which consumes more steel in Germany than any other industry except automotive. Germany, with a fraction of the U.S. land mass and one-fourth our population, produces three times as much wind energy. Capital costs for the production of wind energy in prime locations are now lower than for coal. Economic studies from the Union of Concerned Scientists show that investment in renewable energy sources also creates more jobs — four times more jobs than with natural gas and 40

