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South Side, Sauget, Illinois, and Port Arthur, Texas. It also owns the nation's largest toxic waste dump in Emmel, Alabama, a poverty-stricken town in Alabama's "Black Belt," 79 percent African-American with a median household income of just $7,300 annually.

Chem Waste representative Sylvia Vicars says sites have been chosen because they're environmentally sound and vehemently denies charges of environmental racism.

Kettleman City residents aren't buying it. "The county thinks just because we're Mexican farmworkers we won't speak up," said Auscencio Avila, a retired farmworker. "But we know enough to know that this incinerator is dangerous to or health, to our children, and to our jobs on the farms in the area."

Legal Action Leads to Community Inaction

Although *El Pueblo* members agreed that the lawsuit by the CRLA was an important step in the campaign to keep Kettleman City free of yet another environmental hazard, the legal action also has some unintended effects. Feeling that control over the course of the fight had shifted to an arena over which they have little power, *El Pueblo* members experienced a drop-off in action and involvement when the lawyers got involved.

The spark that reignited the campaign came unexpectedly from the Environmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.), the agency responsible for giving final approval for the Chem Waste incinerator. Though the E.P.A. fined Chem Waste a total of $3.5 million in 1985, and though E.P.A. records show extensive groundwater contamination and hundreds of citations for illegal dumping activities, *El Pueblo* was not surprised when the agency approved the incinerator. However, when the E.P.A. supervisor overseeing Chem Waste's two hundred acres of toxic landfills and evaporation ponds accepted employment with the company *two weeks* after approving their permit to expand their toxic dumping operations in this poor, rural town, Kettleman City residents were infuriated by an obvious conflict of interest.

"The E.P.A. hasn't protected our health," said Joe Maya of *El Pueblo*. "We've never trusted Chem Waste, and now we find we can't trust the government either."

Now, the community is committed to renewed action. "We figure it will now probably go back for another supervisor vote," said Espy Maya, "so we need to keep the pressure on them." Direct action and boycotts are in the works targeting key figures in the long-term campaign.

A rally is in the works for September 21st at Kettleman's historic park, the site of many public meetings during the years when the UFW was a powerful local political force. Leaders from other organizations that have successfully fought off incinerators in their communities, including the Mothers of East Los Angeles, will drive up to help celebrate their victories and lend testimony to what can be accomplished when a community of color organizes.

Kettleman leaders are relieved and excited. "I don't like sitting and waiting," says Mary Lou Mares. "You lose momentum. I'm happy now to move."

Those who were movers and shakers in Kings County are sure to feel the renewed rumble.

David Portillo is completing a six-month Community Publishing Internship with the Center for Third World Organizing's Mentorship Program.

El Pueblo para el Aire y Agua Limpio's "Fiesta del Pueblo" will be celebrated on September 21st in Kettleman Park. For more information contact Mary Lou Mares (209) 386-9645 or Espy Maya (209) 386-5339.

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you question authority on the reservation you put your life on the line," Marina Ortega told the *Trendsletter*, "there are goon squads and thugs with guns. People get killed."

Ortega also points out that what appears to be a struggle over toxics is really much more than that — an analysis echoed by every activist contacted for this article. As Rodarte puts it, "we can't see any of these issues as separate. We don't separate the environment from economics or from the issue of accountability and democracy on the reservation."

"Regular people" (as Marina Ortega describes herself) have little luck trying to bypass the local government and deal directly with the U.S. "The BIA has no interest in listening to the people," says Steve Banegas, "they only deal government-to-government. One time when we tried to recall one tribal leader and went to the BIA representative, he told us that he would not even hear us out." As mentioned above, the BIA is generally in favor of the dump and incinerator proposals, seeing them as a form of economic development. (In South Dakota, however, the BIA representative for the Lakota Sioux nation is opposed to RSW Inc.'s plans, according to Bradley Angel of Greenpeace.)

"This system is very corrupt," says Emily Ironcloud Koenen, "and it's time to do away with it. The system seems to overpower anybody who gets elected [to the Tribal Council], no matter who they are."

The Indigenous Environmental Network

Native American organizers have been working to connect the various struggles for a number of years. So far, there have been two conferences called "Protecting Mother Earth: The Toxic Threat to Indian Lands" held in 1990 (Dilkon, Arizona) and 1991 (Black Hills, South Dakota). "It feels good," says Rodarte, "things are really snowballing. We had two hundred people in Dilkon from thirty tribes, and five hundred people [in Black Hills] from fifty-seven tribes."

At the last conference, held in June, a coordinating committee was empowered to set up an office to serve as a clearinghouse, and an "Indigenous Environmental Network" was officially inaugurated, with Rodarte as acting director. The network, according to Rodarte, can play an important role in connecting the individual struggles, which is especially important given that the same company will often approach several different reservations with the same proposal. Waste Tech, for example, has admitted that it want to site fifteen incinerators or dumps on Native American land, while an internal memo from Bechtel Corporation leaked to activists made a blanket suggestion to locate all kinds of hazardous waste facilities on reservations all over the country.

Another goal of the network is to bridge the gap between the hazardous waste experts and the grassroots. "We have been successful because we are Indian people working with other Indians," Rodarte commented, "but sometimes tying into the environmental groups is like getting hooked into another bureaucracy." He explained that if they are organized, Native Americans can access the information and expertise national environmental organizations have collected without being condescended to. Native Americans are tired of having their concerns included as an afterthought in campaigns by environmental groups, Rodarte said, and are sick of being told "well, we had an awareness session and dealt with racism for an hour and half, so now lets move on to environmental issues."

"We want to come to the table as equals, and we want access to the money too."

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