

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

At first glance, this seems to run counter to everything we have heard about environmental issues. The common assumption seems to be that protecting the environment will destroy the jobs of thousands -- maybe millions -- of workers in our basic, smokestack industries. Which view is correct?

In a technological sense, the solutions to environmental problems are 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 can be preserved by phasing out the chlorofluorocarbons and other chemicals that destroy it. The new international agreements on ozone depletion, and the current research on substitutes, show that even worldwide problems can be solved.

Solutions to global warming will be more difficult. Cutting carbon dioxide emissions will take a massive worldwide effort. But it can be done. 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. In the long run, alternate non-polluting sources of energy like solar power can largely replace fossil fuels. Coal and petroleum could then be used as feedstocks for the chemical industry, creating new products instead of being wastefully burned.

None of this, however, will be easy or cheap. The real problems are not technical -- they are economic and political. Our society will change enormously, either through our efforts to save our environment, or because environmental destruction finally overwhelms us. As a union, we cannot stand aside from these issues. Difficult choices will have to be made. The only question is who will make those choices, and how? Will working people be the victims of change, or will we help control that change to the benefit of ourselves and our children?

Steelworkers have heard the jobs argument before. 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 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?

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 shakeup.

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 Rouge, Louisiana, 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.

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.

Some companies understand that their own survival depends on their environmental record. But many do not. We cannot expect the company or the government, or for that matter the environmental community, 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 may create jobs on the average, but displaced workers need jobs themselves, not the knowledge that some other worker is 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.

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 issues with economic justice. In particular, income protection and job retraining should be automatic for workers who are displaced because of new environmental regulations, or the failure of their employers to adapt. For example, the USWA and other unions are lobbying intensively to add an Environmental Adjustment Assistance provision to the Clean Air Act currently in the U.S. Congress, 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, Colorado, USWA Local Union 8031 has won an order from the U.S. Department of Energy requiring full earnings protection while production is suspended for a thorough cleanup.

Ultimately, protecting the environment will require cleaner products, methods of production and sources of energy. That, in turn, will take research. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy has joined with several major steel companies to develop a direct steelmaking system that bypasses coke ovens and blast furnaces. The new method could greatly cut steel plant pollution, and increase the competitiveness of North American companies. But without proper planning, it could affect thousands of jobs and further impoverish steel 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.