

Statement

# Bhopal 26 years after: Playing Havoc with Humanity and the Environment

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## A Statement of Radical Socialist

- On the night of December 2-3 , 1984, the Union Carbide India Limited pesticide plant in Bhopal released methyl isocyanate and other toxins. The result was some 500,000 people were affected. Government agencies estimate that over 15000 people died. After 26 years, the court verdict for the Disaster finally came. And it was proof that after the first death there can be another. Some 25 years after the gas leak, 390 tons of toxic chemicals abandoned at the UCIL plant continue to leak and pollute the groundwater in the region and affect thousands of Bhopal residents who depend on it. On June 7, 2010, seven ex-employees including the former chairman of UCIL were convicted in Bhopal of causing death by negligence and sentenced to two years imprisonment each. An eighth former employee was also convicted but had died before judgement was passed. The sentences will run concurrently. The quantum of fine that chief judicial magistrate Mohan P Tiwari of the trial court in Bhopal has imposed is paltry. The court could have awarded exemplary fine on the accused and the delinquent company. Behind it stood the government, which had diluted the charges, so that convictions came only under sections 304-A (causing death by negligence), 336, 337 and 338 (gross negligence), and 35 (common intention) of the India Penal Code.

- Warren Anderson, who was then the CEO of Union Carbide, was arrested, but was released on bail, at the instance of powerful figures in the Indian ruling class and government, jumped the bail bond, and was never brought back to India because of the lax way in which India pursued the case. Likewise, the Government of India passed the Bhopal Gas Leak Disaster Act that gave the government rights to represent all victims in or outside India, and used this to strike a bad deal with UCC, according to which it agreed to pay US\$470 million (the insurance sum, plus interest) in a full and final settlement of its civil and criminal liability. This meant a total of Rs. 12,000 approximately per person. The US Court has ruled that there can be no extradition of Anderson since according to US law, that his company was guilty is immaterial. His personal criminality has to be proved.

- Now owned by Dow Corporation, Union Carbide denies responsibility for the tragedy. They are willing to take the profits of Union Carbide India, but not take responsibility for its crimes. And the judiciary has shown that while it is willing to sentence to death an individual who kills for profit or for terrorism, when it is a matter of big corporate bodies it will soft pedal.

- Bhopal is living evidence that the search for profits under the free market is incompatible with environmental safety and the health of workers and ordinary human beings. It is also proof that the bourgeois state is not neutral, neither the executive, nor the legislature, nor the judiciary. They will use heavy hands on the ordinary people, while they will merely lightly slap the bosses even when hundreds of thousands of people are affected. The entire struggle to get the truth over Bhopal revealed how the goal of profit maximization meant cutting safety measures. In India, unlike Union Carbide plants in the US, its Indian subsidiary plants were not prepared for problems. No action plans had been established to cope with incidents of this magnitude. This included not informing

local authorities of the quantities or dangers of chemicals used and manufactured at Bhopal. UCC admitted in their own investigation report that most of the safety systems were not functioning on the night of December 3, 1984. The long term effects on public health have been severe. People have suffered and are still suffering from eye problems, respiratory problems, disorders of immunological and neurological systems, lung injury causing cardiac failure, female reproductive difficulties and birth defects among children born to affected women.

- It is the ordinary people, affected, who have fought. Led by Champa Devi, on the 18<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the disaster, hundreds of women and men had demanded that Dow must take responsibility for UCC's polluting and clean up the mess. We salute their spirit and call for full support to such struggles.

We demand:

1. Adequate compensation and rehabilitation for the affected gas victims, though the loss is irreparable.
2. Exemplary punishment for all the guilty upper level officials up to Anderson.
3. An immediate halt to the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Bill, in view of the Bhopal experience, which shows that the aim of the Indian state is to minimize the liabilities of capitalists, including non-Indian capitalists, even if, as in Bhopal, the worst non-nuclear environmental disaster in the world has occurred.
4. A countrywide check on all chemical industries and improvement of safety measures. No cuts in safety to maximize profits.

We call upon all working class organizations and other mass organizations to mobilize unitedly in struggle against the mass murder in Bhopal and its aftermath, for given the aims of Indian capitalism, including its recent cosying up to Dow Chemicals, nothing will be done to punish the guilty or take future safety measures unless mass working class struggles develop.

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