



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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South Africans protest Mondi Paper's multi-fuel boiler, 2001-2006

2001

to:

2006

Country: South Africa

Location City/State/Province: South Durban

Goals:

To prevent the construction of a multi-fuel boiler by multinational paper mill Mondi; to reverse the Kwa-Zulu Natal Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs' decision to allow Mondi to construct a 90-ton multi-fuel boiler (MFB) and pursue other expansion at the Mondi Paper Mill in Merebank, Durban

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 047. Assemblies of protest or support
- 048. Protest meetings
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 013. Deputations › SDCEA's chairman traveled to London to confront parent company Anglo American at the Annual General Meeting

Methods in 4th segment:

- 001. Public speeches
- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 006. Group or mass petitions
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 048. Protest meetings

- 121. Refusal of public support
- 122. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Methods in 5th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions
- 010. Newspapers and journals
- 014. Mock awards
- 048. Protest meetings

Methods in 6th segment:

- 003. Declarations by organizations and institutions

Classifications

Classification:

Defense

Cluster:

Environment

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- environmental activists
- human rights activists

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA)

Partners:

Legal Resources Centre, groundWork, Merebank Residents Association

External allies:

TimberWatch, World Rainforest Movement, Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

- Merebank Residents Association
- South Durban Community Environmental Alliance

Groups in 2nd Segment:

- Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives
- Legal Resources Centre
- groundWork

Groups in 3rd Segment:

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

- TimberWatch

Groups in 6th Segment:

- World Rainforest Movement

Segment Length: 1 year

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Mondi Paper Company

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

Not known

Campaigner violence:

Not known

Repressive Violence:

Not known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

0 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

1 point out of 3 points

Although apartheid formally ended in 1994, repercussions from apartheid-era laws and policies have continued to impact the lives of South Africans, especially those in poor and industrial communities. An example of black Africans' plight is the community of South Durban, located in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. Durban is the third largest city in South Africa and one of the country's primary ports and industrial centers. South Durban, in particular, is a bed of industrial activity, home to seven hazardous waste dumps, two petrochemical refineries and one of the highest levels of ambient SO₂ pollution in the entire country. There are numerous records in the late 1990s of toxic exposure to chemicals in both operational factories as well as from abandoned sites. The South Durban Community Environmental Alliance was established in 1996 as a network of ten community based organizations and two NGOs that were all working to end the environmental injustice caused by industrial activity in South Durban.

After its initial request to build a multi-fuel boiler was denied on environmental grounds, Mondi Paper Company completed

further tests and an environmental impact assessment. Consequently, in September 2002, Mondi's proposal was approved and construction on the new incinerator began. Reports from 2004 show Mondi's sales at US\$6.9 billion, making it the 13th largest pulp and paper company in the world, with plantations and factories all over the globe. Although its plantations in South Africa are certified as "well managed" by the Forest Stewardship Council, Mondi has been criticized by the local community for failing to fulfill its promises to provide jobs as well as covering up information on emissions and waste. One of South Africa's largest landowners, Mondi profited from the forced removal of black Africans from their land in the 1980s under apartheid laws. Mondi was able to purchase land for minimal cost in South Durban and located a major paper mill in the community. At the beginning of the 21st century, South Durban's residents suffered from elevated rates of asthma and high levels of air, noise and water pollution.

Local community resistance against Mondi had been a thorn in the company's side since the late 1990s when community members tried to block the company's efforts to locate a landfill in the area. In 2001, residents demanded an outside health expert be brought in to assess the air quality and determine the effects of the proposed multi-fuel boiler. Requests were made directly to the company as well as through numerous media outlets, but neither Mondi nor the regulatory boards hired outside experts. In November 2002, the South Durban Community Environmental Alliance (SDCEA), with the assistance of the Legal Resources Center (LRC), submitted an appeal against the proposed incinerator to Mondi's Operations Services Manager. The appeal was also publicized through various media outlets and in public meetings, organized by SDCEA. The appeal was both an attempt to use legislative provisions to block Mondi's plans as well as a rallying measure for community action, although there was some local support for Mondi because the paper mill provided jobs and incomes for many South Durban residents. SDCEA claimed that the South African Constitution prevented the targeting of certain populations for disproportionate exposure to industrial risk and environmental harm. Section 24 of the South African Constitution guaranteed all residents the right to a clean and safe environment. In this way, SDCEA combined social justice with environmentalism, claiming that Mondi's practices were a continuation of the apartheid-era policies and laws. The SDCEA appeal was accompanied by calls for mass action against the company that resulted in a group protesting in front of Mondi's factory gates in November. SDCEA's appeal was also supported by the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternative's appeal to the company to focus on clean production and abandon its incinerator proposal. Local resistance was also voiced and organized by the Merebank Residents' Association, which represented the community most directly impacted by Mondi's industrial activities.

In March 2003, SDCEA's chairman traveled to London to confront Anglo-American, Mondi's parent company, and voice community concerns at the company's Annual General Meeting. In 2004, groundWork, a non-profit focused on environmental justice concerns in South Africa, submitted an appeal to the company and the community, stating their opposition to the proposal and calling for mass international protest. The SDCEA organized community meetings, circulated a petition against the incinerator that received more than 5,000 signatures, and continued to make public appeals to both the company and to the Kwa-Zulu Natal province's Department of Agriculture and Environmental Affairs.

In 2005, groundWork awarded Mondi its Corpse award, which recognized the worst corporate practices in producing environmental injustice. Corpse award recipients were nominated by local community members, and the award was intended to draw attention to environmental degradation from industrial activity, especially in companies that issued positive (and at times misleading) reports of their own environmental performance. At the same time, SDCEA organized "toxic tours" and invited the international community to bear witness to the environmental impact of Mondi and others in South Durban.

Despite the efforts of community organizations and support from several international organizations, Mondi is currently operating (as of July 2011) its multi-fuel boiler and completed an expansion project to its South Durban facilities in 2006.

Research Notes

Influences:

Civic resistance against environmental degradation, especially issues of environmental justice, grew out of anti-Apartheid protest and resistance from the 1970s and 1980s. Residents in South Durban protested against other industrial risks in their community prior to the campaign against Mondi paper. Additionally, a visit to South Africa by Gandhi influenced the establishment of the SDCEA. (1) South Durban's resistance to Mondi's incinerator is part of a global movement, influenced by the Stockholm Convention and other international reports and organizations. (1)

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Additional Notes:

South Durban's resistance to Mondi's incinerator is part of a global campaign of resistance against industrial incineration, organized by several international organizations, including the Global Alliance for Incineration Alternatives which organized a global day of protest in 2003 as well as other nonviolent actions.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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