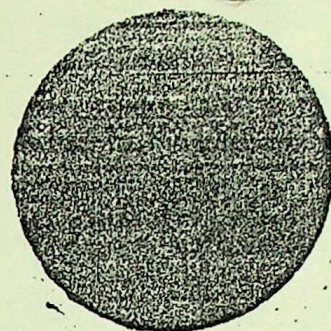


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Editorial

The Bhopal Disaster

We live in a world in which violence, waste and manipulation have not only become central elements in our lives but which have become profitable for the merchants of death, the rapists of the earth and those who manipulate our behaviour, our fears and desires.

—Anwar Fazal

International Organisation of Consumer Unions

The world's worst ever man made industrial and ecological tragedy took place on the 3rd of December 1984 at Bhopal. 30 tonnes of stored methyl iso cyanate escaped into the atmosphere killing over three thousand people and over 3000 cattle and affecting over a lakh people (official estimates!). Even these shocking statistics hide the actual enormity of the human tragedy — of the lives lost, the families affected, the people blinded and ill and the thousands impoverished.

Public and government reaction to this catastrophe had resulted in relief efforts. Wide media publicity has led to the spontaneous formation of citizens groups and collectives to look into not only the deeper issues of this event but also to prevent such events in the future. Zahreeli Gas Kand Sangarsh Samiti (Bhopal), PARISARA — Movement for Environmental Protection (Bangalore), Movement for a Safe Environment (Bombay) and Movement for Environmental Protection (Madras) are some examples of this upsurge.

Notwithstanding the phenomenal human tragedy and suffering caused by this event which need relief, rehabilitation and compensation efforts, all concerned citizens should not miss the opportunity to analyse/understand the deeper socio-political and technological crisis of which this disaster is only a symptom.

This is the time to question —

- the role of multinational corporations and the double standards in their functioning in the developing world;
- the governments role and complicity in improper siting, continued licensing, improper monitoring of dangerous industries and in the continued flouting of its own rules and regulations;

- the national industrial and development policy in the light of people's health and ecological issues;
- the political exploitation of the poor especially the slum dwellers and workers;
- the lack of awareness among people, citizens groups, consumer groups, workers unions, voluntary organisations and action groups on health, safety and environment issues;
- the whole question of the right to information at all levels and the existing control/monopoly of information at multinational and government and professional levels;
- the basic question of the relevance of pesticides to our agricultural economy in the light of available scientific and social knowledge regarding the disruption of eco-systems and the long-term effects on land and agriculture

This bulletin issue is a start in that direction and includes a memorandum from Bombay of which mfc was a signatory, first hand report from one of our members of the dynamics of relief work in Bhopal, and an overview of the efforts of unions and workers in occupational health action in the U.S.

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