

percent more than with coal. No one believes that coal and natural gas will disappear from our energy mix, but our expanding energy needs can and must be met from clean renewable energy sources. We also need to study the role of safe and well-secured nuclear power in our power mix to determine whether its challenges, such as the development of an experimental safe nuclear reactor and the permanent disposal of nuclear waste, can be resolved satisfactorily.

None of this, however, will be easy. The real problems are not technical — they are economic and political. Our society will change enormously

responsibilities are diffused throughout multiple companies — each of which is driven by its own profit-motive — effective social outcomes are less likely. Overall environmental goals become difficult to achieve. And health and safety concerns of workers and communities are brushed aside. This is especially true in British Columbia (BC) today in the logging industry where the dismantling of government enforced standards has led to the highest fatality rates in modern BC logging history.

Steelworkers have heard the argument before that environmental protection causes job losses. For many years companies have tried to use economic and environmental blackmail on the union and its members. In every fight for a new health and safety regulation, or better wages, or improved pensions, there is a corporate economist to tell us that if we persist, the company or the industry will fold, with hundreds or thousands of lost jobs. It rarely turns out to be true, and for good reason. Someone has to design the cleaner process or equipment. Someone has to build it. Someone has to install it. Someone has to operate it. Someone has to maintain it.

In the long run, the real choice is not jobs or the environment. It's both or neither. What kind of jobs will be possible in a world of depleted resources, poisoned water and foul air, a world where ozone depletion and greenhouse warming make it difficult even to survive? Securing our children's world, ensuring clean jobs, and planning a decent future are too important to

leave to management alone.

Even in the short run, companies that exist only by destroying their resource base, or pushing their environmental costs off onto others, will not be in business very long. Some plants have shut down, not because they acted responsibly toward their neighbors, but because they did not. For example, the Johns Manville Corporation declared bankruptcy in 1982 after projecting billions of dollars of potential liability for diseases caused by the company's failure to warn users about the risks of asbestos. Thousands of workers lost their jobs in the resulting shake-up.

Jobs can be lost in any time of change — and the changes ahead are enormous.

Sometimes the cause is short-term greed, the desire to make a fast buck and get out, abandoning workers and the community. Sometimes the cause is management's unwillingness or inability to adapt to changing conditions. The Ethyl plant in Baton

regardless of which path we choose, either through our efforts to save our environment, or because environmental destruction finally overwhelms us. In a very real sense we can either choose to prevent the future generation of storms like Katrina and Rita or we can choose to rebuild repeatedly from an ever increasing cycle of destructive weather disasters. Regardless, our countries will have to provide equitable and effective emergency responses to such tragedies, including the building of levees even in poor neighbourhoods. As a union, we cannot stand aside from these issues. Our choices are to be the victims of change, or to control that change to the benefit of ourselves and our children.

We also want to note the trend toward government and private enterprise outsourcing which makes accountability more and more difficult. When the essential functions of any organization are increasingly fragmented and

Rouge, La., was a major producer of lead additives for gasoline. When the government banned leaded gas in 1985, management shut the plant down, putting more than a thousand members of USWA Local Union 12900 out of work. Yet the plant could have adapted to the manufacture of other products, as Allied Signal is doing in the example cited earlier.

Or look at the current example of the U.S. automotive industry which has steadfastly opposed improved fuel efficiency standards. Now, in an era of high gas prices, consumers cannot afford to drive inefficient engines. The U.S. Big Three's share of the North American auto market is now at an all time low. Failure to operate in an environmentally sustainable fashion has grave economic consequences for workers.

Some corporate managers try to pass the cost of their own misdeeds off onto their workers. For example, at Uniroyal Chemical, near Guelph, Ontario, 230 members of USWA Local Union 13691 went on strike in May 1990, when the company demanded concessions in order to pay the cost of cleaning up a leaky, poorly designed waste site.

The Steelworkers Toronto Area Council has embarked on a program to include environmental issues in bargaining with those employers who use or produce large quantities of toxic materials. Instead of waiting for those employers to demand concessions because of their failure to address environmental concerns, the union is building a pro-active approach, identifying the problems, meeting with the community, and devising strategies for improvement. Working with local environmental groups and other unions as well as City Council and Public Health, the Steelworkers are part of the city's "Community Right to Know" initiative to clean up the city and reduce chemical hazards.

Some companies understand that their own survival depends on their environmental record, but many do not. We cannot expect the company or the government to defend our interests for us. Protecting our children's future and our own jobs requires collective bargaining and political action. We must push our own companies to improve, not only as a way of protecting the environment, but as a way of preserving jobs as well. At the same time, we must recognize that some plants will close no matter what we do. It does not help these workers to argue that other jobs will be created somewhere else, in some other industry. Protecting the environment does create jobs overall, but displaced work-

ers need jobs in their own communities, not the knowledge that others are benefiting from their sacrifice. It is, after all, the worker, not the government or corporate stockholder, who has the most to lose when a plant closes.

Just transition. It is fundamentally unfair to require working people to absorb the cost of environmental controls that benefit society as a whole. Nor is it politically workable, since it inevitably creates opposition to environmental reform, and pits workers against environmentalists.

The only answer is to link environmental reform with economic justice. Cleaning up the environment and improving public health should never be accomplished on the backs of workers. In particular, income protection and job retraining should be automatic for those who are displaced because of new environmental regulations, or the failure of their employers to adapt.

In the past, the USW and other unions lobbied intensively to add an Environmental Adjustment Assistance provision to the Clean Air Act, and to make similar improvements to the unemployment compensation systems in Canada. In addition, companies that curtail operations temporarily in order to install new equipment, or to comply with pollution regulations, should be required to continue the earnings of affected workers. In fact, such a provision was written into the

1977 Clean Air Act Amendments in the United States, for workers in copper smelters that shut down temporarily in order to reduce their average emissions to allowable levels. At the Rocky Flats nuclear plant in Golden, Colo., USW Local Union 8031 won an order from the U.S. Department of Energy requiring full earnings protection while production was suspended for a thorough cleanup. In Canada, Local 1064 continues to actively lobby for work for its members in the clean up of the coke ovens and tar ponds of Sydney Steel, now that the steel mill has closed.

Ultimately, protecting the environment will require cleaner products, methods of production and sources of energy. That, in turn, will take research. Direct steelmaking that bypasses coke ovens and blast furnaces is one such technology. Inert anode and wettable cathode technology in the aluminum industry is another. These new methods could greatly cut plant pollution and energy costs and increase the competitiveness of North American companies. But without proper planning, it could affect thousands of jobs and further impoverish

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steelworker communities. Technological improvements are essential to a cleaner environment. However, new technology — especially that funded by the government — must be subject to democratic planning, and introduced in a way that protects the economic interests of workers and communities, as well as companies.

We cannot serve our members by ignoring environmental issues. We cannot protect them by pretending to resist change. Our mission is to adapt to change and to channel it for the long-term benefit of our members and all working people.

● **Third, Globalization is our common foe, linking the environment to other union issues.**

● Economic forces are the key to almost every union issue. Environmental issues are no different.

● Companies usually try to “externalize” their costs — to make someone else pay part of the real cost of production, for example when workers are asked to pick up part of the cost of their health insurance.

● Sometimes those costs are hidden. Bad working conditions lead to an increase in occupational accidents and illness. Some of that cost is paid by the workers’ compensation system; most of it, however, is absorbed by the victims themselves in disability and lost income, and by all the rest of us, in higher overall medical and insurance bills.

Often these externalized costs are much larger than the costs the company avoided by refusing to improve conditions in the first place. But the company’s concern is its own bottom line, not the overall cost to society.

As trade unionists, we understand this process well. Our efforts to win higher wages, improved pensions, adequate insurance and safe working conditions are efforts to stop the company from dumping its costs onto us.

Environmental economics work the same. Some companies try to maximize their profits by ignoring the cost to the environment. Pollution is pumped into the air and water, toxic chemicals are allowed to escape, greenhouse and ozone-depleting gases are generated because the cost to the environment never appears in the company’s balance sheet.

But the cost is real. And while the cost of environmental damage may be external to the company, the earth itself is a closed system. Considering the earth as a whole, there is no such thing as an external cost.

A healthy economy is essential to a healthy environment. Protecting the environment ultimately means more efficient production, with less drain on the earth’s resources, and less waste. But it will cost money to research, design and implement new controls; it will cost money to substitute new products for old.

Economic justice is critical. Without a full em-

ployment economy, workers displaced because their companies failed to adapt will be unable to find new jobs. Labor rights are important also, to ensure that jobs provide decent wages and benefits. In fact, the environment impacts almost every labor issue. Our health care system, for example, is stressed by the burden of environmental disease. The problems of poor people and minorities are made worse by the fact that they are often forced to live in the most polluted areas.

On a global scale, it is useless to work for a clean environment without also working for economic justice and human rights. It is no accident that a country like Indonesia, where the U.S.-based Newmont Mining Company was recently exposed for polluting coastal fishing areas with dangerous carcinogens and Freeport Mining acknowledged bribing the country's military leaders, has both low wage levels and repressive labor rights. It is no accident that the residents of maquiladora areas on the U.S.-Mexican border live in polluted hovels surrounded by raw sewage, walking to work in factories like the Alcoa wire harness plant in Peidras Negras that pays \$.87 an hour doing jobs once performed in the U.S.

Our union is well aware that the same companies who are the worst violators of labor laws and human rights standards, invariably are the worst polluters and violators of environmental regulations.

Some companies may try to avoid strong environmental regulations by moving overseas. But the answer is not to repeal our own laws, any more than the answer to global competition is to cut our own wages to poverty levels. Instead, we should work with unions and governments in developing countries to improve conditions there. This is exactly the reason the USW has recently signed strategic alliances with seven major unions in Europe, South Africa, South America, and Australia. We also need to form strategic alliances with environmental organizations in North America and other continents to influence corporate environmental conduct.

A good first step would be to stop making the problems of developing countries worse than they already are. Some industrialized countries have tried to use poorer nations as a dumping ground for toxic waste. That practice should be prohibited by international law. In addition, we should forbid the export of products and processes prohibited in the exporting country because they damage health or the environment, and work to ensure that all other exports can be used safely.

Correspondingly, we should restrict the import of products made in ways that damage the environment. It does not help the world environment to export pollution — and jobs — to countries unwilling to meet fair standards. Since the WTO protests

in Seattle in 1999, the world has come to understand the powerful linkage between labor rights and environmental standards. All trade agreements should contain enforceable labor and environmental standards. Without this safeguard the countries of the world will have no protection against the unethical conduct of corporations that move around the globe to escape protections for workers and the world we live in.

The World Commission on Environment and Development, set up in 1983 by the United Nations, has defined its goal as “sustainable development,” finding a way to meet our present needs without destroying the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. In the words of the commission: “Sustainable development requires meeting the basic needs of all and extending to all the opportunity to fulfill their aspirations for a better life. A world in which poverty is endemic will always be prone to ecological and other catastrophes.”

These prophetic words are even more important today. As the rapid expansion of the economies of China and India has accelerated the shortage of natural resources throughout the world, raising the prices of commodities from oil to iron ore, economic and environmental sustainability have become critical to our survival, our prosperity and a peaceful planet.

Taking Action—A Strategic Alliance between the Labor and Environmental Movements

Fifteen years ago we pointed out that unions have always led the fight for economic justice and human rights. We have sought to increase the income of all workers, organized and unorganized. We have struggled for better working conditions and fair treatment on the job. We have worked to ensure better pensions for our parents, and a better education for our children.

Frequently, we have fought for safer working conditions — in other words, for a cleaner environment inside our plants. Workers have a gut understanding of environmental issues — 100,000 North Americans die each year from workplace diseases caused by the same chemicals that later find their way into our air and water. The environment outside the workplace is only an extension of the environment inside.

Today, the greatest threat to our children's world is the destruction of their environment. Protecting it is more than good citizenship; it is an essential program for unions and their members. And in the era of globalization, an alliance between the labor and environmental movements is fundamental to building a powerful, progressive movement for change.

The USW and its predecessor unions have had an environmental program for almost 40 years. We



held our first conference on air pollution in 1969, more than a year before the first “Earth Day.” A conference in Denver examined pollution from smelters in the western United States in 1973. In 1973 the OCAW conducted the first environmental strike against the Shell Oil Company. USW District 6 held air pollution conferences as early as 1966. A 1980 USWA Convention resolution warned of the dangers of global warming, years before it became a matter of widespread public concern. In 1989, the Canadian Policy Conference adopted a strong policy paper on the environment. And from 1992 to 1995, the Canadian National office ran an education program that was delivered at local union and area council meetings focused on environmental protection and energy conservation issues.

In our early years, the USW saw environmental protection as a legislative issue. We provided strong lobbying support for nearly every major environmental bill in the U.S. Congress, the Canadian Parliament, state legislatures, and provincial assemblies. In the United States, the USW has been an active member of the National Clean Air Coalition, and was instrumental in the passage of the 1990 Clean Air Act and earlier legislation. In Canada, the USW participated in the Canadian Coalition on Acid Rain. In turn, environmental groups helped us achieve many of the right-to-know laws in the United States, and effective chemical testing regulations in Canada.

Some USW locals have worked hard on environmental issues. Local Union 6500, at the Inco nickel smelter in Sudbury, Ontario, fought sulfur dioxide pollution since the local was chartered in 1961. The local helped force the Ontario government to begin measuring pollution levels in the town. In coalition with neighboring environmental and community groups, Inco steelworkers won dramatic improvements in pollution control.

Environmental committees were also established by Local Union 1010, District 31, at Inland Steel in Indiana, and Local Union 480, District 3, at the Cominco Lead/Zinc smelter in Trail, British Columbia. The committees work with environmentalists from the community to protect both jobs and the environment.

These locals pointed the way. The environment was not just a legislative issue. Protecting our children's future and our own jobs from the threat of environmental destruction is a job for all levels of the union. In recognition of this truth, the union created its new “Health, Safety and Environment” department in 1990.

Throughout the 1990's our union learned that

one of the keys to winning its struggles against rogue global corporations was to build alliances with environmental organizations which were also concerned about corporate misconduct. These alliances were critical to winning our major labor disputes at Ravenswood Aluminum, Bridgestone-Firestone, AK Steel, Kaiser Aluminum, and Asarco, to name just a few.

However, some people still say the task of environmental protection is too big for any one local, or union, or country. Certainly it is. But that has never stopped us from fighting for economic justice or human rights in the past. The biologist Rene Dubos coined a phrase that sums it up: “Think globally; act locally.” We should not forget the global nature of the problem, but we must not be paralyzed. In this issue, as in any other, an active union can have an impact.

In fact, workers are in a key position in the fight for environmental quality. Violations of pollution regulations can be difficult for the public to spot. Nor is it possible for the government to monitor continuously every potential polluter. It is much harder to hide illegal behavior from plant workers. And through collective bargaining and the power of the union, organized workers have an especially effective tool for forcing a cleanup.

Some maintain that environmental problems can be solved through individual actions, like turning off lights, reusing plastic bags and car pooling to work. Individual efforts are valuable and they should be promoted. They can help cut pollution and decrease the waste of our resources. More important, they can help establish a personal commitment to protecting the environment.

But individual efforts are not enough. Car pooling will not force Detroit to build vehicles that do not pump carbon dioxide into the air; cutting our use of plastic bags will not lead to the development of safer manufacturing processes for plastics; turning off the lights will not get scrubbers built on coal-fired utility plants or expand the use of renewable energy. In fact, individual energy use accounts for only about 30 percent of total consumption.

As union members, we have learned the value of collective action. We do not tell oppressed workers to handle it themselves, individually. We attack the problem with the strength that comes from organization. We do promote individual efforts — consumer boycotts are a good example. But we focus our efforts on organizing, collective bargain-

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