The Great Louisiana Toxics march (November 11-20) has been organized to celebrate change, and to protest the destruction of the southern Mississippi region, where the chemical industry has now created the nation's largest cancer alley, an industrial wasteland of enormous chemical factories spewing filth on a massive scale. The march is an important symbol, at once festive and deeply serious, a shared celebration and protest that can be carried on in other states to bring people together in action to stop the poisoning of America. The Louisiana march begins November 11 in Baton Rouge and ends November 20 in New Orleans. All along the way, for a few hours or a few days, everyone is welcome. Put on your walking shoes and come on down!

The march will cover the 80 miles from Baton Rouge to New Orleans. Not everyone will walk the whole 80 miles, but thousands of people will join the march for a day or an hour as it comes through their community. Food and music will abound. And so will information. Red beans and rice, jambalaya, gumbo; rhythm and blues, gospel, jazz, and zydeco; rallies, meetings, reports, forums, and workshops have been organized at sites along the way. The march will coincide with the arrival of the Greenpeace ship, the Beluga--formerly a fire boat, now outfitted with a chemical laboratory--which has been traveling down the Mississippi River for the past several months, analyzing water samples along the way and staging creative local events to focus public attention on the destruction of the Mighty Mississippi by the international chemical giants.

The march will begin at Devil's Swamp, once a bountiful wildlife area but now one of the most treacherous Superfund sites in the nation. The march will follow along the Mississippi, where 138 factories produce 25% of the nation's raw chemicals, where 350 legally-permitted outfalls (pipes) discharge hundreds of thousands of tons of hazardous chemicals into the river every year, which people in towns downstream end up drinking. The march ends November 20 with a massive rally in New Orleans.

The march has been organized by a coalition of environmental activists, poor black tenant groups, and unionized chemical workers. The march will demand an end to the destruction of the Mississippi and of the people of Louisiana, where citizens are drinking heavily-contaminated water as a matter of course, where cancer rates are the highest in the nation, where birth defects and developmental disorders are rising steeply.

Local industry has turned its back on the people. When a local pharmacist reported a high rate of miscarriages and still births in the Geismar-St. Gabriel area, the former chairman of the Louisiana Chemical Association, Fred Loy, was quoted in the Washington Post saying, "They say the chemical plants are causing the miscarriages, but they have no proof. I could say they screw too much and that's the cause of the miscarriages. But then I would have no way to prove that."

Although it remains physically beautiful, Louisiana has been allowed to become a polluters' playground. Since World War II, when the chemical industry moved in en masse, a corrupt state government, bought-off local politicians, and do-nothing federal agencies have turned their backs on workers and citizens as the corporate poisoners have had their way with the environment. The result has been wholesale destruction of natural resources and the poisoning of people.

The organizers of the march aim to forge networks with people outside Louisiana to mount a coordinated national attack on the corporations responsible for the damage. This march is significant in several ways: It is a symbol that the grass roots toxics movement is growing stronger every moment and can now stage massive regional events to turn a spotlight of shame onto industry's misdeeds; that blacks, whites, workers and local residents can coordinate their vision and their strength for the common good; that traditional environmental organizations and the newer movement for environmental justice can work together, building bridges to community groups and labor unions to achieve common purposes; and finally it is becoming recognized everywhere that the South is under chemical siege—that dumpers and poisoners from across America, East, Midwest and West, and even from Europe, are using our southern states as an industrial toilet, and that this has got to stop.

Hats off to Darryl Malek-Wiley and the Delta Chapter of the Sierra Club, to the Louisiana Environmental Action Network, to the Gulf Coast Tenant Leadership Development Project, and to the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union. And, finally, hats off to Greenpeace and the remarkable crew and staff of the Beluga for their eyeopening, precedent-setting Mississippi River Project.

For further information, contact the Louisiana Toxics Project, 533 France Street, Baton Rouge, LA 70802; phone (504) 3872305; or write Darryl Malek-Wiley, 3227 Canal St., New Orleans, LA 70119; phone (504) 822-8760. Greenpeace can be reached at 1017 West Jackson Boulevard, Chicago, IL 60607; phone (312) 666-3305.

A first-rate video that will give you the flavor of the problems in Louisiana—and of the possibilities for solutions through coalition-building and citizen action—is Chris Bedford's video tape, LOCKED OUT! THE STORY OF BASF'S ATTACK ON WORKERS, THE COMMUNITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN LOUISIANA which you can borrow from Dick Leonard at the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers International Union (OCAW), P.O. Box 2812, Denver, CO 80201; phone (303) 987-2229. Or contact Chris Bedford at the Organizing Media Project, 1801 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20009; phone (202) 387-1000.

This video is very revealing about the formerly Nazi-influenced company, BASF, which citizens are fighting all across the U.S., and about lockouts in general.

--Peter Montague

GUERILLA MEDIA: HOW TO USE RADIO AS A TOOL IN YOUR LOCAL FIGHTS

Here's a potent new idea for grass roots activists who want to influence politicians and the public: make radio spots and air them as public service announcements or, for a few hundred dollars, buy air time. This video makes the case that radio advertising is the cheapest, most effective and least-used way to get your message out to a mass audience, throwing light, heat and pressure on your adversaries. Not convinced it's effective? Afraid it's over your head or out of your budget? Buy or rent the video tape, Guerilla Media, from Varied Directions, Inc., 69 Elm Street, Camden, Maine 04843; phone (207) 236-8506. This video will convince you that making radio spots is cheap, easy and an effective force for winning your local fight. It sells for $299 but rents for seven days for $75. Your group won't be making a mistake to invest $75 in renting this video. As you watch the tape, pay careful attention and take notes. You'll find a bundle of good ideas packed into this 90-minute tape.

--Peter Montague

Descriptor terms: video; radio; advertising; publicity; mass media; tactics; public relations; strikes; lockouts; labor; ocaw; la; basf; greenpeace;