

LETTERS

We welcome your letters for our next issue. As a general rule they should be no longer than 300 words and, preferably, be typewritten.

ALR reserves the right to edit letters down to length.

Authors names and addresses and a contact 'phone number should be included, although, naturally, they will not be published. The deadline for letters is four weeks prior to publication date.

Carmichael and the environment

Laurie Carmichael (ALR 110) notes that: "It is now commonplace to say that the world is proceeding through a technological revolution. The big question for us is whether we share its benefits in Australia effectively guarding against the dangers it can bring." Undoubtedly, trade unions must focus on the need of working people vis-a-vis technological change and the dangers it can bring. Indeed, Carmichael went on to provide us with a valuable challenge to the Taylorist model of management and alienating work practices, the result of deskilling.

His analysis, however, failed by virtue of its blinkered horizon even to identify the greatest danger facing trade unionists in Australia and, indeed, the world, and one which is clearly the result of the Industrial Revolution - the destruction of the planet itself.

More damage has been done to the earth in the last hundred years of industrial production than in the previous 100,000 years. The trade unions have been, admittedly, an unequal and ignorant partner in the damage, but ignorance can no longer excuse the union movement from its responsibility as a primary participant in the 'development' and 'technological progress' philosophies of high-tech industrial methods of production.

Put bluntly, unionists deserve a broader and more environmentally informed analysis of the effect of the current technological revolution than the stated vision of Laurie Carmichael: "A further concomitant of the technology is its ability to deliver greater consistency, uniqueness of design, durability and warranty. In short, quality and service have been placed by history alongside of price as a principal market determinant."

It would be irresponsible and wrong to adopt an anti-technology view but it is equally irresponsible for unions to adopt the 'business as usual' approach promoted by the multinationals and governments. The current ACTU direction illuminated by the process of 'structural efficiency' can be applauded on a narrow economic level, but to try to articulate such a program without reference to fundamental environmental imperatives is simply a recipe for more efficient destruction of the planet.

The biological diversity of our planet is disappearing at a literally stunning rate. More than 60,000 of the 265,000 known plant species are in danger of extinction. By the end of this century a full one-fifth of the known and estimated plant and animal species of the earth may be gone.

Greenhouse heating of the atmosphere can no longer be dismissed as the exaggerated claims of demonstrating greenies. It is an internationally recognised crisis affecting the ecological stability and survival of the earth. Yet, at the same time, the fragile stability of our national and world economy depends on the expansion of production and burning of fossil fuels which produce greenhouse gases primarily through electricity generation, transportation and manufacturing.

How reasonable are left union strategies for the future which do not even consider the environmental crisis? So far, timber workers, with ACTU support, have joined state governments and multinational corporations in approving increased consumption of our forests. These trees give us oxygen and absorb carbon. More trees and forests help to lower the greenhouse heating. In 200 years of white settlement of Australia, we have removed 50 percent of the forest area; 75 percent of the rainforests have been cleared; and 69 percent of

range land has been badly degraded: not to mention that 40 of the known 329 mammal species in Australia are threatened with extinction.

The union movement so far has either taken a stand *against* conservation or has remained silent. Where will the left unions stand on issues such as drastically reducing the production and use of fossil fuels, coal and oil? On slowing down - maybe eliminating - high energy industries (aluminium, for example)? Where will they stand on the manufacture of polluting chemicals and motor vehicles which are one of the major emitters of greenhouse gases?

Hundreds of thousands of unionists are employed in industries which are directly involved in threatening the planet's survival. Union strategies also encourage more efficient production in return for better pay, allowing unionists to consume more of the material goods which themselves contribute to the environmental crisis.

Looking ahead, even in the short term, there will have to be massive changes to many industries vital to corporate capital. Ideologues of the trade union left, then, should now be demanding an environmental 'Accord' involving unions, governments, employers, environmentalists, scientists and other community groups. Such an Accord could act as part of the necessary global co-operation to save the earth by placing moral and environmental judgments on the process of technological innovation.

Brian Moynihan
AJA, NSW Branch,
Sydney.

... and timber workers

My compliments and congratulations on an interesting and thought-provoking magazine - especially Diana Simmond's article "It's easy being Green" (ALR 111).

I'm glad that some people recognise that timber workers are not the villains of the piece...

Paul Cooke
Forbes,
NSW

ERRATA: In ALR 111, "Liberte, Egalite, Publicite" was written by Colin Mercer.