

25 years after the Bhopal Gas Disaster : UPA Govt. and MP Govt Out to Bury the Truth and Bail out the Killers

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On the night of December 2nd and the early morning of December 3rd 1984, some 40 tonnes of Methyl Isocyanate (MIC) spewed out of the Union Carbide Corporation's pesticide plant in Bhopal, exposing over 5,00,000 people to the toxic fumes. 25,000 people died as a result, hundreds of thousands of persons were maimed for life, and entire future generations poisoned.

Union Carbide left without cleaning up the toxic chemicals dumped on the ground – and the toxins have seeped into the soil, poisoning the drinking water which people have no option but to consume. Studies have shown toxins to be present even in the breast milk of mothers living around the factory.

The past 25 years are a shameful saga of the Indian Government's callous betrayal of the victims to appease the killer corporation. The Indian Government has done nothing to demand that Warren Anderson, CEO of Carbide, be extradited to India to face trial. And Dow Chemicals, which has taken over Carbide, has refused to take responsibility for cleaning up the Union Carbide factory wastes.

Soon after the incident, Union Carbide denied that poisonous gases had been released. One of the Carbide doctors recommended sodium thiosulphate as treatment – but withdrew this (correct) advice, since success of this treatment would have proven that poisonous gases had entered the bloodstream, resulting in heavier damages for Carbide ! The MP Govt then even banned the sodium thiosulphate treatment method.

Today, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) Government of MP and the Congress Government at the Centre are united in their efforts to exonerate the killers.

Visiting the Carbide factory site in Bhopal on the eve of the 25th anniversary of the tragedy, Union Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh insulted the victims by brandishing a handful of waste and proclaiming, "I'm alive, I'm not coughing !" as proof that the factory site is now harmless and no longer poisonous. In other words, he suggested that the claims of victims who say their daily drinking water is poisoned are bogus and Dow is not called upon to clean up any further.

On top of this, the MP Government has now decided to throw open the doors of the Union Carbide factory in Bhopal to the general public as a tourist spot – as 'proof' that the poisons are gone and all is well. Madhya Pradesh Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Babulal Gaur has announced that the waste lying in the Union Carbide factory site here for the past 25 years is no longer toxic enough to adversely affect human beings.

Indian ruling class parties and governments have done their best to roll out the red carpet for Dow. Among those who have pleaded and lobbied on Dow's behalf between 2005 and 2007 are Planning Commission deputy chairman Montek Singh Ahluwalia, Home Minister (then Finance Minister) P. Chidambaram and Commerce Minister Kamal Nath, as well as Ratan Tata.

The Bhopal crime is a damning instance of how India's ruling class is committed to defending corporate killers and MNCs at the cost of Indian people's lives and safety. Shamefully, Dow's long-term legal counsel who peddles all the lies on behalf of the killer MNC is none other than the Congress party spokesperson - Abhishek Manu Singhvi.

In October this year, India approved the commercial release of Bt Brinjal, the first ever such Genetically Modified (GM) food crop anywhere in the world with the toxin-producing Bt gene in it. The Bt Brinjal is produced as part of a US Artificial Insemination Department (USAID) programme called Agri-Biotechnology Support Programme [ABSP] - a Public Private Partnership of various institutions with MNCs Monsanto and Mahyco. This is a direct effect of the Indo-US Knowledge Initiative in Agriculture, signed alongside the Nuke Deal. Now, Supreme Court observer to the committee Dr Pushpa Bhargava, in his letter to the GEAC and Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, has revealed that Prof Arjula Reddy, Chairperson of the Expert Committee on whose recommendation the approval was granted, had complained of being under "tremendous pressure" to clear Bt Brinjal and had calls from Agricultural Minister, Genetic Engineer Approval Committee (GEAC) and industry.

Bhopal, Bt Brinjal - all are grim evidence of how governments are willing to lie to the people, even endanger their lives and allow them to be poisoned - all in order to serve corporate interests or partnership with the imperialist US.

On the eve of the 25th Anniversary of the Bhopal disaster, the people of India demand that the UPA Government seek extradition Of Carbide CEO Warren Anderson from the US ; ensure that Dow pays for clean up both on the factory site as well as of ground water and surroundings ; blacklist Dow and Union Carbide ; and guarantee free medical treatment for the victims.

P.-S.

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