

Accord, Discord, Discourse and Dialogue in the Search for Sustainable Development

*Labour-Environmentalism Cooperation and Conflict in
Australian Debates on Ecologically Sustainable
Development and Economic Restructuring in the Period
of the Federal Labor Government, 1983-96*

**Paul C. R. Norton, B.Sc. (Hons.)
Australian School of Environmental Studies
Griffith University
Brisbane, Australia**

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Abstract

The thesis seeks to provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics of interaction between the environmental and labour movements, and the conditions under which they can cooperate and form alliances in pursuit of a sustainable development agenda which simultaneously promotes ecological and social justice goals. After developing an explanatory model of the labour-environmentalist relationship (LER) on the basis of a survey of theoretical and case-study literature, the thesis applies this model to three significant cases of labour-environmental interaction in Australia, each representing a different point on the spectrum from LER conflict to LER cooperation, during the period from 1983 to 1996.

Commonly held views that there are inevitable tendencies to LER conflict, whether due to an irreconcilable "jobs versus environment" contradiction or due to the different class bases of the respective movements, are analysed and rejected. A model of the LER implicit in Siegmann (1985) is interrogated against more recent LER studies from six countries, and reworked into a new model (the Siegmann-Norton model) which explains tendencies to conflict and cooperation in the LER in terms of the respective ideologies of labour and environmentalism, their organisational forms and cultures, the national political-institutional framework and the respective places of labour and environmentalism therein, the political economy of specific sectors and regions in which LER interaction occurs, and *sui generis* sociological and demographic characteristics of labour and environmental actors.

The thesis then discusses the major changes in the ideologies, organisational forms and political-institutional roles of the Australian labour movement which occurred during the period of the study, and their likely influence on the LER. The two processes of most importance in driving such changes were the corporatist Accord relationship between the trade union movement and Labor Party government from 1983 to 1996, and the strategic reorganisation of the trade union movement between 1988 and 1996 in response to challenges and opportunities in the wider political-economic environment.

The research hypothesis is that the net effect of these changes would have been to foster tendencies towards LER conflict. The hypothesis is tested in three significant case studies, namely: (a) the interaction, often conflictual, between the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) and the environmental movement in debates around macroeconomic policy, economic restructuring and sustainable development from the mid-1980s onwards; (b) the complex interaction, involving elements of cooperation, disagreement and dialogue, between the environmental movement and the unions representing coal mining and energy workers in the formulation of Australia's climate change policies; and (c) the environmental policy and campaign initiatives of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union to improve workplace environmental performance and promote worker environmental education.

The case studies confirmed the research hypothesis in the sense that, whilst the LER tended overall towards greater cooperation in the period of the study, the Accord relationship and union restructuring process worked to slow the growth of cooperative tendencies and sustain conflict over particular issues beyond what might

otherwise have been the case. The Accord relationship served to maintain conflict tendencies due to the dominance of productivist ideologies within the ACTU, and the union movement's perseverance with this relationship after the vitiation of its progressive potential by neo-liberal trends in public policy. The tripartite Accord processes institutionalised a "growth coalition" of labour, business and the state in opposition to excluded constituencies such as the environmental movement. This was partially overcome during the period of the Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) process, which temporarily included the environmental movement as an insider in the political-institutional framework. The long-run effects of union reorganisation on the LER are difficult to determine as the new organisational forms of unions were not in place until almost the end of the period of the study. However, in the short term the disruptive effects of the amalgamations process restricted unions' capacity to engage with environmental issues.

Pro-environment initiatives by the AMWU, and cooperative aspects of the coal industry unions' relationship with environmentalists, reflected the social unionist ideology and internal democratic practices of those unions, and the influence of the ESD Working Group process, whilst LER conflict over greenhouse reflected the adverse political economy of the coal industry, but also the relevant unions' less developed capacity for independent research and membership education compared to the AMWU. The LER in all three cases can be satisfactorily explained, and important insights derived, through application of the Siegmann-Norton model. Conclusions drawn include suggestions for further research and proposals for steps to be taken by labour and environmental actors to improve cooperation.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma at this or any other university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Material in Chapter 3 of this thesis was published in my name, in slightly modified form, under the title “A critique of generative class theories of environmentalism and of the Labour-Environmentalist Relationship” in *Environmental Politics*, Vol. 12, No. 4, pp. 96-119.

Paul Norton, B. Sc. (Hons.)

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	i
Statement of Originality	iii
Table of Contents	iv
Acknowledgements & Dedication	ix
Abbreviations & Acronyms	xi
Chapter 1. Introduction and Methodology	1
1.1 Introduction	2
1.1.1 The Focus of the Thesis	2
1.1.2 Thesis Structure	5
1.1.3 The Place of the Thesis in the Literature on Environmental Policy-Making and Politics, and in Labour Movement and Environment Movement Scholarship	10
1.2 Methodology	15
1.2.1 The Research Problem	15
1.2.2 Sources of Evidence and Authority	18
1.2.3 Theorisation of the Thesis: Political Economy and Neo-Gramscian Theories of Hegemony	22
1.3 Summary	24
Chapter 2. The Jobs and Environment Debate	25
2.1 Introduction	26
2.2 Siegmann and the “Jobs and Environment” Debate	27
2.3 Inventory of LER Scholarship on the “Jobs Versus Environment” Debate	32
2.3.1 Treadmill Reality or “Trade-Off Myth”?	32
2.3.2 Treadmills and Trade-Offs in Australia	40
2.3.3 The Jobs-Environment Problematique in LER Studies	44
2.4 Conclusions	49
Chapter 3. A Critique of Class Theories of Environmentalism and the LER	51
3.1 Introduction	52

3.2	Interrogating the “class-conflict” theory of the LER	54
3.2.1	The industrial working class and the labour movement	56
3.2.2	The industrial working class and environmentalism	58
3.2.3	Environmentalism and the Middle Class, Old and New	62
3.3	Gender and the LER	78
3.4	Conclusions	80
	Chapter 4. Organisation, Politics, Ideology and the LER	83
4.1	Introduction	84
4.2	Movement Organisation and the LER	85
4.2.1	Siegmann and Internal Labour and Environmental Organisation	85
4.2.2	Inventory of LER Scholarship on Movement Organisation	87
4.2.3	Movement Organisation – Summary	92
4.3	The Political-Institutional Framework (PIF) and the LER	93
4.3.1	Siegmann on the Political-Institutional Framework	93
4.3.2	LER Scholarship and the PIF	96
4.3.3	The PIF and the LER – Summary	102
4.4	Movement Ideologies and the LER	104
4.4.1	Siegmann on Ideologies of Labour and Environmentalism	104
4.4.2	LER Scholarship on the Role of Ideology	107
4.4.3	Ideology and the LER – Summary	112
4.5	Ideology or Discourse?	113
4.5.1	Jobs, Environment and Discursive Struggle	113
4.5.2	Labour, Environmentalism and Discursive Reconstitution of Subject-Positions in Coalition	116
4.6	Conclusions, and the Siegmann-Norton model	118
	Chapter 5. The ACTU-ALP Accord and Accord Relationship 1983-96	121
5.1	Australian Public Policy Under Hawke & Keating	122
5.2	Designing and Debating the Accord	128
5.2.1	Prelude to the Accord – 1975-83	128
5.2.2	The Original Accord	134
5.2.3	Debates around the Accord	138
5.3	The Accord in Practice, 1983-96	157
5.3.1	Accord Mark I, 1983-85	157
5.3.2	The Accord at Risk: Neo-Liberalism and the Balance of Payments Crisis	162
5.3.3	Accord Mark. II: A Wage-Tax Trade-Off	165

5.3.4	Accords Mark III to Mark VII: Win-Win Bargaining For Productivity or Cost-Cutting and Profit-Taking?	166
5.4	Evaluation: Unions and the LER in the Accord Relationship	169
Chapter 6. Crisis and Change: Australia's Union Rationalisation Process		175
6.1	Introduction	176
6.2	Centralisation and Consensus in the Accord Relationship	177
6.2.1	The Evolution of Australian Trade Union Organisation to 1983	177
6.2.2	The Rise of the ACTU	178
6.3	The Crisis in Australian Unionism	184
6.3.1	Declining Union Coverage	184
6.3.2	Deunionisation of Key Constituencies	185
6.3.3	Performance and Image Problems in Australian Unions	186
6.3.4	The New Right Offensive	187
6.3.5	The Crisis and the LER	188
6.4	Union Rationalisation and Amalgamations	188
6.4.1	The Accord and Union Reorganisation	190
6.4.2	<i>Australia Reconstructed</i>	191
6.4.3	<i>Future Strategies</i>	194
6.4.4	The Amalgamations Process in Practice: 1988 to 1996	198
6.4.5	Union Rationalisation and the LER	209
6.5	Conclusions	211
Chapter 7. The LER in Economic Restructuring and Sustainable Development Debates		215
7.1	Introduction	216
7.2	The Union Agenda on Industry Development	217
7.2.1	Australia's Economic Weaknesses and Policy Responses Pre-1980s	217
7.2.2	The Union Synthesis of Industry Policy and Alternative Economic Strategy	219
7.2.3	Accord Commitments on Industry Policy	220
7.2.4	ACTU and Metal Unions' Industry Policy Development	221
7.3	Accord Industry Policy Implementation and Non-Implementation	223
7.3.1	EPAC, AMC, the Industry Councils and the Sectoral Plans	223
7.3.2	<i>Australia Reconstructed</i> and its Fate	226
7.4	The ESD Process - Sustainably Reconstructing Australia?	229
7.4.1	Overview of the ESD Process and Its Fate	230

7.4.2	Labour-Environmental Discontent Prior to the ESD Process	233
7.4.3	The LER in the ESD Process	242
7.4.4	Unsustainable Development in the ACTU Mainstream	263
7.5	ACTU-Environmentalist Cooperation and Conflict after 1992	268
7.5.1	Green Jobs Project	268
7.5.2	ACF/ACTU Charter and "New Visions"	270
7.5.3	1994-95 Export Woodchipping Debacle	272
7.6	Conclusions	275
	Chapter 8. The LER in Australia's Greenhouse Response	281
8.1	Introduction	282
8.2	Labour Actors in the Greenhouse Debate	283
8.2.1	Social Unionism in Australia's Coal and Energy Sectors	283
8.2.2	Economic and Industrial Relations Pressures on the Union	288
8.3	The Climate Change Problem and Australia's Political Economy	290
8.4	Unions, Environmentalists and the Evolution of Australia's Greenhouse Response	292
8.4.1	Australian and Global Greenhouse Responses and Sustainable Development	292
8.4.2	Environmentalist, Union and Government Responses Prior to the ESD Process	293
8.4.3	The Greenhouse LER Inside and Outside the ESD Process	297
8.4.4	The ESD Working Group Reports - A High Point of LER Convergence	307
8.5	The Post-ESD Backslide	312
8.5.1	Industry and Bureaucracy Counter-Attack	312
8.5.2	Economic Models, the Carbon Tax Debate and the Earth Summit	313
8.5.3	The NGRS, "No Regrets" and Union Relapses	317
8.6	Other Coal Union Environmental Initiatives and Dialogue	321
8.6.1	Information Kit on Greenhouse	322
8.6.2	Environment Officers at Mine Sites	322
8.6.3	Uniting Coal with Solar Energy	323
8.6.4	UMW/CFMEU Environment Kit	323
8.7	The ACTU and CFMEU at Kyoto	324
8.8	Conclusion	328

Chapter 9. The Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Environment	331
9.1 Introduction	332
9.2 Social Unionism in Manufacturing Industries	333
9.3 The AMWU Amalgamations Experience	339
9.4 AMWU Environmental Policy Development	341
9.4.1 AMWU Environmental Policy in the 1980s	342
9.4.2 A Comprehensive MEWU Environment Policy	344
9.4.3 Further AFMEU and AMWU Environmental Policy Development	347
9.5 AMWU Environmentalism in Action	349
9.5.1 The AMWU and the ESD Process	349
9.5.2 The Bloustein Report	351
9.5.3 The "Working For The Environment" Project	355
9.5.4 The AMWU Environment Officer	365
9.5.5 Working and Bargaining for the Environment	368
9.5.6 Other AMWU Environmental Initiatives	369
9.6 Conclusions	370
Chapter 10. Conclusion and Issues for Further Research	373
Appendix 1: Structure of the Mining and Energy Division of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union	387
Appendix 2: Inventory of Australia's Greenhouse Gas Emissions	391
Appendix 3: Structure of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union	395
Bibliography	399

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As the late Ralph Miliband might have said, in view of the somewhat controversial nature of what follows I wish to state that I take complete responsibility for it myself.

Dedication

In the light of statements made by the Prime Minister of Australia at the time this thesis was being completed, I would like to dedicate the thesis to all those dedicated and caring people in Australia's public education system, at primary, secondary and tertiary level, who have over the years made it possible for a working class kid from Reservoir, both of whose parents had left school by the time they were thirteen years old, to become a University Medallist and a Doctor of Philosophy.

Abbreviations and Acronyms used in the Thesis

ABARE	Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACA	Australian Coal Association
ACF	Australian Conservation Foundation
ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
ADSTE	Association of Drafting, Supervisory and Technical Employees
AEC	Australian Electoral Commission
AEU	Australian Education Union
AFMEU	Automotive, Food, Metals and Engineering Union
AGIS	Australian Greenhouse Information Service
AGO	Australian Greenhouse Office
AHC	Australian Heritage Commission
AIRC	Australian Industrial Relations Commission
ALAC	Australian Labor Advisory Committee
ALP	Australian Labor Party
AMC	Australian Manufacturing Council
AMFSU	Amalgamated Metals, Foundry and Shipwrights Union
AMIC	Australian Mining Industry Council
AMIEU	Australasian Meat Industry Employees Union
AMWSU	Amalgamated Metal Workers and Shipwrights Union
AMWU	Australian Manufacturing Workers Union <i>or</i> Amalgamated Metal Workers Union
ANF	Australian Nursing Federation
AR	<i>Australia Reconstructed</i>

ARU	Australian Railways Union
ASE	Australian Society of Engineers
ATF	Australian Teachers Federation
ATWU	Australian Timber Workers Union
AWU	Australian Workers Union
BCA	Business Council of Australia
BLF	Builders Labourers Federation
BOP	balance of payments
BPEM	Best Practice Environmental Management
BUCU	Business Union Consultation Unit
BWIU	Building Workers Industrial Union
CAW	Canadian Auto Workers Union
CEPU	Communications, Electrical, Electronic, Energy, Information, Postal, Plumbing and Allied Services Union
CES	Commonwealth Employment Service
CFC	chlorofluorocarbon
CFF	Commission for the Future
CFMEU	Construction, Forestry, Mining & Energy Union
CFMEU (F)	Construction, Forestry, Mining & Energy Union (Forestry Division)
CFMEU (M&E)	Construction, Forestry, Mining & Energy Union (Mining & Energy Division)
CIS	Centre for Independent Studies
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPA	Communist Party of Australia
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation

DEST	Commonwealth Department of Environment, Sport and Territories
DITAC	Department of Industry, Trade and Commerce
EB	enterprise bargaining
EBA	Enterprise Bargaining Agreement
ECWU	Energy and Chemical Workers Union (Canada)
EIS	Environmental Impact Statement
EPAC	Economic & Planning Advisory Council
ESD	Ecologically Sustainable Development
ETM/s	Elaborately Transformed Manufacture/s
ETU	Electrical Trades Union
EU	European Union
E&SD	Environment & Sustainable Development (committee and policy of the ACTU)
FCCC	Framework Convention on Climate Change
FEDFA	Federated Engine Drivers & Firemen's Association
FFPIC	Forest & Forest Products Industry Council
FIA	Federated Ironworkers Association
FICA	Forest Industries Campaign Association
FIMEE	Federation of Industrial, Manufacturing and Engineering Employees
FMMA	Federated Mining Mechanics Association
FPS	Forest Protection Society
FRG	Federal Republic of Germany
<i>FS</i>	Future Strategies for the Trade Union Movement
FSPU	Federated Storemen & Packers Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product

IAC	Industries Assistance Commission
IC	Industry Commission
ICEM	International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine and General Workers' Unions
IPA	Institute of Public Affairs
IRC	Industrial Relations Commission
JvE	“jobs versus environment”
J&E	“jobs and environment” (as in “jobs and environment debate”)
J+E	“jobs and environment” (as in “jobs and environment synergy”)
LER	labour-environmentalist relationship
MEWU	Metals and Engineering Workers Union
NAFI	National Association of Forest Industries
NFFPUC	National Forestry and Forest Products Union Council
NGAP	National Greenhouse Advisory Panel
NGRS	National Greenhouse Response Strategy
NGSC	National Greenhouse Steering Committee
NIEIR	National Institute for Economic and Industrial Research
NLP	New Left Party
NMC	new middle class
NSESD	National Strategy for Ecologically Sustainable Development
NSM	new social movement
NSW	New South Wales
OCAW	Oil, Chemical & Atomic Workers Union (US)
OPEC	Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries
PGEU	Plumbing and Gasfitting Employees Union

PIF	political-institutional framework
PPWF	Pulp & Paper Workers Federation of Australia
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
RSL	Resource Security Legislation
R&D	research and development
TCF	textiles, clothing and footwear
TDC	Trade Development Commission
TGWU/T&G	Transport and General Workers Union (UK)
TLC	Trades & Labor Council
TWS	The Wilderness Society <i>or</i> Tasmanian Wilderness Society
TWU	Transport Workers Union
UAW	United Auto Workers (US)
UMW/UMFA	United Mineworkers Federation of Australia
UNCED	United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
US	United States (of America)
USWA	United Steel Workers of America
VBEF	Vehicle Builders Employees Federation
VFT	Very Fast Train
VTHC	Victorian Trades Hall Council
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development
WfE	<i>Working for the Environment</i>
WWF	Worldwide Fund for Nature
WWII	World War Two

