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## **Guyana: Plans To Generate Electricity Via Combustion Of Industrial Waste Inspires Environmentalist Campaign**

*by John Neagle*

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For the first time in Guyanese political history, environmental pollution has become a major issue, inspired by a recent announcement by the Guyanese Resource Corporation (CRC) that it plans in 1988 to install a electricity generation plant fueled by industrial waste imported from the US. The GRC is a joint venture, owned by the government and US capital. The waste conversion project involves a \$5 million investment, and its backers claim it will supply electricity at a much lower cost than existing facilities. GRC spokespersons emphasize that as a result of insufficient capital resources for the development of hydroelectric resources, Guyana depends on oil imports for electricity generation. In 1987, the country has reportedly invested some \$70 million in purchasing crude oil and oil derivatives. Using industrial waste as fuel for electricity generation, they say, will eventually save Guyana millions in reduced oil imports. The political opposition and concerned citizens have launched a public campaign against potential water and air pollution. Joshua Ramsammy, one of the campaign's leaders, has told reporters that many of the substances contained in the industrial waste are carcinogenic. He has also emphasized that at a recent meeting, Caribbean Community (Caricom) foreign ministers issued a "categorical condemnation" of any and all efforts to use the Caribbean as an industrial waste dumping ground. Ramsammy is a faculty member at the University of Guyana and member of the Working People's Alliance Party. Opponents to the GRC project point out that the environmental hazards of industrial waste dumping are well recognized in the US. Many cities and state governments in the US, they argue, have prohibited toxic waste dumps in their jurisdiction, and the Guyanese government should follow suit. GRC director Mike Connors has asserted that the new facility will not permit the use of radioactive waste, or waste containing any chemical and biological agents known to produce negative effects in the environment. The waste products, to be used as fuel in electricity generation, he claims, are no more toxic than gasoline and common machinery lubricants. Opponents are most concerned about the destination of byproducts in the generation process, i.e., the likelihood of dumping or seepage into rivers, canals and ground water. GRC representatives have responded to these concerns by claiming that emissions undergo a filtering process that has been tested in the US and Denmark. (Basic data from Prensa Latina, 12/21/87)

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