

Earth Day News So Hot It's Radioactive

By Carol Masters

The New Satyagraha: Bhopal Survivors and Nuclear Resisters Unite

Survivors of the disastrous chemical spill in Bhopal, India, have joined with nuclear resisters in a new Indian satyagraha (Gandhi-defined "soul force"), a nonviolent movement for change. The Kudankulam nuclear generator, about to come online, has been the site of mass protests since August 2011. Last March, more than 250 survivors of the 1984 Union Carbide spill sat in a daylong fast in support of the Kudankulam struggle and to this day have continued their support of nuclear resisters.



Earth Enlightenment

by Jane Evershed

Art and imagery that speaks to the pertinent issues.

Our emotions, our souls, the carnage of earth, the realm of nurturing men,

The rights of children, the fate of humanity . . .

Those empty seats at the table of global consequence, with your name written on them.

—Jane Evershed/ evershed.com

Considered one of the world's worst industrial disasters, the Union Carbide spill exposed over 500,000 people in early December 1984 to methyl isocyanate gas and other chemicals. The government of Madhya Pradesh confirmed 3,787 deaths. Others estimate 8,000 died within two weeks and many thousands have since died from gas-related diseases. After a bitter 25-year court battle, on June 7, 2010, eight former executives of the Indian subsidiary were convicted of negligence. The men were sentenced to two years in prison and fined \$2,100. Their original charges carried a maximum sentence of 10 years, but India's Supreme Court reduced the charges. The company eventually paid the government \$470 million to settle the victims' claims: Only a portion of the money was distributed, in many cases at \$550 per recipient.

Public outrage at the light criminal sentences and inadequate recompense has not waned. In recent months the Indian government has tried to "shake off the shadow of Bhopal, an episode that has become synonymous with ineffectual governance and humiliation at the hands of Western capital." *

"Western capital" is not the only power under Indian public criticism: The reactors at Kudankulam in the southern Indian state (Tamil Nadu) are Russian-designed and many questions remain about their safety, faulty construction, cracks, leaks, and shoddy equipment. They have been under construction since 1988 and are obsolete before they even start up. Three million people live within 18 miles of these reactors.

As of early February 2013, protests had intensified, despite a government crackdown. Men, women, and children from several nearby villages are heading a campaign to stop the nuclear plant. The villagers say they have faced media propaganda, government corruption, threats, prohibitory orders against public meeting, police abuse, cases of sedition in courts, and arrest warrants. Public agitation increased after the disaster at Fukushima. Says S. P. Udayakumar, coordinator, People's Movement Against Nuclear Energy, "The Indian nuclear authorities have not shared any basic information about the project with the public. They do not give complete and truthful answers on the 'daily routine emissions,' the amount and management of nuclear waste, fresh water needs, impact of the coolant water on our sea and seafood, decommissioning costs and effects, Russian liability, and so forth."

* topics.nytimes.com

What a Waste!

Also from the Nuclear Information and Research Source: Replaced a faucet lately? Bought a new belt? Did you check the label? Would it matter? Some small amounts of radioactive metals have been part of common household items—toys, flatware, batteries, buckles—for years, but the “floodgates are about to open.” The U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission is legalizing the “clearance” of radioactive materials from regulated control into raw materials, building supplies, and ordinary household objects

(<http://www.nirs.org/radwaste/recycling/releasebrochure.htm>).

The recycling process is cheaper than treating such materials as the radioactive waste they are. Companies make a profit by selling contaminated metals to steel and scrap metal recyclers and manufacturers. In the U.S., nuclear plants and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and Department of Energy are working hand in hand to increase the amount of radioactive “recycling,” weaken protection standards, and allow utilities to conduct incomplete cleanup of contaminated sites.

As William Boardman, Reader Supported News, reports, the plan is largely unnoticed. An alert congressman, Rep. Edward Markey of Massachusetts, noted an inadequate public response period this past January and raised the alarm (readersupportednews.org).

Carol Masters is a WAMM member and serves on the Newsletter Committee.

Further information and updates at: Nuclear Information and Resource Service (www.nirs.org); World Information Service on Energy (wiser.org), and DiaNuke.org