

# Colonialism in Puerto Rico

News and Articles on:

## The Environment Militarization

\$3.00

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# The Puerto Rican Environmental Movement: A Brief Overview

*The following introduction was written by Puerto Rican environmentalist Deborah Santana and originally appeared in El Bientevao Libre, January 1993.*

The environmental movement in Puerto Rico arose during the 1960's in response to five manifestations of Puerto Rico's colonial political status and economic development strategy.

First, displacement of poor coastal residents by military and tourist expansion provoked nationalist opposition with increasing environmentalist overtones. Second, attention was called to serious erosion problems, due to sand and rock extraction for massive construction projects undertaken to provide Puerto Rico with an infrastructure capable of handling the ambitious industrialization and modernization programs. Third, it fought stripmining of the island's interior by multinational corporations. Fourth, nuclear irradiation and "Agent Orange" experiments in the El Yunque tropical rain forest inspired environmentalist, nationalist, and anti-military protests. Finally, it mobilized workers and communities against the environmental havoc resulting from heavy industrialization. In recent years activists have expertly utilized the media to inform and mobilize broad sectors of the public quickly, sometimes forcing corporations, the government, and even the military to drop or modify environmentally questionable plans.

The environmental movement is nearly unique among grassroots social movements in Puerto Rico, in that it is showing an increasing ability to unite citizens from different political and social backgrounds; this holds out hope that the environmental struggle may eventually provide a nucleus for a national popular movement capable of demanding and effecting change. However, the movement must focus on two important issues: first, it must fight against the colonial-inspired ideology of lack of natural resources, which led to the island's dependent development strategy and hinders public awareness of the need for environmental protection — for most people won't protect what neither exists nor belongs to them. Second, it must promote sustainable development of all of the island's resources to provide for the people's economic and social needs, while protecting the natural environment for the use and enjoyment of future generations.

# Unexplained toxins haunt Puerto Rico

By Mark Kurlansky  
Special to the Tribune

MAYAGUEZ, Puerto Rico— "Around 1981 we started feeling something strange," Montserrat Cruz said. "In August 1983 people started feeling numbness, dizziness, chest pains. Then on Dec. 12, 1984, we were working. Something smelled strange. We stood up and saw a cloud. It started green. Then turned to pink. Then gray. Then disappeared. Then women started falling on the floor."

This is more than a recurring nightmare for Cruz and 4,800 workers in the Guanajibo-Castillo Industrial Zone in the west coast city of Mayaguez. It is a recurring assault that can not be explained. It is one of 176 such incidents in this zone documented from March 3, 1983, to Nov. 16, 1989.

The unexplained gas here is only one of numerous mysterious poisonings on the island of Puerto Rico. On the other end of the island, an entire town has been evacuated because of mysterious illnesses. In the center of the island, residents by Lake Cidra complain of strange rashes and respiratory ailments.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is finding that the island has an unusual concentration of toxic waste that will cost hundreds of millions of dollars to clean up. In the last decade, dozens of small local environmental groups have formed to call attention to strange occurrences in their areas.

These groups often do not have the scientific background to explain the phenomenon, but strange tales from angry citizens are being heard all over the island. There are repeated stories of lakes and rivers that suddenly turned bright blue. There are constant stories of people falling sick from the air, water or soil.

Not all the outbreaks are mysteries. The mercury in the soil near the central town of Juncos is by the Becton Dickinson thermometer plant. On the north coast, the Upjohn Co. has so far spent \$15 million trying to clean up the 15,000 gallons of carbon tetrachloride that leaked into the water system in 1982.

The EPA already has identified nine sites for its priority list and expects in the next few years to add more. These are sites slated for cleanup at an estimated cost of \$30 million each either by the industry that is responsible or by the so-called Superfund, a system whereby toxic waste-producing industries are taxed and the revenue applied to areas the EPA designates as particularly severe.

"Nine sites is quite a lot for an area the size of Puerto Rico," said Pedro Gelabert, director of the EPA in Puerto Rico. Puerto Rico is 3,400 square miles in area, or about one-sixteenth the size of Illinois.

The chief environmental watchdog for the Puerto Rican government, the Environmental Quality Board, submitted a list of 160 sites

for Superfund. The EPA found 9 out of the first 100 were severe enough for their list of priorities. But they already have recommended to Washington another eight sites and think there will be more. "We believe we are going to get more municipal landfills," Gelabert said.

Neither the EPA nor the Puerto Rican government is accusing industry of violating current anti-pollution laws. In the 1960s and '70s, when there were few prohibitions, industry dumped significant quantities of toxic waste in municipal landfills. Private industry as well as federal and Puerto Rican officials say the practice largely ended once the Recovery and Conservation Act took effect in 1980.

Sometimes the cure is as bad as the illness. Lake Cidra looks like a green meadow. People living in the residential area by the lake say they are afraid to drink water from it.

The Puerto Rican government decided to clear the lake by using a defoliant that locals and researchers at the University of Puerto Rico say is in itself highly toxic.

The gases escaping at the industrial park in Mayaguez are one of the island's great toxic mysteries. No one denies that there are gases escaping and that the workers, 80 percent of whom are women, are getting sick. Hundreds have checked into hospitals after so-called "gas attacks." In a single incident in 1985, 258 people were hospitalized.

Benito Ruiz, plant manager for

Stieffel Laboratories and head of the industrial parks association said, "Nobody can say where or how this happens, but people get sick."

Another mystery is Ciudad Cristiana, a low-cost housing project partially funded with federal assistance.

The developers originally were turned down twice for a building permit. The area on the eastern coast of Puerto Rico is near an industrial park where mercury dumping had polluted a canal.

Furthermore, 200 cows died in 1977 from grazing in the pesticide contaminated field where the town was to be located. The Environmental Quality Board had both mercury and pesticide stopped in 1978.

Then the project was approved. Ciudad Cristiana became home to 451 families. Then complaints started emerging of miscarriages, headaches, loss of hair, loose teeth, skin rashes, learning problems in children. In 1985, the Puerto Rican government moved the entire town to new housing in a nearby area and closed down Ciudad Cristiana. The 451 families complain of continuing health problems and are suing the Puerto Rican government. But the EPA has been unable to document the cause of the health problems. They found mercury in the creek bed, but not in the fish or in the town.

"Could they have had contact with the people in Juncos?" suggested a perplexed Gelabert. "We know the people in Juncos have mercury poisoning."

## World

# Battle on to preserve national rain forest

By Georgia Tasker  
*Knight-Ridder Newspapers*

**CARIBBEAN NATIONAL FOREST, Puerto Rico** — In every forest, there's a sound that works its way into memory.

In the Caribbean National Forest, called El Yunque for one of its mountain peaks, that sound is the crystal-clear two-note piping of little brown frogs: "co-kee, co-kee," a low note then a sharp high one. The singing of the coquis often plays against the rushing of water because here it rains 280 days a year and the creeks and waterfalls are abundant and gushing.

A small woodland by some standards, the 28,000-acre El Yunque is the only tropical forest in the U.S. Forest Service system and one of the oldest forest reserves in the Western Hemisphere. Its coquis, its endangered parrots and boa constrictors and elfin woodland have earned a reprieve from the larger scale development originally planned by the U.S. Forest Service, although environmentalists and the people of Puerto Rico have yet to pass judgment on the newest management plan.

When the Forest Service devised a 10-year plan for El Yunque in 1986, foresters proposed to commercially log some 2,000 acres, build 15 miles of new roads, and declare only 5,000 acres as wilderness.

The Society of Natural History and Department of Natural Resources in Puerto Rico, as well as big guns of the environmental movement in the United States — including E.O. Wilson from Harvard, Michael Robinson, director of the National Zoo, and Paul Ehrlich of Stanford — decried the plan. In Puerto Rico, protest bombings were attributed to militants opposed to the logging.

The Forest Service went back to the drawing board. Last month, it revealed the new plan, still open to public comment until June 8. It has devised four alternative plans, but officially prefers one that will:

- Log 200 acres in the next 10 years.

- Build a maximum of 1.5 miles of roads.

- Set aside 10,000 acres as wilderness, which include an even more restrictive research natural area.

- Emphasize recovery efforts for the endangered Puerto Rican parrot, the boa and some 41 "sensitive" plants that are endangered, threatened or rare.

The Caribbean National Forest has the only sizable virgin land left Puerto Rico, with the possible exception, say experts, of remote and inaccessible areas of the central mountains.

Here, clearly distinguishable from Highway 191 that snakes through it, are four distinct forest types: the lowland tabonuco forest, where the scaly-naped pigeon and the bananaquits fly; the palo colorado forest, with crooked, red-barked ancient palo colorado trees, where the endangered boa and Puerto Rican parrot live; the palm brake, where sierra palms cluster around rivers and streams; the elfin woodland of the mountain tops, where tiny trees and shrubs, liverworts and mosses are washed in clouds and constant mists.

An estimated 1 million people visit the forest each year, although the Forest Service never has done an official count. They have their photos taken before Cocoa Falls and walk the aerial Big Tree Trail to La Mina Falls; they come to see the golden glory of the *Heliconia caribea* and the lacy finery of the giant tree ferns rising 30 or 40 feet into the air.

Because visitors are so plentiful, new recreation facilities are badly needed, foresters say. They propose to develop five new picnic-camping areas and 11 new interpretive sites, as well as build a visitor center by 1993. The visitor center complex may include training facilities such as classrooms and dorm space for students from other tropical countries.

May, 1990

Indianapolis Tribune

# Group prepares to fight for P.R.'s forests

By HARRY TURNER  
Scraps Howard News Service

WASHINGTON — A major environmental organization, warning that "time is running out," is beginning a campaign to stop what it calls the steady destruction of Puerto Rico's 14 Commonwealth-owned forests.

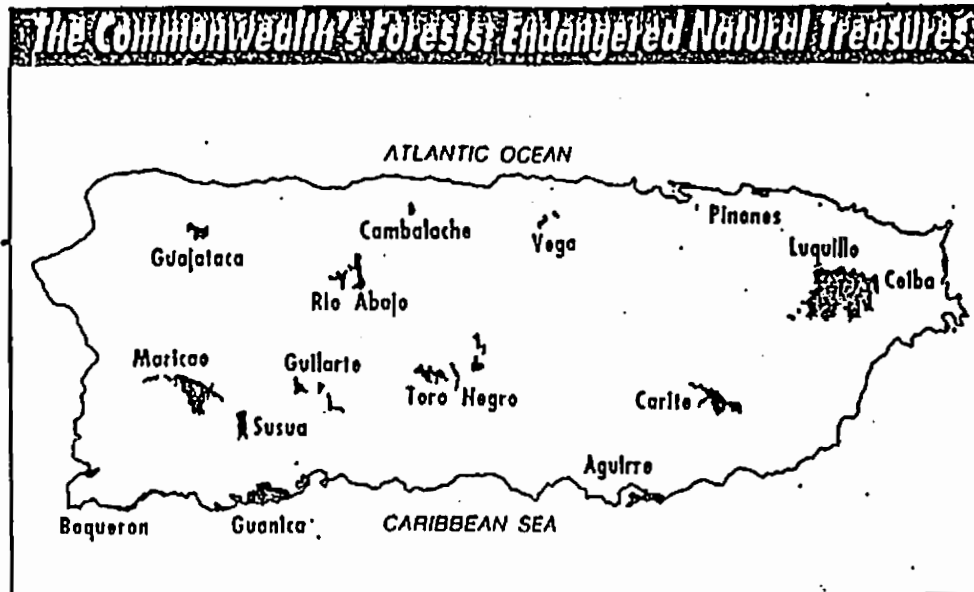
The Natural Resources Defense Council, which has a history of successful legal action against mainland environmental polluters, said it expects to initiate a wide-ranging program in Puerto Rico to protect the forests from what it called "a variety of threats."

"Puerto Rico's biological wealth is in danger," the NRDC said.

Faith T. Campbell, senior research associate with NRDC, said one primary goal is to encourage the Natural Resources Department to set up a forest management program.

To date, Campbell said, "It looks like they [Natural Resources] have done about nothing" to establish a management plan to prevent environmental destruction in the 14 forests.

In an interview here, Campbell said a bill by Sen. Victoria "Melo" Muñoz Mendoza, PDP-at large, that would have established such a forest management plan died in the Legislature earlier this year.



Map shows the locations of Commonwealth forests on the island.

Among the threats to the forests and the valuable plant and animal species that exist in them are unauthorized deforestation, construction of communications facilities in the higher forests, the influx of illegal residents and, in the Vega forest, a municipal garbage dump that is spreading pollution, she said.

Her organization, Campbell said, is particularly concerned about the "real danger" to the Guanica State Forest posed by the proposed Club Med, and she raised the possibility that NRDC would go to court if it appeared the resort project was ready to move forward.

Legal action in Ponce Superior Court

has stymied the Club Med project for now.

Campbell said the resort would threaten the crested toad and the Puerto Rican nightjar bird, both on the endangered species list and both with their habitat in the subtropical dry forest that abuts the resort land.

In recent years NRDC, which has a large staff of lawyers, has won several environmental legal battles against Bethlehem Steel, some national oil companies, industrial polluters in New England and the Environmental Protection Agency.

Campbell, whose offices are in Washington, said one campaign goal in Puerto Rico is to "open up the Department of Natural Resources to make information on the forests more available to the public."

Additionally, NRDC expects to present several slide shows on the island to drum up public support for the forest protection campaign, she said.

Assisting Campbell in the project is Suzzette Delgado Mendoza, a graduate of the University of Puerto Rico Mayaguez campus.

The Commonwealth forests, which total about 7,000 acres, are Pinones, Luquillo, Colba, Carite, Aguirre, Guanica, Boqueron, Susua, Monte Gullarte, Toro Negro, Maricao, Guajataca, Rio Abajo, Vega and Cambalache.

U.S.-P.R. begin



Aquí detrás  
hay una planta  
de carbón.



What you see is not necessarily what is... The headline beneath the photo at left states that there is a coal-fired generating plant out of view and the text of the ad published by Cogentrix implies that the photograph was taken in North Carolina, where the company has established plants. However, Cogentrix has admitted that the photo actually was taken in Alborito. The photo above, taken by Misión Industrial, is of the identical scene with a cutout overlay of two children walking and flowers in the foreground to emphasize the seaminess to the photograph in the ad.



## Cogentrix accused of doctoring ad photo

By KARL ROSS  
OF THE STAR BUN

The partnership behind a controversial proposal to build a coal-fired plant was accused Tuesday of doctoring a print advertisement, while company officials countered that the ad aims to show such a facility would not damage the environment.

The accusations were aired by a member of Misión Industrial outside a Planning Board hearing

over the location of the plant, and they surround a full-page, full-color ad published Aug. 27 in El Nuevo Día.

Cogentrix-Endesa, the two firms interested in building a \$325 million, 300 megawatt coal-fired plant in Mayaguez Bay, have invested more than \$1 million to win support for their plans. Amid opposition from townspeople and politicians alike throughout the island, the proposal received the go-ahead

from the Environmental Quality Board last month, which cleared the way for the firms to pursue several other local and federal permits.

The ad features two Latino children walking hand-in-hand in a lush, flower-sprinkled meadow. Behind them is a skyline of pine trees and clearly defined mountain tops.

Written in the ad's bottom left corner is a caption stating: "Behind this there is a coal-fired plant." The

accompanying text reads: "The technology for producing electricity with coal is so advanced that it is already compatible with nature."

"In places where pine trees and vegetation abounds, like in North Carolina," the text continues, "Cogentrix has constructed coal-fired plants that serve humanity without damaging nature."

However, Misión Industrial activists said the photo was snapped not in

North Carolina behind a Cogentrix plant as the ad suggests, but here in Alborito, which does not have such a facility.

Misión's community organizer, Jorge Fernández, showed a photograph of an apparently identical site along Highway 717 in Barrio Pardo in Alborito. The stand of pine trees on the left side of the photo and the mountain range on the right are unmistakably alike, but absent are the springlike flowers, which

Fernández said were potted.

The activists' photograph is pasted along side the original ad on a placard but with a new caption - this one stating "Behind this is a big... LIE."

A spokeswoman for Comstel Rowland Inc., the public relations firm that handled the ad, said the picture was taken in Alborito.

Cogentrix Vice President James Feedin called the ad in question a "perception ad," which he said was intended "to point out that our plants are not incompatible with the environment."

"That's the point we're trying to convey," said Feedin, the local representative of the North Carolina-based Cogentrix firm.

Feedin, who approved the advertising proofs prior to publication, said he didn't think the ad was "misleading," and he countered that the Cogentrix-Endesa ad was "a lot better than the plain lying" that are displayed in anti-Cogentrix propaganda circulated by the plant's opponents.

Asked why the publicist firm didn't shoot the ad behind an actual Cogentrix facility in North Carolina or elsewhere, Feedin replied:

"Candidly, I don't know. The public relations people apparently wanted to show images of Puerto Rico, but there aren't any coal plants here."

EN VIVO

Esta noche  
a las 10:00 p.m.



Héctor  
Luis  
Acevedo

¿Puede inscribirse todavía?  
¿Qué hago si perdí mi tarjeta electoral... o si está vencida?

Héctor Luis Acevedo contesta preguntas de interés para los votantes y presenta un innovador plan urbano para Río Piedras.

Canal 7  
10:00 p.m.

Anuncio político pagado por Comité Municipal del PPD.

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required to accommodate the  
upcoming Christmas and '93  
men's fashion collections.

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Sept. 192  
2 The San Juan Star

**IN B**

**Mayaguez group calls for EPA official to resign**

The spokeswoman for Mayaguezanos for Health and the Environment said Tuesday that the group is calling for the resignation of Constantine Sidamon-Eristoff, regional administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Spokeswoman Julia Mignucci denounced as "irregular and improper" the administrator's disclosure Friday at a gathering of local business leaders that the EPA had tentatively approved the air-emissions permit for the Cogentrix-Endesa coal-fired plant.

The controversial project, proposed to be built on Mayaguez Bay, is strongly backed by the island's business leaders but is opposed by many top political leaders, including the three gubernatorial candidates. The EPA must also consider the plant's impact on aquatic resources and neighboring endangered species, which are considered under a separate permit application.

# Playtex plant workers affected by gas fumes

By **DOREEN HEMLOCK**  
Of The STAR Staff

Twenty-nine workers at a Playtex Corp. plant in Barceloneta were hospitalized Wednesday morning after inhaling gaseous fumes, but most were released by Wednesday night, officials said.

Police and plant management continue to investigate the cause of the incident, but one unnamed worker told police that problems apparently started when a diesel gas tank was left open.

Diesel fumes apparently entered the air conditioning system, affecting employees in the sewing area, the worker told police.

Workers suffered respiratory difficulties, nausea, headaches, and in some

cases, vomiting, said a doctor at the San Agustín Hospital in Manatí.

Affected workers were taken to nearby hospitals with ambulances from the hospitals, Civil Defense and from pharmaceutical plants in the area.

As of Wednesday night, all had been released from Barceloneta's public hospital and most from private hospitals in the area.

The rest were expected to be released today, medical authorities said.

Playtex Barceloneta Corp., a division of Chicago-based Beatrice Co., makes brassieres and employs about 750 people.

The factory reportedly was closed for the day after the incident Wednesday morning, according to radio reports.

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## PUERTO RICO: TOXIC PARADISE A PROFILE

Location: The easternmost and smallest island of the Greater Antilles, bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the North and the Caribbean Sea in the South.

Area: 8,897 km<sup>2</sup> (3,423 mi<sup>2</sup>)

Population: 3.5 million (1990 estimate); approximately 2.6 million have migrated to the United States since the 1940s.

Population density: 392 inhabitants/km<sup>2</sup> (1,028 inhabitants/mi<sup>2</sup>)

Urban population: 71%

Original colonial power: Spain, 1493-1898

Present colonial power: United States of America, 1898

Political status: The "Commonwealth of Puerto Rico" is under the jurisdiction of the United States Congress. Since 1973 the case of Puerto Rico is on the annual agenda of the United Nations Decolonization Committee. The United States government exerts direct control over more than 30 fundamental aspects of Puerto Rican sovereignty: foreign relations, air, land and waterways, migration, currency, shipping, foreign commerce, customs and tariffs, military service, nationality and citizenship, constitutional law, communications, postal system, etc.

Official languages: Spanish

Religion (1980): Catholic - 91%; Protestant - 4.7% (Protestant rate has presumably increased significantly during this decade, particularly revival denominations); unknown but significant number of practitioners of spiritualism and "santeria", based on African rites.

Per capita income (1988): \$5,157 (£ 3,145) (lower than the poorest United States state)

Real per capita income (1967 - 100): 1972 - \$3,120 (£ 1,903); 1988 - \$2,812 (£ 1,715)

Personal savings rate: minus 10%

Motor vehicles: approximately 1.5 million, or about one for every two inhabitants

Official unemployment rate (1988): 15.9%; real unemployment estimate: 30%

Official literacy rate (1980): 88.5%. In some municipalities total illiteracy approaches 30%; functional illiteracy estimate: 33%

Formal education (1991): 9 years

Official school desertion rate (1982-83): 20.4%

Extra official estimate: 50%

Public debt (1985): \$9.2 (£ 5.6) billion

U. S. Government transfers: \$6.7 (£ 4.1) billion (1989), aprox. \$936 (£ 571) million for the Food Assistance Program

Below poverty level (1980): 62.4%

Beneficiaries of Food Assistance Program: 63%

Violent crime rate (1988): 7<sup>th</sup> rank in United States

Adjusted homicide rates (1980): Puerto Rico - 16.3/100,000h; United States - 10.5; Metropolitan San Juan rank in United States 1988 = 2 (23/100,000h); Ponce rank: 4

Alcohol consumption: ranked among top 10 nations worldwide

Alcohol abuse and dependence rate estimate: 12.6%

Incidence of AIDS (1989): 2<sup>nd</sup> rank in United States; Puerto Rico rate = 42.9/100,000h; United States rate = 14.2; Metropolitan San Juan rate = 73.9

Value of United States direct investment (1986): \$24.7 (£ 15.1) billion, 3<sup>rd</sup> in global ranking, behind Canada and United Kingdom

Income on investment (1986): \$5.9 (£ 3.6) billion, 1<sup>st</sup> in global ranking

Puerto Rican ownership of reproducible wealth: 1950 - 82%; 1970 - 40%; 1984 - 20%; foreign wealth = 16 times Puerto Rican wealth

Industry generated toxic waste: 300-400,000 tons/year; 20% exported to United States; 60% disposed in Puerto Rico; 20% nobody seems to know where they end-up.

Domestic waste generation - 2,874,000 tons/year. In 1990 we were already generating domestic wastes at rate equal to the estimate U. S. generation for the year 2015. Waste are disposed in 62 landfills. Only 6 complies with either federal or local statutes. Only 2 complies with both.\*

Number of major toxic contamination sites: 160

Toxic clean-up cost (1989): \$5 (£ 3) billion

Statement of purpose - Misión Industrial de Puerto Rico is committed to assist economically deprived communities confronting serious industrial contamination problems, promoting their democratic organization for environmental struggle and the preservation of natural resources. Only properly informed, educated and ideologically independent communities can reverse erroneous and dangerous industrialization strategies through participation in economic and environmental decision-making, as necessary elements in the establishment of development strategies based on popular needs.

## MISION INDUSTRIAL: MOVEMENT BUILDING IN PUERTO RICO

by Mike Williams, CCHW Organizing Director and Brian Lipsett, CCHW Research Analyst

Toxic pollution knows no borders, and everywhere the greed of toxic dumpers raises its ugly head, people unite to stand for Environmental Justice. On the beautiful island of Puerto Rico, a particularly effective organization has risen to the battle.

The "Mision Industrial De Puerto Rico" has been a clearinghouse for grassroots citizen's groups fighting for Environmental Justice for more than 20 years. Mision Industrial is a non-profit, religious-based organization dedicated to helping disadvantaged communities facing environmental contamination and ecological destruction.

Funded mostly with grants and donations from churches and social service foundations, the Mision Industrial has used its modest resources to help thousands of Puerto Ricans keep out waste dumps, incinerators, luxury tourist resorts and the U.S. military.

Puerto Rico, located in the Caribbean Ocean, about 1,000 miles southeast of Florida, is a commonwealth nation affiliated with the United States. An island smaller than the size of Vermont, Puerto Rico has had a long history of U.S. corporate/political paternalism.

In the words of Mision Industrial, there is a need for, *"struggle against environmental deterioration of human and natural life wrought by three decades of a developmental policy which disregards the health of the people and our natural resources."*

Much like CCHW, the Mision Industrial goals are aimed at empowering local groups and leaders. Their main objective is helping *"the democratic and autonomous organization of our country's popular sectors, providing the necessary tools for them to defend their health, environment and natural resources from multinational corporations and governmental agencies."*

With an annual budget of about \$100,000, and fewer than 10 full-time employees, Mision Industrial has ac-

complished amazing victories and strides for the grassroots movement in Puerto Rico. In 1990 alone, the organization directly assisted more than 22 community groups in addition to their on-going work with educational centers, churches and mass media exposure of environmental justice struggles.

Mision Industrial is structured around four components: community organization; scientific and legal research; communications; and documentation, all coordinated with a minimum administrative staff and backed up by an impressive list of volunteer scientists, researchers and attorneys.

They emphasize door-to-door neighborhood organizing, but also have the experience and resources to coordinate a National (Puerto Rican) Convention of Environmental Groups. Mision Industrial's perspective on "bottom-up" grassroots environmental justice organizing is like few other national organizations.

*"The (grassroots) groups have developed a common language and a popular movement of great impact in our country's political life. In speaking of a 'movement' we are not referring to one structured in traditional terms, but rather of a movement consisting of a great diversity of autonomous parts, structured horizontally, with equality of conditions among its components. A movement characterized by its dispersion through the Island but unified by its common goals."*

Juan Rosario of Mision explains, *"I was at a meeting and people asked me to start. 'We were waiting for you to tell us what to do,' they said. I responded, 'If I ever come here to tell you what to do, I hope you kick me out of here.' We keep saying, 'Don't let anyone, including us, tell you what to do.' It's up to you. That's what is important. If we can go to a community and tell people what to do and they stop the facility, when you leave, you leave behind no organization, you leave behind no skills and no self reliance, people don't know what to do the next time, they will be*

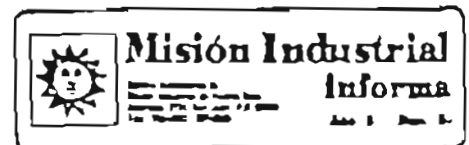
*fighting the same fight over and over again."*

In organizing a National Conference for Puerto Rico, the Mision Industrial helped to set up a coalition to allow all the grassroots groups to help each other, thereby avoiding having to struggle against the same pollution projects time and time again. They also clearly wanted to avoid *"reproducing the environmental movements of other countries but rather respond to our own conditions and needs."*

Nineteen grassroots groups and many individuals participated in the conference. While many people urged the Mision Industrial to become the decision-making body of a national coalition, Mision Industrial leaders turned down this suggestion because it is against their principles to dictate policy to the grassroots. In other words, *"don't do for others what they can be empowered to do for themselves."*

It is due to such vision and adherence to true democratic principles that CCHW is so proud to be working with Mision Industrial and the grassroots groups of Puerto Rico. Both local and larger than local grassroots organizations can gain valuable insights from our friends in the Caribbean.

Mision continued on next page.



*Alternativas a la crisis  
de los desperdicios*



Mision continued from previous page.

CCHW's reputation is based on the power of the groups we work with. The stronger and more effective these local groups are, the more effective we are. The same can be said for Mision Industrial. Without the commitment and determination of local communities, Mision's guidance would be little more than a voice in a storm. Here are a few examples:

Mision helped groups win a victory over 30 microwave antennas. A local group was formed called the National Association against Antennas and Radiation (ANCR). They forced the planning board to suspend the permit process until they had acceptable regulations.

Mision has been working with the Comité Despertar Cidreno (Committee for the Awakening of Cidra). Mision describes Comité as, "One of the most independent among community environmental groups and is developing excellent work regarding the environment, planning, popular education and community organization." Comité is working on a number of campaigns, including a boycott of Coca Cola because of toxic discharges into the Cidra water supply, cleanup of dumpsites and other factory emissions in the area and wildlife/archeological/preservation.

One of the most common opponents of Mision Industrial and many grassroots groups in Puerto Rico is Browning Ferris Industries. (BFI was formed out of the merger of Texas, Tennessee and Puerto Rican garbage haulers in the early 70's.) In 1988, a BFI subsidiary proposed a landfill in Guaynabo/Hato Nuevo area near San Juan. Two years later, residents in Hato Nuevo discovered BFI's plans. They organized Vecinos De Guaynabo Opuestos al Vertedero en Hato Nuevo (VEGOVE). In English, that's Guaynabo Residents Against the Landfill. According to VEGOVE leader, Doris Anglero, Mision Industrial helped the group get started, but VEGOVE quickly established itself.

According to Angel Sosa of VEGOVE, "The people of Hato Nuevo have sustained an opposition campaign, during 16 months, against...BFI and its subsidiary, Environmental Development Corp. Ours

has been a particularly well organized struggle. However, due to the great political and economic power of BFI and to the tendency of our government to quick fix 'solutions' to serious problems, at this moment, political considerations are playing a big role in how this case will be decided...

"At the beginning of the siting process, EDC/BFI was represented by an important legal firm: Goldman & Antonetti. However, early this year, EDC/BFI hired a new legal firm named Fiddler, Gonzalez y Rodriguez. We believe this is a political move. This new firm is known for its high level contacts with the present administration in PR...At present, Attorney Salvado Casellas, has been incorporated to the process due to his relationship with Gov Rafael Hernandez-Colon."

Sosa argues that after VEGOVE won support from a number of US and Puerto Rican agencies that have jurisdiction over the landfill, BFI visited top officials in those agencies and managed to get the US EPA and US Geological Survey to soften or reverse their opposition to the landfill. In addition, BFI offered a deal to the San Juan Solid Waste Authority to gain their endorsement for the landfill in exchange for a promise to accept ash from San Juan's proposed incinerator. BFI attorney, Salvado Casellas, is also representing Westinghouse in the proposed San Juan solid waste incinerator.

To counteract these political moves, VEGOVE has maintained a high profile in the news media through press conferences and protests aimed at highlighting both the political shenanigans BFI has been playing and the technical inadequacies of the site. The group has enlisted the support of many important



VEGOVE members confront BFI rep Gerald Gresh. The sign reads "BFI Don't give me that Trash." Leaders added, "We usually don't communicate in English, but these signs were a special service for Mr Gresh." Photo Credit: VEGOVE.

people in their community. Using information CCHW provided on BFI, a prominent Hato Nuevo resident, who is also an attorney, helped to discredit BFI's track record by presenting their anti-trust and environmental violations. VEGOVE and Mision also exposed BFI's dumping of toxic waste in the Ponce municipal landfill. According to Doris Anglero, "In a press conference we showed that BFI's model of good management, the Ponce landfill, was not as pretty as they want us to believe."

The fight for Environmental Justice in Puerto Rico continues. Juan Rosario of Mision explains, "[The politicians] don't want to deal with people... They think the people are ignorant. At one meeting about the proposed San Juan garbage incinerator, officials tried to tell people they were ignorant. That really made people mad. One woman said 'We are upset because you are treating us like children. We think that you don't have any respect for people.'" The message here is that folks in Puerto Rico are tough, organized and fighting hard for environmental justice. Doris Anglero is looking to the future, "The organized groups are really strong, we still have a long way to go, but we will fight on."



Waste management specialist

Special to the STAR

By JUAN E. ROSARIO

## Dioxin dangers are for real



**T**he editorial entitled "The dioxin mistake" that appeared recently in this newspaper is indeed alarming. It basically states that the evacuation of Times Beach, Mo., contaminated with dioxin was premature and unnecessary. Such opinion is based on supposedly new evidence that shows that dioxins are not as dangerous to humans as they are to animals.

A close examination on the controversy of dioxins reveals that the truth is very different from what the editorial, the government, and the industry wants the people to believe. Dioxins is the short name of a group of 75 chemicals, of which the 2, 3, 7, 8 tetrachlorodibenzo-p-dioxin (TCDD) is the most toxic isomer. Nevertheless, according to Environmental Protection Agency, at least 12 other isomers are of great concern to humans. According to an EPA study, "on a molecular basis, TCDD is perhaps the most toxic substance ever made by man."

Doses as low as one-trillionth of an animal's body weight have been correlat-

ed with cancer, birth defects and reproductive problems. At higher but still tiny doses it has produced those same effects, plus developmental, nervous and immune system abnormalities and damage to the kidney, liver and skin. An EPA document of 1985 considers TCDD "as the most potent carcinogen ever tested on laboratory animals."

The editorial quotes a study from Italy where an accident in 1976, released dioxins into the environment. The study, the editorial says, shows no excess cancers for those exposed to dioxins. However, in 1989, a study of this community found increased rates of brain cancer, leukemia and other cancers.

Previously, in 1980, an EPA report quoted a study of 1978 that found "an increase in chromosomal lesions in males and females aged two to 28 years. Cytogenetic (cell) studies indicated chromosomal damage in maternal peripheral blood and in placental and fetal tissues studied following therapeutic abortions." This may explain the unusually high incidence of abortions among women in Oregon

who were exposed to 2, 4, 5 T (Agent Orange component). This information was deliberately kept from the public by EPA, along with other findings about the health risk posed by eating Great Lakes fish contaminated with dioxins. Two officials of EPA resigned in the wake of the scandal.

Not only do dioxins represent an immediate risk to those exposed but also pose long term dangers. Dioxins are very persistent chemicals and once in the soil they resist breakdown for many years, even decades. This enhances the contamination of food and the consequent bioaccumulation of the chemical in the food chain. In the case of dairy products, the bioconcentration rate can be as high as 480 to 1, according to studies made by the Center for the Biology of the Natural Systems in New York.

Industry has successfully pressured EPA to keep alarming information from the public. When the EPA administration proposed a relaxation of the risk estimate, even its own Scientific Advisory Board rejected it. They said that "there is

no scientific basis for such change."

As for the studies conducted by the industries and the Center for Disease Control, even government officials do not have many good things to say about them.

Dr. Cate Lenkins, a chemist on EPA's Regulatory Development Branch, calls Monsanto research "fraudulent." Last year the House Government Operations Committee said that the Orange Agent study, conducted by the CDC amounted to a "cover up." Ted Weiss, chairman of the investigation, called the CDC study a "sham."

There is massive information which demonstrates that the dangers of dioxins to people are for real. This editorial comes out when the government is planning to build three incinerators, and the private sector is promoting at least one more to "solve" the waste crisis in Puerto Rico. They are going to be, by far, the greatest point sources of dioxins. Public health is not well served when people are told that "the most toxic substances man has ever made" will do them no harm

## Campaign pedals for recycling

Puerto Rican environmentalists are fighting a plan by Westinghouse Corporation to install a domestic waste incinerator in the capital San Juan. The company claims it is offering an environmentally-friendly waste disposal service to the city's inhabitants, and to reinforce this positive image describes it as a resource recovery plant.

The incinerator would be a prototype for seven more units planned throughout the island and for the promotion of this state of the art technology in the Caribbean and Latin America.

Opponents of the plan say that it is an expensive solution which might cause more harm than good. The smoke from the waste now burned in dumps would be replaced by gases, particles and toxic emission from the incinerators. The pollution of soil and groundwater from landfills would be increased by the burial of toxic ash; and approximately 50% of the total volume of garbage would still have to be dumped, either as toxic ash or non-burnable items.

Incinerators contaminate the air with nitrogen oxides, sulphuric oxide, hydrogen chloride, carbon monoxide, heavy metals and the most toxic and dangerous substances ever produced dioxins and furans.

In Sweden, for example, the

government warned nursing women living near incinerators not to breast-feed their babies after tests showed high levels of dioxin in mothers' milk. Dioxins also reach humans through the food chain. A study on cows conducted by the Center for the Biology of the Natural Systems in the US showed that as much dioxin was accumulated in the body from drinking one litre of contaminated milk than from breathing dioxin-polluted air for eight months.

Besides creating serious pollution problems, the installation of waste incinerators in Puerto Rico would hamper the development of more environmentally-sound alternatives such as waste reduction, and recycling.

In order to be profitable, incinerators must burn large amounts of waste. Environmentalists fear that waste might even have to be imported to ensure a constant flow of raw material for the new plant.

Puerto Rico plans to legislate to prevent separate collections of items that can be recycled and critics claim the law is designed to ensure such a waste flow. The government is also considering introducing taxes for waste management.

Only large waste management enterprises can afford the incinerators. Such large enterprises may easily become monopolies, as did Browning Ferris Industries, Waste Management Inc. and others in the US. These two monopolies have pushed local recycling operators out of business and now, less than 10% is being recycled.

Misión Industrial de Puerto Rico, the island's non-governmental organisation concerned with the environment, is

campaigning for waste reduction and recycling on the grounds that both strategies make economic and ecological sense.

The campaigners are pressing the government to offer incentives for the development of local projects which recycle the raw materials found in waste, an average of 80% of the total volume. They are also promoting a shift

in consumption patterns as well as prompting industries to alter production processes and to use recycled materials.

They believe that garbage must not be viewed as a final product but rather as a step in the production-consumption cycle, as recoverable material.

*Marianne Meyn works for the Misión Industrial de Puerto Rico.*



## THE HEALTH OF A COUNTRY: NOT NEGOTIABLE

### A COMMUNITY ORGANISATION IN PUERTO RICO

by Marianne Meyn

For over a decade, Mission Industrial de Puerto Rico has offered assistance to poor Puerto Rican communities who are struggling against serious problems of environmental pollution and their effects on health. Mission Industrial assists the communities to organise themselves, through the direct participation of community organizers and through popular education programs. These are related to specific problems faced by affected communities. Mission Industrial's education program is also directed towards the underlying problems linking the Puerto Rican economic development model with the destruction of the environment, natural and human. Mission Industrial believes that the democratic organisation of educated and well-informed communities forms an

indispensable element of counter-balance to the failures of economic development. It enables them to be in charge of their own lives based on the knowledge they develop about their environmental problems and on their own practical grassroots perspective.

Mission Industrial was created to provide an alternative to the uncontrolled industrial development model that has made Puerto Rico a haven for investment by polluting industries, and, therefore, one of the most polluted countries in the world. Decades of incentives to industrial development have attracted a large number of multinational enterprises. These industries have created severe environmental problems through their need to annually dispose of 336,000 tons of hazardous waste. A recent proposal to create four dumps for industrial waste has brought opposition from neighbouring communities. Other environmental problems include those arising from the large number of power stations built to meet the energy needs of an expanding industrial base.

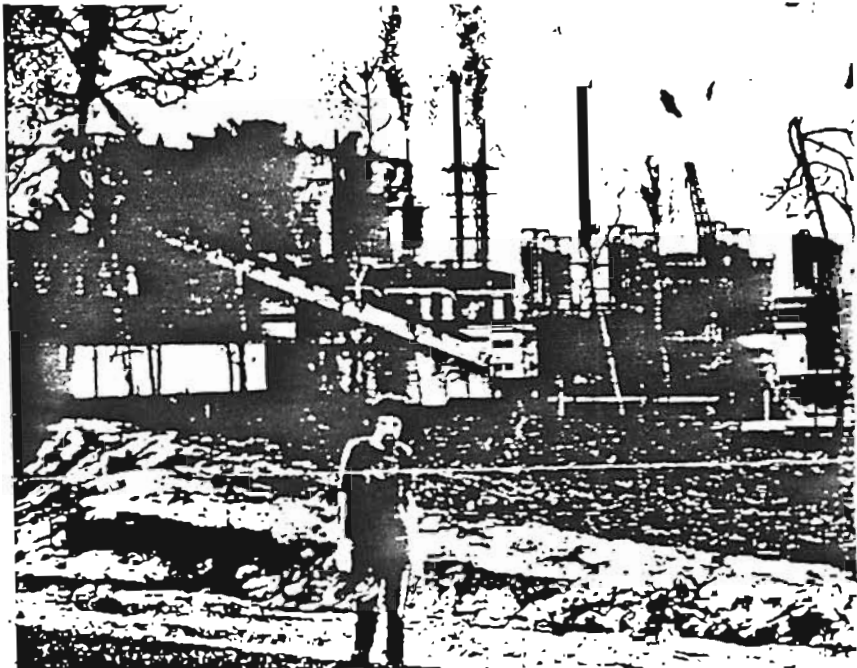
There are more than 2,000 factories in our small island of 3500 square miles. The community of Ciudad Cristiana was built on land which had for more than a decade, received waste from the Industrial Park of Humacao. Poisoning by mercury and

other heavy metals has blighted the lives of some 450 families living in the area. After a campaign lasting a year and a half and supported by Mission Industrial, the government was forced to take the unprecedented step of relocating the entire community.

The struggle of the community of Ciudad Cristiana will continue until the government fulfils all its promises to build a new residential complex, to conduct legal and medical research, and compensate the sufferers.

In the last two years, Mission Industrial has supported workers and residents in and around the Industrial Park of Guanajibo in Mayaguez in their campaign to stop the escape of toxic gases that periodically affect the workshops and communities of the area. These escapes have caused about 1,000 workers (mainly women) to be hospitalised. The neurotoxic effects of these gases have disabled many workers and have chronically weakened many residents of the area as a result of polineuropathy. Symptoms of polineuropathy include depression, numbness of the face, tongue, lips and fingers, lung and skin diseases, and temporary memory loss.

The workers in this Industrial Park and neighbouring communities, like the residents of Ciudad Cristiana, live with the frightening experiences caused by a frequently polluted



"Majority of industries in Puerto Rico generate few jobs, but have a high potential for environmental pollution." Photo credit: Stefan Okologuicz

environment: the continuous fear of another escape of toxic chemicals; the fear of job losses resulting from absences from work due to a variety of debilitating health effects. In this case, there are also serious psychological problems exacerbated by the callous attitudes of industry and government agencies who blame the effects of toxic gases on the imagination of 'hysterical workers'.

In spite of this, Mission Industrial believes that communities such as these can face their individual and collective problems. The struggle for improved conditions is beyond the capacity of isolated individuals: it requires community organisation and popular education. The work of the community must not only make the responsible corporations and government agencies accountable for pollution; it must also point out the necessity for other communities to work together and organise themselves in pursuit of greater peoples participation in the decisions taken about their environment and their economy. In this way, communities can put forward a new vision of development: One in which people's health is not sacrificed in the pursuit of an artificial economic prosperity; one of which genuine prosperity is achieved by placing people and their needs as the highest consideration.

Mission Industrial works alongside many communities, not only those that respond to specific pollution problems, but also those seeking to prevent the establishment of new polluting industries. Most of these struggles have succeeded. Many environmental movements have been able to bring together a cross section of the national community. As a result, several potentially damaging projects have been stopped, including the construction of a super-port which would have brought oil from Arab countries to be refined in Puerto Rico; the establishment of three nuclear power plants; the expansion of Rohm & Haas, a pesticides plant; and the construction of a herbicide plant by Monsanto.

Due to the complexity of the environmental problems in Puerto Rico, Mission Industrial supports the needs and interests of the communities at a variety of levels: by pressuring government agencies to meet their obligations; by conducting scientific and legal research about ecological damage; and by educating the community. This is done from a perspective which aims to help communities to reach a level of

knowledge and organization which will enable them to become agents for change; for social transformation.

It is a basic goal of the organizational and educational work of Mission Industrial to help communities to become self-reliant in their decision making. This means that the communities will slowly become independent of Mission Industrial's infrastructure which has already been achieved in some cases.

Mission Industrial has always defined the ecological problems of the country as the outcome of the type of economic development imposed on Puerto Rico by the United States. Historically, Puerto Rico has been used as the show-case of economic progress in the Caribbean region, as well as providing bridge for the economic penetration in the region. Puerto Rico's role in the economic plans of the metropolis has increased even more as a result of the Caribbean Basin initiative (CBI) which aims to develop a network of industrial plants in the Caribbean based on Puerto Rico.

The majority of these industries will be chemical, pharmaceutical and electronic plants which will generate few jobs, but have a high potential for environmental pollution.

Based on this analysis of the region, Mission Industrial has come to realise that wider cooperation and information is needed among Caribbean organizations and movements working on the environmental issues. The Caribbean countries must seek common solutions in the context of a regional strategy, whilst at the same time taking account of the economic, social and political reality of each country. The search for alternatives will also bring the Caribbean countries closer together.

For more information write to:-

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## TRICKLE UP PROGRAMME

A new revolutionary programme to end poverty started seven years ago on a small Caribbean island, the Trickle Up Programme spread to now in over 80 countries. Unemployed and underemployed women are getting together and starting their own businesses. Growing and selling fruits and vegetables, starting bakeries, making school uniforms and clothes, they work long hours, but they are making profits, saving, reinvesting, gaining confidence and becoming self reliant.

Young people who have never had a job have learned they can become entrepreneurs and create their own jobs. Working together, they are investing their time and creating their own capital. Some of the poorest people in the world are solving their problems of unemployment, poverty, and hunger through the Trickle Up Programme, which gives them the courage to believe in their own dreams.

As shown in the enclosed World Summary Report for the period from the start of the Program in May 1979 through December 1985, a total of 1,747 enterprises have been started in eighty countries with the help of 516 TUP Co-ordinators.

Co-ordinators are individuals and

organizations who are already working with people in areas of poverty where widespread unemployment and malnutrition are chronic. TUP does not find Co-ordinators; they find TUP and ask to become Co-ordinators. The TUP process provides them with a technique to use to help people make practical business plans. It enables them to make immediate payments of \$50 per group as start-up capital so that work can start without delay.

To the poorest of the poor, this is a significant amount of capital--enough to get them started in their own business, and when a Business Report, certified by a Co-ordinator is received, showing that they have met the conditions of the Grant, a final \$50 helps them move ahead. The average projected profit for 12 months of \$880 indicates that a milestone on the path out of poverty has been passed, particularly as people have learned how to create their own capital by investing their previously unemployed time, skills, and ideas.

For more information write to:  
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NL61, New York, NY 10024, USA.

# PUERTO RICO: The Military Industrial Cost

