

A PIONEERING STUDY OF THE POLITICS OF L.A.'S AIR POLLUTION

# L.A.'s Lethal Air



Dedicated to the Future of the Children of Los Angeles

## New Strategies for Policy, Organizing, and Action

LABOR/COMMUNITY WATCHDOG



DEBRA DIPOALO

## CONCERNED CITIZENS OF SOUTH CENTRAL L.A. Refusing the City's Garbage

In August 1985, Robin Cannon discovered the City of Los Angeles' plan to build a trash-burning incinerator in her neighborhood. She, Charlotte Bullock, and other community residents formed Concerned Citizens of South Central L.A. Their studies confirmed that the incinerator would emit lead, zinc, and mercury, and garbage-filled trucks would crowd residential streets.

The city offered \$10 million if the community accepted the incinerator. "This was money we badly needed, for housing and daycare," Robin explained, "but many people felt it was a bribe. Our health was worth a whole lot more." In 1987, after Concerned Citizens' door-to-door organizing and demonstrations at City Hall, Mayor Tom Bradley abandoned plans to build the incinerator and later began a recycling program he had long opposed.

On the fight against air pollution, Robin remarked, "The AQMD talks about how working people should change our lifestyle, cut down on driving and barbecue lighters, but they aren't forcing these large corporations to change *their* lifestyles. Until they do, they'll never clean the air."

Robin Cannon  
in front of  
the proposed  
LANCER site.

Closer to home, 12,000 people were evacuated from Simi Valley, California in 1989 when a cloud of potentially lethal chlorine gas leaked from a tank at a textile manufacturing plant. In East Los Angeles 15,000 people were evacuated when a cloud of hydrochloric acid escaped from Grow Group Inc., a metal plating shop.<sup>77</sup> And while federal law requires that "Local Emergency Planning Committees" develop "community hazard assessments," Dr. Fred Millar of the Friends of the Earth in Washington D.C. explains, "Companies have done millions of dollars in hazard assessments, but they are scared to death to provide that information to the public."<sup>78</sup>

## Women: In the Community and At Work

In many of the most visible campaigns in Los Angeles to fight toxic waste dumping, incineration, ground water contamination, and air pollution, it has been women who have been the outspoken leaders and strategists. There has been a marked increase in the participation of women in the full-time, full-year workforce (from 34 percent in 1969 to 58 percent by 1987); but even when women and men both work it is most often women who assume a disproportionate responsibility for home, family, and community.

As the toxic crisis impacts the children first, and most severely, it is often women who have come forth to lead the fight. Penny Newman, who fought the ground-water contamination in the