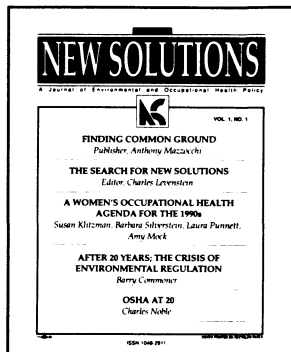


# Labor Bookshelf

## ***New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy.***

Published four times a year in association with the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union, AFL-CIO. \$40 for one-year subscription. Make checks payable to *New Solutions*, P.O. Box 2812, Denver, CO 80201.

*Earlier this year, OCAW Secretary-Treasurer Anthony Mazzocchi, one of the "founding fathers" of the OSH movement in the late 1960s, started a new publication that embodies and seeks to further the growing coalition of OSH and environmental activists. We reprint here Mazzocchi's Publisher's Introduction to the first issue of New Solutions.*



---

## **FINDING COMMON GROUND: Our Commitment to Confront the Issues**

*by Anthony Mazzocchi*

Twenty years ago, protests from organized labor and from environmental and public interest groups heralded the beginning of a new wave of environmental activism. The passage of the Coal Mine Safety and Health Act in 1969, the Occupational Safety and Health Act in 1969 and the National Environmental Protection Act in 1970 promised to provide workers and the public alike with significant protection from hazardous materials and processes, both on the job and in their communities.

In those days, those most active in the movement took it for granted that the interests of workers and community members in a safe and healthy workplace were inseparable. That I should be asked, as a labor official active in environmental issues, to chair the first Earth Day ceremonies in April 1970 at New York's Union Square, struck no one as unusual. The labor movement and the environmental movement were working together on a common cause.

Things have changed. The end of the post-war economic boom in 1973 resulted in the radical restructuring of the U.S. economy and the loss of hundreds of thousands of unionized, manufacturing jobs. Workers became increasingly reluctant to complain about health and safety problems, even as the grassroots environmental

movement—spurred on by a growing number of tragic incidents and catastrophic accidents—became ever more vocal in demanding an end to the unchecked, heedless growth of the hazardous waste stream and, as much as possible, the complete elimination of toxic materials from the production cycle. This put the trade unions and the environmental movement on the collision course they find themselves to this day.

Those of us in the trade union movement, who represent people employed in industries that either use or produce hazardous materials, now find ourselves caught on the horns of a difficult dilemma:

On the one hand, our first concern is to protect the jobs, incomes, and working conditions of our members. That is what they elected us to do, and if we can't do it, they are within their rights to replace us. Which they do.

On the other hand, people who work in hazardous industries, as most OCAW members do, want safe jobs and a healthy environment, just like everyone else. And they expect us to do everything we can to ensure that their employers provide them with a workplace free from all recognized hazards, as the Occupational Safety and Health Act requires.

The problem is that these two goals often seem to conflict with one another. Ask workers at home if they support government efforts to clean up the air or the water, and they will most likely say yes. Ask them at work, after the company has told them that new OSHA or EPA regulations threaten their jobs, and they will most likely say no.

They are right both times. Most people are astute analysts of their own best interests. Workers know that they are the first to die from exposure to hazardous materials, both at the workplace and in the community. They also know that their families can't live on clean air and clean water alone. And they know that if they didn't have a job, or one that paid as well as many of the jobs in the petrochemical and atomic industries do, they would live less well and die a lot sooner.

Both the trade unions and the environmental movement need to find a way to help working people escape from this cruel choice. We can't go on forever always putting off until tomorrow the necessary task of cleaning up the mess we make today. We are rapidly running out of corners into which the dirt can be swept. At the same time, we can't expect most people voluntarily to give up all the benefits of modern industry, which has enabled more of us to enjoy a higher standard of living than has ever been true before, without offering a realistic alternative—a different, if not a better, way to live.

This is not an easy task. It requires, first of all, that we each—community activist as well as trade unionist—know as much as we can about the scientific, medical, and economic issues involved. What are the hazards we face? How can they harm us? What alternatives exist? We must, together, find answers to such questions. The only acceptable way forward from this point is one which both respects the limits of Mother Nature's tolerance for too much more garbage and acknowledges the equal right of us all—petrochemical worker as well as college professor—to a decent standard of living.

The Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers International Union, under the auspices of its Alice Hamilton Library, is undertaking to publish *New Solutions: A Journal of Environmental and Occupational Health Policy* in order to help with this common search. We want this journal to be a place where trade unionists and community activists can learn about the latest scientific and medical research, and where scientists and physicians can learn more about the concerns of working people and their families. We want it to be a forum where trade unionists and environmentalists can work together to find answers to the critical questions that confront both our movements.

Necessarily, then, *New Solutions* will not simply be a platform. It will be an argument. As such, it will include things with which many of us disagree, and to which we might even take strong exception. Certainly, in my opinion, this first issue includes such things. But that is the nature of an argument. We are committed to the journal because we are committed to finding a way for our members to escape the cruel choice between their livelihood or their lives, now forced upon them by both industry and government policy alike. We welcome *New Solutions* as an effort to find the way forward to a time when working people everywhere can enjoy both wealth and health, can live both well and long.

We are also committed to it because we believe that only if and when scientists and policy makers submit their research and proposals for action to the scrutiny of the general public, can we find acceptable solutions to our common problems. We want *New Solutions* to be a place where all the different issues of environmental and occupational health policy that we now face, and that we will have to face in the coming years, can be argued out. Whatever the current tension between the interests of the workplace and those of the community, from the standpoint of workers, they are, in the long run, inseparable. *New Solutions* is intended to be an opportunity to stake out and then to share that common ground on a wide range of issues of concern to us all. ■