

Solidarity in Struggle

32 years on... From Bhopal, India to Kanawha Valley, USA

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A message to the people of Bhopal: We are writing you from the shadow of the Union Carbide plant at Institute, West Virginia. We are residents, professors and college students who oppose MIC [methyl isocyanate] production in our community. Like you, we are people who need industry for jobs, and for the products that make our lives better. Like you, we now know that safety and health come first. May our common concern bond your community and ours for many years to come.

– Estella Chandler, People Concerned About MIC (now called People Concerned About Chemical Safety),¹ August 18th, 1985 (*Chemical Valley*).

The International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB), a global coalition led by four Bhopal gas disaster survivors' groups and one Bhopal-based support group, uses the slogan, "We all live in Bhopal" to indicate the global battle against the toxic trespass of our bodies and environments by hazardous industries. This is of particular relevance in Kanawha Valley—also known as "Chemical Valley"²—West Virginia (WV). Kanawha Valley, and particularly the community of Institute,³ shares a historic connection with Bhopal, India—the site of the world's worst industrial disaster—and as in Bhopal, residents have dealt with toxic emissions for decades.

In the following, we detail the separate, but interconnected, histories of these two landmark struggles. In doing so, we demonstrate that diverse communities facing environmental racism—like those of Bhopal, India and Institute, WV—have formed sustained

relationships of solidarity through struggle. This solidarity is demonstrated through the exchanges of support for one another's local struggle, framed within the broader scope of the struggle for environmental justice. This transnational solidarity challenges the increasing power of multinational corporations (MNC's) within a neoliberal system—a system that undermines the health and well-being of (primarily racialized, Indigenous and/or poor) populations worldwide.⁴

Bhopal, India

In 1969, the Union Carbide Corporation's Indian subsidiary, Union Carbide India Limited, constructed a chemical facility in Bhopal, the capital city of Madhya Pradesh, India. The facility was 50.9% owned by the American-owned Union Carbide Corporation (Hanna, Morehouse and Sarangi xxiv). In effect, the parent corporation held ul-

timinate decision-making authority over the plant's maintenance and operation. The purpose of the facility was to formulate and later manufacture pesticides for India's Green Revolution, marking a shift to the use of mechanized agriculture, GMOs, chemical-based fertilizers and pesticides (Morehouse and Mathur 27-28).

Union Carbide's US-based officials approved the utilization of untested technology ("Carbide's internal documents" 19-20), instituted cost-cutting measures that resulted in a slew of safety hazards, and hazardously stored methyl isocyanate (MIC) (ICFTU-ICEF 28-35)—a substance more toxic than phosgene (Rajagopal 24).

Notably, the facility was sited in the poorest subsection of Bhopal, known as Old Bhopal. Old Bhopal is comprised largely of daily wage earners, and migrants from rural areas (displaced as a result of the Green Revolution, and other projects) (Sarangi, "The movement in Bhopal . . ." 101). In addition, a large portion of the population identifies as Muslim and scheduled-caste Hindu—both of whom are marginalized in the Indian context (Hanna 6). ICJB community mobilizer, Hazira Bi—who resides in the severely impacted locality of Jai Prakash Nagar—notes, "When the gas leaked it poisoned the area close to Union Carbide... all the places where

the poor live. There is certainly a reason why only the poor were allotted land near a dangerous factory like UCC” (Scandrett et al. 141).

Labour unions fought long and hard to improve the deteriorating safety conditions within the facility, and the routine exposure of workers to hazardous chemicals (Ranjhi 12). However, worker’s demands were routinely ignored by Union Carbide’s American and Indian officials. On December 26th, 1981, a maintenance worker named Mohammed Ashraf was killed. Ashraf, who was not provided with PVC overalls,

was splashed with phosgene as a result of a malfunctioning valve. In a panic, he removed his mask, resulting in the inhalation of a large quantity of phosgene. Seventy-two hours later, Ashraf was dead (Chouhan 34). Absolving their responsibility, Union Carbide officials noted, “It is a matter of regret that because of unmindful removal of safety mask before decontaminating himself, Mr. Ashraf Mohd. Khan suffered exposure to toxic gas” (Chakravarty 13).

Ashraf’s death did little to improve safety in the facility. In January 1982, a phosgene leak hospitalized 24 work-

ers (none of whom had been ordered to wear protective masks), and in February 1982, a MIC leak impacted 18 workers (Eckerman 38). In May 1982, a safety audit found 61 hazards (30 major and 11 in the MIC and phosgene units); however, no action was taken to remediate these hazards (Hanna, Morehouse and Sarangi xxiv). In August 1982, a chemical engineer was exposed to liquid MIC, resulting in burns to over 30% of his body (Eckerman 38). In September 1982, Union Carbide dismantled the siren warning system to prevent the adjacent communities from being alerted to toxic leaks. A month later, a chemical leak resulted in the hospitalization of hundreds of residents in the neighbouring communities (Hanna, Morehouse and Sarangi xxiv). The MIC supervisor, who attempted to stop this leak, experienced major chemical burns, while two other workers were severely exposed (Eckerman 39). Following this leak, the workers’ union circulated flyers in the adjacent communities, warning: “Beware of Fatal Accidents”, “Lives of thousands of workers and citizens in danger because of poisonous gas” and “Spurt of accidents in the factory, safety measures deficient” (ICFTU-ICEF 35). Union Carbide’s response was to ban all political and union meetings inside the factory, and soon after, they laid off union leaders (Eckerman 39).

Moreover, between 1983 and 1984, major cost-cutting measures were instituted. The MIC unit saw a reduction in staffing from twelve to six, and safety training was reduced from six months to 15 days. In addition, safety manuals were re-written to permit the shutting down of two safety systems when the plant was not in operation (ICJB, “What Happened in Bhopal?”). It is this blatant neglect of health and safety that led to the world’s worst industrial disaster.

On December 3rd, 1984, 40 tons of MIC leaked from Union Carbide’s Old Bhopal-based facility (Hanna, Morehouse and Sarangi 3). Approximately 500,000 people were exposed, and up to 10,000 were killed within three days (Amnesty, *30 years is too long . . . 2*). Recalling the night of the disaster, Resham Bi—a resident of the severely impacted community of Jai Prakash Nagar—notes,

Was it an unavoidable accident? Or an ‘accident’ at all?

Carbide acted in a rather peculiar manner, responding to the death of Ashraf Khan by intensifying their cost-cutting in the most dangerous areas of the plant. The workforce was halved. The crew of the MIC unit was slashed from twelve to six, and its maintenance staff from six to two. Safety training was reduced from six months to two weeks, reduced in effect to slogans (but the slogans were in English so the workers couldn’t understand them anyway). There were so many small leaks that the alarm siren was turned off to avoid inconveniencing the neighbours. In case of repairs, old parts were recycled instead. Managers were still looking for things to cut. There was nothing left. Or was there? The Carbide bosses then remembered the three giant tanks of MIC. As a probable consequence all the safety systems failed to keep the deadly MIC from losing temper that night.

Kokila Bhattacharya



KOKILA BHATTACHARYA

[P]eople started coughing, choking, and were feeling burning sensation in their eyes. Children started fainting... I felt like somebody was burning chili peppers... Many people died from my community. People have died due to cancer, and stomach diseases. Even today, people are suffering... I gave birth to two children after the disaster, they both were born dead.

Similarly, survivor-activist, Nafisa Bi, shares: "My sister's son... was one and a half years old then... There was... green foam coming out of his mouth when he died... I can't even talk about the bodies that I had seen at the station. There were many... When that scene comes into my mind, I get angry..."

Immediately after the Bhopal gas disaster, protests took place. Within a week, approximately thirty leftist, middle-class activists from other parts of Bhopal and India arrived in the impacted communities. These external activists founded structured movement groups, which focused on the short-term goals of relief and rehabilitation, and the long-term goals of justice and accountability. Although some local activists were involved in these early groups, the external activists played a dominant role. By the end of 1986, most of these external leaders had left Bhopal, resulting in survivor-led groups assuming much of the movement's leadership (Sarangi, "The movement in Bhopal . . ." 101-108).

Thirty-two years later, the struggle goes on, with survivors' groups—namely, (1) *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmchari Sangh* (Bhopal gas-affected women workers' stationery union, formed in 1986); (2) *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Purush Sangharsh Morcha* (Bhopal gas-affected women's and men's front, formed in 2004); (3) *Bhopal Gas Peedit Nirashrit Pension Bhogi Sangharsh Morcha* (Bhopal gas-affected destitute pensioners' front, which formed prior to 1981);⁵ (4) Children against Dow-Carbide (formed in 1987); and (5) The Bhopal Group for Information and Action (formed in 1986)—continuing to lead the struggle, and demand "no more Bhopals" worldwide through their activist work. These distinct groups form the leadership of ICJB, which functions under the guiding aims of: (1) The precautionary principle; (2) The polluter pays principle; (3) Community right-to-know; (4) International liability; and (5) Environmental justice (ICJB, "Mission Statement and Guiding Principles"). Within these larger aims lie the goals

of social and economic rehabilitation, healthcare and medical research, adequate compensation, environmental remediation, and legal recourse—all aimed at the State government of Madhya Pradesh, the Government of India, and the Dow Chemical Company (which bought the Union Carbide Corporation in 2001) (ICJB, "Campaign for Justice").

In the initial years following the disaster, Bhopali groups formed relationships of solidarity with American environmental justice (EJ) struggles. According to Pam Nixon—spokesperson and president for the Institute, WV-based EJ group, People Concerned About Chemical Safety—Bhopali survivors visited Institute, WV in 1989, while on a toxic tour of the United States. Satinath Sarangi, co-leader of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action, elaborates:

In 1989 the Bhopal survivors/supporters' tour went to the toxic hotspots such as landfills, chemical and petrochemical factories and Superfund sites in 14 states... In an overwhelming number of places the victims of industrial pollution were people of color and poor white communities. The Bhopal group participated in several rallies, non-violent protests and media events in support of issues of environmental justice and the hosts, in turn, pledged to lend solidarity to the struggle in Bhopal that they said was their own. The exchange of solidarity between Bhopal organizations and EJ organizations in the United States continued for a little over two years...

According to Sarangi, relationships with U.S. based EJ groups proved difficult to sustain. However, the relationship between Bhopali survivors and residents of Institute, WV has proven most long-lasting, as is evidenced by the numerous occasions in which Bhopali survivors and solidarity activists have visited Institute, WV, and the ongoing commemoration of the Bhopal disaster by People Concerned (through film screenings, public discussions, and other events). Sue Davis, a long-time People Concerned member, shared one memorable action:

I found out that [the chemical companies] sponsor this other [community safety] group... They sponsor them! ... We were intending to make our voice heard that night at their meeting... I had gone over there earlier, and I saw where they had their

table up, and they had their easel for their display... So I told the janitor... "We'll need a table on this side too, and we need an easel over here too". I just let him think I'm part of the [company-sponsored community safety group]... and we took all of our Bhopal stuff. We took all the posters... We set up... right across from what the chemical people had... and I had pass-outs stapled together with all these facts to give to everybody... I took my old jogging suit... It was red... [and] had the United States flag on it... I had gone up and bought a skeleton... and I put him over there, and I said: 'They didn't tell him in time to evacuate', or something like that. He was my Bhopal person... and I had all this Bhopal stuff, and I had stuff about Dow... So when the people came, what could they say to me?... I wish they would've said something to me. I had a right to be there. I'm community. You're doing this under the name of the community. I'm community. So when the people came in... I said, "Here's your packet" [laughs]... I gave everybody that went inside our packet, and that's what you have to do.

We will now delve more deeply into the history of environmental racism in Kanawha Valley, and the community of Institute, WV, in particular.

Kanawha Valley, USA

Kanawha Valley, WV is known as "Chemical Valley," and for good reason. The chemical industry has been the prime driver of the region's economy for decades. This is rooted in the salt industry, which dates back to the Delaware tribe, and was later adopted by settlers in the region. Salt, and the presence of other natural resources, provided the necessary resources for a thriving chemical industry to develop (Cantrell 1-2). Union Carbide's presence in Kanawha Valley dates back to 1920, with the construction of the world's first petro-chemical facility in Clendenin, WV. By 1923, the company had leased 11 acres of land in South Charleston, WV (Union Carbide Corporation).

In 1936, Union Carbide found itself at the center of the worst industrial disaster in U.S. history—the Hawks Nest Tunnel Disaster in Gauley Bridge, WV. Due to silica exposure, close to 500 were killed, and 1,500 workers were left disabled (Cantrell 5). As in Bhopal, India, Union Carbide neglected safety measures. Further, Union Carbide actively sought Black workers to drill the Hawks Nest Tunnel, as "they were considered a cheap, pliable labor force" (Rose 38).

Did you rather your bundle of joy die in your arms than live a life benumbed?

Almost half of all pregnant women exposed to Carbide's gas spontaneously aborted. For women living within 1km of the plant, 43% delivered stillborn babies. Of 486 live births, 14% died in the first 30 days. In 1985, 1 in 3 babies survived. However, women's gynaecological problems were systematically denied and time and again ascribed as 'faking', 'psychological', or due to 'poverty' or 'poor' hygiene. Women have also spoken of indifferent doctors, large mouthed politicians, and predatory touts. Humiliation for all lurks in every nook and cranny.

'Yeh bhi gas kaand ka baccha paida hua hai,' (Here is another child of the gas tragedy). Bhopal's second disaster.

Kokila Bhattacharya

While the Bhopal gas disaster led to the questioning of chemical safety worldwide, it cast particular light on Kanawha Valley. In 1941, Union Carbide purchased a facility in Institute, WV (Agarwal, Merrifield and Tandon 11). Institute is a predominantly Black community, and home to the historically Black university, West Virginia State University. As Bullard contends, "African American communities in the South... have been routinely targeted for the siting of noxious facilities; locally unwanted land uses... and environmental hazards. People in these communities, in turn, are likely to suffer greater environmental and health risks..." (xv). In fact, the foundational work of the United Church of Christ's Commission for Racial Justice (UCC-CRJ) and Bullard, Mohai, Saha, and Wright contend that race is a prime factor in the siting of hazardous industries and waste, with the latter indicating, "racial disparities in the distribution of commercial hazardous wastes are greater than previously reported... [P]eople of color make up the majority of those living in host neighborhoods within 3 kilometers of the nation's hazardous waste facilities" (152). Aside from Institute, poor and working class white neighbourhoods also surround the Institute facility, a perspective of environmental (in)-justice that is common throughout West Virginia and Appalachia.

Importantly, UCC-CRJ's work led to the First National People of Color



Leadership Summit in 1991, which, in turn, led to then President Bill Clinton's Executive Order 12898 on Environmental Justice (Orum, Moore, Roberts and Sanchez 4). While little has been achieved since this Executive Order, it is notable that EJ groups across the U.S., in harms way of chemical facilities, refer to the Bhopal gas disaster as a definitive moment in history, necessitating chemical policy reforms:

For almost 30 years since the Bhopal disaster, chemical facilities, Congress, and a series of Presidential Administrations have neglected the potential for toxic disaster that millions of Americans—who are dis-

proportionately Black, Latino, and low income—live with every day. While some companies have adopted safer alternatives, thousands of similar facilities have not. (Orum, Moore, Roberts and Sanchez 3)

Although Union Carbide's Bhopal, India facility was considered the "sister plant" of Union Carbide's Institute, WV facility, safety precautions were more advanced in the Institute facility (Agarwal). In fact, "Several weeks before deadly methyl isocyanate leaked from a Union Carbide Corp. plant in Bhopal, India, the company revised operating procedures at its Institute, WV plant to help prevent a similar accident

there” (Winslow 6). Nevertheless, Institute, WV has been ridden with toxic emissions for decades. “[R]esidents in the small, predominantly black, town... remembered frightening incidents... including an explosion and evacuation of the community in June 1954. Workers recalled a series of fires, explosions and leaks and their own exposures to MIC gas” (Agarwal, Merrifield and Tandon 11). Sue Davis, of People Concerned, shared her memories of the 1954 explosion:

[W]e were sitting at the movie theater... and we were watching *Birds of Paradise*... [I]n *Birds of Paradise*, there was a volcano that erupted... [and] at the exact moment that that volcano erupted, they burst into flames over [at the plant]... We had no idea that they had something over [there] that could burst into flames or affect us in any way... [W]e didn't know what to do. You looked at the windows and everything outside was red... and we had no idea what it was... [T]he kids were running around saying, “It's the end of the world! It's the end of the world!”... Just pandemonium. It was terrible...

Notably, ICJB community mobilizer, Hazira Bi, recalls a similar sense of panic following the Bhopal disaster: “[W]e were running without any sense of direction... The children were groaning so much that we just picked them up in our arms and joined the masses of people. Believe me it seemed like the end of the world!” (Mukherjee 47).

Institute, WV residents understood that MIC, which killed up to 10,000 Bhopalis (Amnesty, *30 years is too long* . . . 2) was being produced in their community. Further, it was revealed that Union Carbide's Institute, WV facility had leaked MIC 28 times between 1979 and 1984. Later, Union Carbide admitted to 62 MIC leaks (Agarwal, Merrifield and Tandon 11). In response, citizens' groups like People Concerned emerged. Sue Davis discussed the founding of the group and her brother, Warne Ferguson's, pivotal role:

He got very upset after the Bhopal incident... He virtually founded [People Concerned], even though you had a lot of people who worked on that original committee... He went to Don Wilson, this young man that lives in West Dunbar... and said, “Don, we've got to do something”. They, in turn, went to Ed Hoffman, who was at [West Virginia State University]... So, that's when it started, but it did

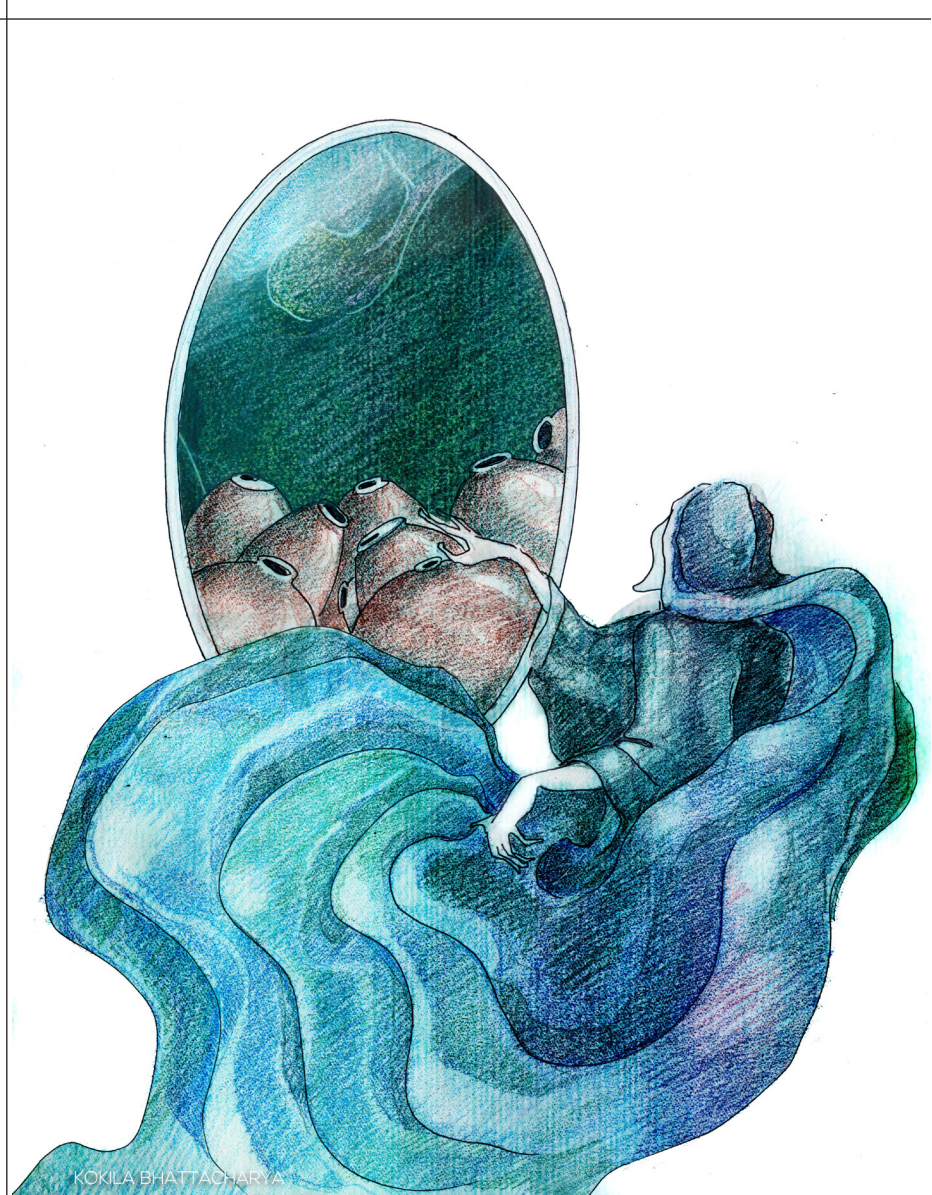
start because of Warne. He was just upset about it, and he remained active until his health started failing...

While Union Carbide officials assured Institute, WV residents that MIC was being produced and stored safely, on August 11th, 1985, a cloud of aldicarb oxime, containing trace amounts of MIC and methylene chloride—a neurotoxin and suspected carcinogen—leaked from the facility. Union Carbide officials waited 20 minutes before informing authorities of the leak, resulting in the hospitalization of 135 residents (Fortun 60). Pam Nixon, spokesperson and president for People Concerned, recalls, “They said there wasn't [any long-term health effects]... [There were] so many chemicals... if it had been one particular chemical, you would have known... what the health ef-

fect would have been... I had respiratory problems. Immediately people were having respiratory problems... I was one of the 135 that ended up going to a medical clinic.”

Following this leak, People Concerned organized a town hall meeting, attended by Institute, WV residents and Union Carbide's then President, Robert Kennedy. Residents voiced their anger and frustration. At the meeting, People Concerned member, Donna Willis, remarked,

You fumble and stumble, and cause our lives to be turned upside down... It wasn't the emergency whistle. It was the fire whistle, and firemen were running to get a fire. As they ran for the fire, I was running out of Institute with my two kids. Trying to save the lives that



I put here on earth, not for Carbide to take away! (*Chemical Valley*)

In 1986, Union Carbide's Institute, WV facility was acquired by Rhone-Poulenc, and later, Aventis CropScience, followed by Bayer CropScience. Despite changes in ownership, the Institute facility has continued patterns of fugitive emissions. In May 1993, a chlorine leak led to a shelter-in-place warning—a largely ineffective “safety” measure—for 1,000 residents (Ward, “Plant’s History Rocky”), and in August 1993, residents again adhered to a shelter-in-place warning after an explosion at the facility (Associated Press). This explosion killed two workers (Ward, “Bayer Cited . . .”). In June 1994, untreated wastewater leaked into the Kanawha River, and in December 1994, a sulfur dichloride leak injured one worker. In February 1996, a toluene leak led to another shelter-in-place advisory, and in July 1997, a small amount of MIC was released from the facility. In October 1999, residents in a two-mile radius adhered to yet another shelter-in-place advisory following a phosgene leak, and in 2001, ten workers required medical care following a chloroform leak (Ward, “Plant’s History Rocky”).

For 26 years following the Bhopal disaster, Institute, WV was the only place in the U.S. that continued to stockpile such large quantities of MIC—as much as 200,000 pounds (CSB 142). On

August 28th, 2008, there was another explosion in the same unit as the August 1993 explosion, 70 feet away from an above-ground tank containing 6,700 gallons of MIC (CSB 7). One worker died instantly, and another within two months. At this time, the company was owned by Bayer CropScience; and, regardless of the giant fireball and cloud of smoke, Bayer officials declared confidence that no MIC escaped the fence-line (Ward, “Bayer Knew MIC Monitors . . .”). However, a 2009 Congressional investigation, prompted by Bayer’s secrecy, noted,

Air monitoring devices designed to determine whether MIC has been released into the air were not operational on the night of the explosion. Video cameras positioned to capture the site of explosion did not record the time period of explosion because they had been disconnected from the recording unit. (U.S. Comm. on Energy and Commerce)

Additionally, plant workers were instructed to manually bypass safety procedures (CSB 1), as they rushed to resume operations following a maintenance shutdown. The Congressional investigation determined that “the consequences could have eclipsed the 1984 disaster in India” (Ward, “Congressional Report . . .”). The U.S. Chemical Safety and Hazards Investigation Board (CSB) recommended that the Kanawha Valley develop a prevention program as a result of the chronic issues with hazardous chemical releases (CSB 116).

In May 2009, Rachna Dhingra (co-leader of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action), along with Sarita Malviya (founding member of Children Against Dow-Carbide), and Safreen Khan (leader of Children against Dow-Carbide), visited the U.S. as part of the 25th Anniversary Bhopal Survivors’ Tour. They met with groups across the U.S., in hopes of spurring U.S. governmental action to hold Dow Chemical, the U.S. based company responsible for the disaster, accountable. People Concerned invited the tour to Institute, WV, where community members gave the visitors a toxic tour of the “Chemical Valley,” as they had done in 1989. Later that evening, the young Bhopali women shared their personal experiences at a forum held at the West Virginia State University in Institute. Both Khan and Malviya spoke of living near the Union Carbide site, and being forced to consume groundwater contaminated

as a result of the polluting practices of Union Carbide. The young women highlighted an all too possible reality for residents of the Kanawha Valley, who, at the time, still lived in the shadow of another Bhopal disaster, 25 years later. As Malviya noted, “We have to learn from what happened in Bhopal. We fear that the company operating here, Bayer, will make a second Bhopal here” (Steelhammer).

In addition, members of People Concerned worked with ICJB to coordinate meetings with West Virginia Senator Robert C. Byrd’s office, the CSB, and Senator Henry Waxman’s office. Waxman was a California Democrat who in 1985 called for a U.S. government inquiry into the Bhopal disaster. This resulted in U.S. legislation regarding the accidental release of toxic chemicals in the U.S. (Agarwal). In these meetings, the Bhopali representatives, with their U.S. grassroots allies, sought a Congressional hearing on accountability for Bhopal. To date, no such hearing has occurred.

In August 2009, three months after Khan, Malviya, and Dhingra visited Institute, WV, Bayer CropScience announced a \$25 million USD project to upgrade the Institute facility and reduce the MIC stockpile by 80% (Ward, “Bayer to Cut Institute . . .”). Further, in February 2011, Bayer announced its intention to restart MIC production at the Institute, WV plant (Hohmann). In response, impacted citizens (many of whom were members of People Concerned) filed a lawsuit to prevent the restarting of the unit, until safety measures identified by the CSB were put in place. The residents cited the Bhopal gas disaster as the catastrophic potential, and invited a prominent Bhopali survivor-activist, Sanjay Verma—who lost seven members of his immediate family in the Bhopal gas disaster—to testify as an expert witness on the effects of MIC, on behalf of People Concerned. The day before the trial seeking a permanent injunction began, Bayer retracted their decision to restart MIC production (ICJB, “Sanjay Verma, Bhopal Survivor, Tours the U.S.”), and People Concerned about MIC became People Concerned About Chemical Safety. In March 2015, Bayer announced that it was divesting from the Institute, WV facility, and returning the site’s ownership back to Union Carbide Corporation (Ward, “Bayer Sells Institute . . .”).

‘Are we less than human?’

2005

Our fight for clean water and life. The government had sat for so many years on UC’s cash [from the settlement] that the sum in the bank with interest had multiplied threefold.

Then they decided to give a lot of it to the state government, which had done nothing for us.

Entering the Gas Relief and ask to meet the minister.

We wait singing songs. Three truckloads of armed riot police turn up.

The cops are kicking out, hitting really hard with thick sticks. You are trying to get my children out of that place and see an activist dragged by his hair all the way downstairs and later beaten with sticks.

Kokila Bhattacharya



Make sure your street isn't the next Bhopal, Chernobyl, Hiroshima, Kodaikanal, Kasargode, Eloor-Edyar

32 years on...

Thirty-two years later, the struggle continues, making ICJB and People Concerned contemporary EJ struggles. Survivors of the Bhopal gas disaster continue to lead a relentless fight for their rights to medical care and research, social and economic rehabilitation,

adequate compensation, a toxic-free environment, and justice, accountability and recognition in the Indian and American courts. The Dow Chemical Company's acquisition of Union Carbide in 2001 complicated the struggle, as Dow Chemical vehemently denies all responsibility for the Bhopal gas disaster, despite inheriting Union Carbide's

assets and liabilities (ICJB, "Dow's Liabilities").

As a result of the Bhopal disaster, approximately 25,000 people have died (Sarangi, "Compensation to Bhopal gas victims . . ." 118), close to 150,000 are facing chronic health problems (Amnesty, *30 years is too long* . . . 6), and at least 22 communities are facing ground-

"We picked up bodies with our own hands"

Every time we lifted one up it gave out gas.

The bodies had all turned blue, and had froth oozing from their mouths.

Eight trucks on duty.

120 bodies into one truck.

Filled and emptied each truck five times a day.

For three to four days.

4,800 bodies a day.

In some houses everyone had died. They had transformed into morgues whose locks needed to be broken down. The fear of a mass epidemic lingered about for three to four weeks as even carcasses of dead animals weren't disposed off.

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water contamination as a result of Union Carbide's polluting practices (Amnesty, *30 years is too long* . . . 10). Satinath Sarangi, of the Bhopal Group for Information and Action, notes that there is an increase in cancers and tuberculosis. This is in addition to a wide array of illnesses impacting diverse bodily systems (respiratory, ocular, neurological, neuromuscular, gynecological, reproductive, endocrine, and immune). Further, the disaster has had a significant impact on mental health (Amnesty, *Clouds of Injustice* . . . 14-17).

Similarly, in Kanawha Valley, the struggle continues. In January 2014, 10,000 gallons of crude 4-methylcyclohexane methanol (crude MCHM) leaked from a Freedom Industries' facility into the Elk River, polluting the water supply of 300,000 residents in Kanawha Valley, across nine WV counties (Orum, Moore, Saha and Sanchez 24), including Institute. Notably, crude MCHM was never adequately tested for human toxicity. In fact, in the United States, thousands of chemicals used in everyday products have not been tested. Of the 60,000 chemicals grandfathered in under the 1976 Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA), only 200 have been tested for safety, and only five have been restricted. Of the 80,000 chemicals currently available for use in the U.S., the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has only required a few to be tested for their safety (Safer Chemicals Healthy, Families). While a 2016 TSCA reform bill known as the

"Frank R. Lautenberg Chemical Safety for the 21st Century Act" requires testing prioritization to include an assessment of disproportionate risk to vulnerable populations, its sluggish implementation pace means it will have little impact on already overburdened EJ communities. Such chemical safety legislation remains a focal point of the U.S. EJ movement.

Shortly after the 2014 Freedom Industries' spill, the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal—like People Concerned in 1985—released a statement of solidarity, noting the similarities between the Freedom Industries' spill and the Bhopal gas disaster. Namely,

The International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal... expresses solidarity with the communities of West Virginia that are facing a toxic nightmare. The Freedom Industries chemical spill and the Union Carbide Corporation's (UCC) chemical leak in Bhopal, India share many similarities, namely: (1) Unsafe design; (2) Unsafe location; (3) Failure to report to official bodies; (4) Denial of the leak by the Corporation immediately after the incident; (5) Inadequate information available on the leaked chemical and on an appropriate response, and; (6) Government's negligence in regulation. ("Statement of Solidarity")

History tells us that Bhopal, India and Kanawha Valley, USA are inextricably connected, and recent events demonstrate that the common concerns that first bonded these communities in 1984 continue to have relevance 32 years later. Both are marginalized communities, battling the toxic trespass of their bodies and environments, and the devaluation of their health and safety, which allows toxic facilities to be sited in their backyards.

In many ways, the 32-year relationship of solidarity between ICJB and People Concerned represents a transnational struggle, which aims to challenge the ability of multinational corporations and their colluders in government to pollute our (racialized, Indigenous, and/or poor) bodies, and the environments in which we live, work, and play. However, as allies and advocates, we must ask: What are the lived implications of such solidarity? Namely, what has it done to increase quality of life in Old Bhopal and Institute, WV, or address these communities' respective day-to-day struggles amidst routine toxic exposure? In other

words, what are the implications, if any, on-the-ground? Survivors of the Bhopal disaster and residents of Institute, WV continue to contend with the toxic trespass of their bodies and environments decades later. These are vital questions to consider.

Still, Old Bhopal, India and Institute, WV teach us that distinct communities can form long-term bonds of solidarity over the shared experience of environmental racism. Such supportive networks can have significant meaning in the long-term, ongoing, and arduous battle for environmental justice—beyond the potential amplification of voice necessary in achieving movement aims and campaign goals. As Pam Nixon, spokesperson and president for People Concerned, shares: "I just want [Bhopal survivors] to know never give up. They're not in it by themselves. We're still fighting here, and we're gonna continue and for them to do the same."

Notes

¹ To avoid confusion, People Concerned About MIC/People Concerned About Chemical Safety will be referred to as 'People Concerned' throughout this paper.

² Editor's Note: "Chemical Valley" in Kanawha Valley, USA differs from "Chemical Valley" surrounding Sarnia, Ontario, Canada.

³ Notably, Robert Bullard's (1990) groundbreaking work, *Dumping In Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality*, profiles Institute, WV and several other African American communities facing environmental racism in the Southern United States.

⁴ Both Shadaan and Nye are solidarity advocates with the Bhopal struggle, while Nye is a former neighbouring fenceline resident of the Institute facility and former spokesperson of the Institute-based EJ struggle, People Concerned About Chemical Safety. As such, the article is written from the perspective of active allies of the Bhopal struggle, and, in Nye's case, an insider of the West Virginia struggle. In effect, some of the information presented in this article is based on our experiences of observing and participating in these movements.

⁵ According to Balkrishna Namdeo of the Bhopal gas-affected destitute pensioners' front, "Social security pension scheme was initiated in the state of Madhya Pradesh in the year 1981. Our organization was formed to deal with the difficulties that the beneficiaries of this scheme (old, disabled, and widows) were facing... After the gas leaked in 1984... we decided to include the cause of the gas victims in our organizational agenda" (Scandrett, Mukherjee, Shah and Sen 122-123).

⁶ Few studies have been done to understand any short or long-term effects from exposures in Institute, WV over the years.



KOKILA BHATTACHARYA

When Dow CEO Liveris is asked if he will clean up the city, where the drinking water of tens of thousands is poisoned by toxic wastes dumped by Dow subsidiary, he said:

“We don’t feel this is our responsibility.”

Kokila Bhattacharya

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