Officials of the Union Carbide Corporation have accused the Citizen's Clearinghouse for Hazardous Waste (CCHW) of being tied to the "communist party.

As most of our readers know, CCHW is a key leadership organization in the grass-roots citizens' movement against toxic chemicals. Union Carbide is the owner of 700 chemical plants worldwide, including the plant at Bhopal, India, where a toxic gas leak killed an estimated 8,000 people, and injured an estimated 300,000 others.[1] the night of Dec. 2, 1984, in the world's largest industrial disaster.

The Carbide attack on CCHW is contained in an internal corporate memo dated November 14, 1989, signed by Clyde Greenert. Mr. Greenert is Director for Corporate Contributions, Public Issues and Administration at Carbide's headquarters in Danbury, Connecticut.

Contacted at Carbide headquarters, Robert M. Berzok, Director of Corporate Communications, confirmed that the memo was written by Mr. Greenert but said Mr. Greenert is "on vacation" and not available for comment. After confirming the authenticity of the memo, Mr. Berzok refused to comment on any aspect it. Mr. Berzok himself is listed on the memo as a recipient. We asked him at least 30 questions relating to the memo but he consistently said "no comment." From our one-way conversation with Mr. Berzok, we drew the strong impression that a high-level decision had been made within Carbide to circle the wagons and try to stonewall. Mr. Berzok assured us several times that none of the other recipients of the memo would comment upon it either, but he refused to give us phone numbers for any them so we could not test how tight corporate security on this matter has become. Mr. Berzok refused to say which of the world's many communist parties Carbide officials want to believe CCHW is tied to.

The memo, which was sent to 13 individuals within Carbide's top management, says, "CCHW is one of the most radical coalitions operating under the environmentalist banner. They have ties into labor, the communist party and all manner of folk with private/single agenda [sic]."

The memo goes on: "In October, at their grass roots convention, they developed the attached agenda which if accomplished, in total, would restructure U.S. society into something unrecognizable and probably unworkable. It's a tour de force of public policy issues to ask hard questions, or don't ask any questions. Worldwide, pesticide sales increased from $2.7 billion in 1970 to $11.6 billion in 1980 and they're expected to hit $18.5 billion this year.[3]

After a pesticide is banned in the U.S. it can still be exported to the third world legally. Union Carbide sells many pesticides in the third world that our government has banned as too dangerous to humans or the environment. For example, Carbide sells DDT, Mirex, Heptachlor, Chlordane, and Endrin in the third world,[4] all of which are banned in the U.S.

The World Health Organization estimates that one million humans are poisoned by pesticides each year, 99% of them in the third world. These "incidents" kill as many as 20,000 humans each year, again the vast majority of deaths occurring in the third world.[5] (These are immediate poisoning deaths, not cancers or other diseases that may strike later.)

As regulations threaten to restrict export of banned pesticides to the third world, large chemical companies have developed a clever strategy: they simply ship the separate chemical ingredients of a banned pesticide to a third world country, then manufacture it there in "formulation plants." From the third world country, the banned pesticide can be shipped anywhere. Bhopal started as a formulation plant.

"It's a real Mafia-type operation," says Dr. Harold Hubbard of the United Nations Pan American Health Organization, not referring to Union Carbide specifically. "Global companies are setting up formulation plants all over the world. [They] simply go into less developed countries, give a banned pesticide a local name, and then turn around and sell it all over the world under that new name.[6]"

Until 1978, Carbide made pesticides at Bhopal without using the supremely toxic chemical, MIC. But MIC was more profitable, so they switched. In 1979 and again in 1982, Carbide sent teams of experts from Danbury to evaluate safety hazards at the Bhopal plant.

Going back to the 1930s, Carbide has a long history of worker health and safety problems and management has been unable to project an image of caring. From 1930 to 1932, 476 Carbide workers died in a tunneling project in Gauley Bridge, West Virginia; a Carbide subsidiary "had hired the men to drill a tunnel that would divert water to a hydroelectric plant, but the deadly silicon dust in the tunnel became so thick that within nine months the miners, mostly black, began dying off and were quietly buried in mass graves while the work went on. After each blast, company foremen would force the men back into the tunnel, often at gunpoint, without even waiting for the dust to settle. Respirators? They weren't necessary. As one company official reportedly said, 'I wouldn't give $2.50 for all the niggers on the job.' In Indonesia during the 1970s, over 400 employees at Carbide's Cimanggis battery plant contracted kidney diseases after drinking the plant's mercury-contaminated well water, which they were never told was poisonous. In Tennessee for forty years (until 1983), Carbide "discharged toxic and radioactive chemicals into air, water and unlined pits in the ground, poisoned many workers with mercury, and contaminated birds, fish and even bees with radioactivity by blowing wastes into the hillsides" of Oak Ridge.[2]

Carbide is a chemical giant whose best-known products are plastic garbage bags ("Glad" bags), Eveready batteries, and Prestone antifreeze. They also make and sell pesticides on a massive scale ($335 million in 1983), especially in the third world. The Bhopal plant made pesticides using methyl isocyanate (MIC).
We hope these facts will help our readers put into perspective such silly attacks on CCHW by the world's largest and most ruthless poisoner. And we urge our readers to phone a protest to the top PR man at Carbide, Mr. Ron Wishert [(203) 794-4103] or send him a tart note at 39 Old Ridgebury Rd., Danbury, CT 06817-0001. We also urge readers to send contributions of $50 or more to CCHW to help them purchase a new building for their offices as they lead the grass-roots toxics movement on to new victories: CCHW, P.O. Box 926, Arlington, VA 22216.

--Peter Montague


[2] All information in this paragraph is from Kurzman, cited above in note 1, pg. 92.


[6] Dr. Hubbard is quoted in Weir and Schapiro, cited above in note 4, pgs. 41-42.


Descriptor terms: cchw; union carbide; bhopal; occupational safety and health; race; african-americans; gauley bridge, wv; va; indonesia; cimanngis; drinking water; kidney disease; mercury; heavy metals; pesticides; studies; who;