

CHAIN REACTION ARTICLE: 1291 words.

## ***“EARTHWORKER AND ALLIANCE BUILDING”***

### ***A LONG TIME COMING.....A LONG WAY TO GO***

*Earthworker* was an Electrical Trades Union, Friends of the Earth and Rail, Tram, Bus Industry Union initiative.

It arose out of discussions around the issue of union-green relations, the history of where we got those relations right, and an analysis of the points at which those relations broke down.

For many months the idea of *Earthworker* was talked about widely. Time was allowed for discussion around the “jobs vs environment” debate and a range of other issues affecting relations between the two social movements. Some people, understandably, even became frustrated at the amount of time allocated to talking these things through.

However when you look at what has come out of the discussion, real dialogue has actually started to occur where people are truly listening, rather than attempting to ram home their particular point.

Out of this atmosphere a new way of working is developing which relies upon *the best traditions of labour: solidarity, mutual aid and cooperation, combined with the best traditions of the green movement: interconnection, inclusivity and openness.*

One of the first positions reached, the *raison d’etre* for *Earthworker*, was that *a phoney dichotomy had been deliberately created between worker/unionist and green.* In establishing *Earthworker* the obvious was accepted, that the vast majority of active greens were unionists and/or supporters of unionism. Likewise the vast majority of unionists we knew were greens.

The acceptance of this overarching truth led to the establishment of *the primary activity of Earthworker: to develop "Agreed Lists"* between affiliates from both the green and union movements. These lists are to contain those things which can be jointly actioned.

There are, of course, areas of the traditional green project around which there is a lot of heat. *Earthworker's* role is to, by developing the *Agreed Lists*, create an atmosphere, a working relationship within which discussion around differences of opinion and action can begin within a framework of solidarity.

*Earthworker is also there to act as a conduit* which allows for the dissemination of union ideas, articles and data throughout those green organisations affiliated, and as well to telescope the excellent work done by green organisations onto the shopfloor. We are doing this by coordinating deadlines, organising for joint articles to be written when requested, and by generally cross referencing the publications of each movement.

Currently there are 14 unions and 3 green organisations, affiliated to *Earthworker*, and the organisation has a room at Trades Hall, above the bookshop. Apart from allowing, at last, for the natural greening of our union movement, *Earthworker* seeks to unionise the green organisations. Friends of the Earth has full union membership of its workers, and is campaigning within its membership for unionism. Environment Victoria is fully unionised.

working ones

As this project continues we are confident that our movements will move closer towards each other in our joint efforts to defend working people and the planet. We do this in full knowledge of the obvious truth that one cannot exist any longer without the other; that much of the damage to the planet will need to be consciously reversed by human hands.

copy contribution

Leadership

working organisations

Earthworker set subscription  
or affiliation

## **AN EXAMPLE OF THE PRIMARY ACTIVITY:**

One of *Earthworker's* first active initiatives was to suggest to industry unions that now was the opportune time to put the work in to establish a Solar, Wind and Water industry in this country.

Dean Mighell and the Electrical Trades Union (ETU) and Craig Johnston and the Amalgamated Manufacturing Workers Union (AMWU) agreed that it was time, and they allocated a worker each, once a week, to work with a range of experts, academics and industry players to actually get such an industry on its feet. A major *Agreed List* was up and running.

The action group has been functioning for around five weeks, and is now at a stage where it is beginning in-confidence approaches to industry which will lay the foundation for pilot projects, leading to a widespread growth in all aspects of alternative energy, from manufacture to installation, generation and distribution.

We will be working through issues around apprenticeship training as well, so that we pick up the new "alternatech" modules which will be the basis for new workplaces within the burgeoning industry.

Anyone out there with expertise and knowledge, or who knows of anyone in that category who may wish to work with the Solar, Wind and Water action group of *Earthworker*, please feel free to contact us.

Whereas Australia has had some of the finest minds in the world working in this area for many years, we are not arrogant enough to have forgotten one of the most basic of union principles: *that our, the ordinary people's, experience is a true source of knowledge and wisdom.*

So as a unionist in whatever capacity, as secretary, organiser, delegate or activist, please feel free to get involved. Even if that involvement is informed questioning, they could be the very questions which correct a mistaken view, or change an incorrect perception.

The green expertise out there within organisations like Friends of the Earth, and contained within the very practical efforts of progressive, consensus-based businesses like “Going Solar”, has always been right about the need for a change in energy/power directions.

*Earthworker* seeks in its work to take the valuable work of organisations like these and telescope that work, increasing its impact, opening doors for its information, placing information and communications into the hands of the right people, taking the heat out “jobs versus environment situations” which have arisen due to Greenwashing.

As an all unions green caucus, *Earthworker's* role is to ensure that workers win the democratic right to have the dominant say, as the vast majority of the world's population, in questions around the survival of our planet.

At the moment 1000 people a month in Victoria are enrolling in Energy Efficiency Victoria's “Green Power” initiative. This is where people pay a voluntary premium on their energy bill in order to be able to buy green power. Clearly working people want to be able to make certain decisions and choices.

Unions and green organisations affiliated to *Earthworker* intend to see that the necessary industry infrastructure is in place, so that fellow workers and businesses can eventually buy their primary power from alternative sources. (Queries/suggestions/assistance to Dave Kerin on 0417.607.011 or email: [dave@etu.asn.au](mailto:dave@etu.asn.au))

## *No Jobs On a Dead Planet Tour.*

*Earthworker* plans to see in the new millennium with this November tour. It will be a week of activities which look at past successes, and a week which looks to a future based upon solidarity with each other as workers, and with our planet.

The tour will consist of a journey around past Green Ban sites in Melbourne, a launch of the "Solar, Wind and Water Industry Plan", a seminar which we hope will lay the foundation for some new sustainable directions in Superannuation investment, and a whole lot more activities.

By November also, we have set the target of having at least current affiliates' journals cross referenced. So that all the valuable union information about the looming battles against Reith's second wave gets into the green publications, and relevant green material gets into the appropriate union journals.

To conclude in the manner we began, *Earthworker* is not there to repeat the work of existing green and union organisations. In fact it is constitutionally bound not to do so. It's role is to telescope the information and activities of each social movement into the other. To lay the basis for alliances which are open and not subject to destabilisation by any vested interests. To build the work of each in the interests of all.

*When the Workers Say  
"Yes!" to the Planet,  
Who can Say "NO"?*