

# The Prism Retrospective: 10 Years of Under-Reported News

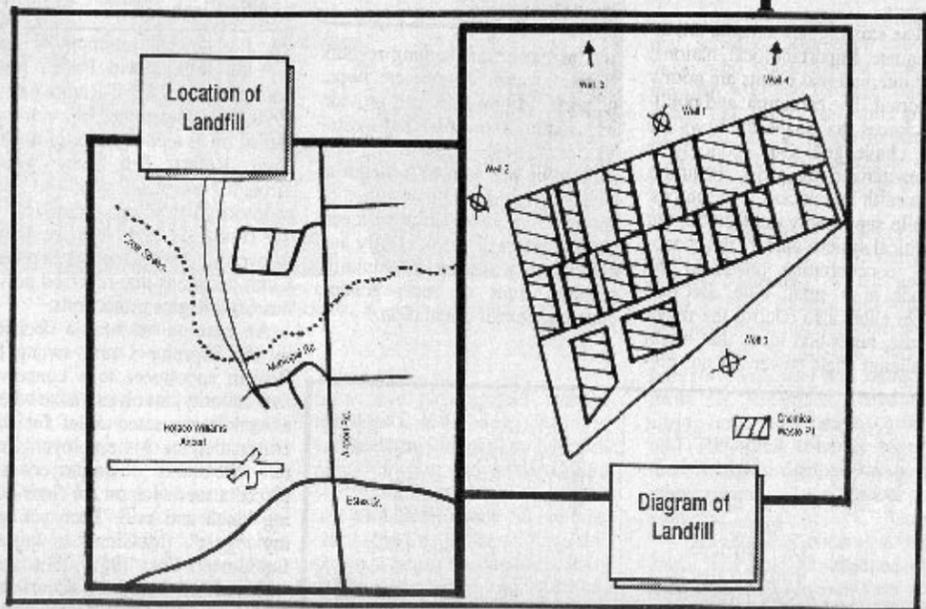
*The Prism* is proud to present a 10-year retrospective of news and views that have graced the pages of this grassroots publication. Many of the stories profiled here from the past decade remain current and have lost none of their relevance. There are stories of hardship and stories of triumph, and stories that, like the university-affiliated toxic dumps in Chapel Hill and Raleigh, demonstrate how the Triangle area has lots of common problems in search of solutions.

Please note that we have not reprinted the entire articles here, nor have we chosen only the most controversial stories. We hope you will find a good representation of the coverage that *The Prism* has provided to the area since 1990. *The Prism* hopes eventually to make all of its archive editions available on the Internet, but for now we hope you enjoy this brief overview of *The Prism's* decade.

## 1990, May

### Greens call for action

## UNC sits on toxic dump



**Possible chemical substances buried in the landfill include poisons...pesticides, mercury, and heavy metals.**

By Timothy M. Hunter

"Ignorance is bliss," but not when it comes to hazardous waste. With this in mind, the Orange County Greens initiated an investigation of a chemical landfill located in Chapel Hill and owned by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Greens released the results of this study during Earth Week, in an effort to inform the community of the existence and possible dangers of the landfill.

The chemical landfill, located along Airport Road one quarter of a mile north of Estes Road, operated from 1973 to November of 1979 primarily as a burial ground for chemical waste from the chemistry department at UNC-CH. The landfill closed in 1979 largely due to the development of commercial services that treat hazardous waste. Since that time, UNC-CH has realized that it is more practical to ship off waste to a contracted commercial service than to landfill the waste.

The Airport Road site was a state approved and planned waste chemical burial/disposal area. In other words, the university had the state's permission to legally dispose of its hazardous and non-hazardous waste chemicals on university property. These decisions were based on attitudes of the time and the then up-to-date information on hazardous waste. In the 1970's a sanitary landfill was considered a "safe" method of waste disposal as there were no commercial waste treatment services available. Since the 1970's, however, increased knowledge in the field of hazardous waste has led to the

realization that past actions may be reason for concern for the present and the future.

Just what was buried in the unlined landfill and how much? The exact answer to this question is not known, because there was no permit system that enabled authorities to track and record hazardous waste that was treated or disposed. It was not until the early 1980's that hazardous waste regulations and an extensive permit-tracking system were implemented to ensure the safety of the transport, treatment and disposal of hazardous waste. Possible chemical substances buried in the landfill include poisons, halogenated and non-halogenated solvents, organics, inorganics, pesticides, mercury, and heavy metals.

The uncertain chemical composition of the landfill could create several complications. First, reactive chemicals may have been buried next to each other creating a possible formation of reactive products or even explosions. The probability of chemicals reacting with each other increases tremendously if the site is disturbed by events such as on-site construction or site excavation. Second, the chemicals were buried in their original containers, often glass bottles, and not safely drummed in 55-gallon steel barrels. These original bottles may have broken when the site was covered and regraded, thus increasing the chance for chemicals mixing below the surface.

The initial disposal procedure involved the digging of a trench 8 to 12 feet deep, then placing the chemicals in the trenches and burying them with 4 to 6 feet of soil

## 1990, April

### Raleigh News & Observer editor gives Central American solidarity activists reason to launch an alternative paper

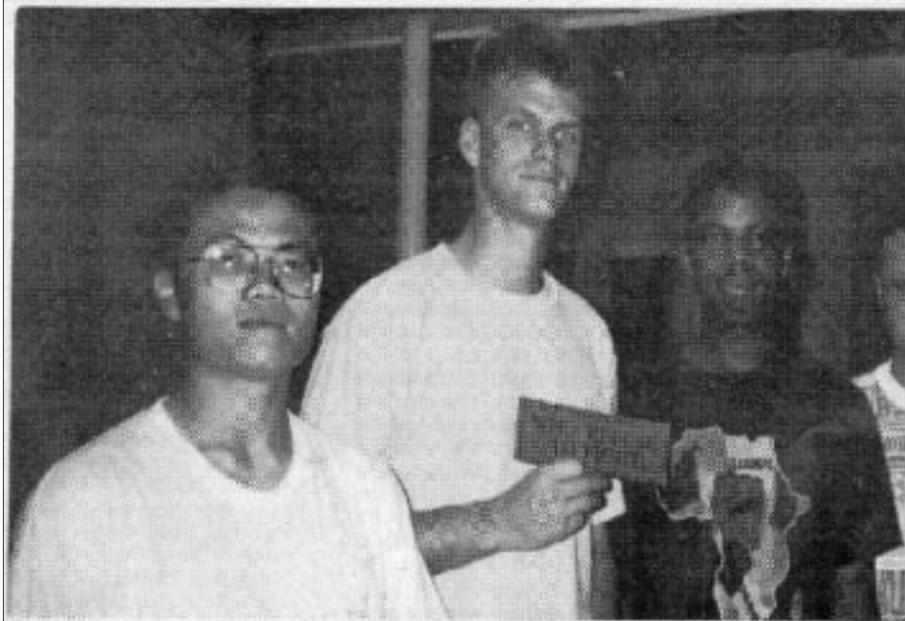
There are many in our community who are politically involved in the struggles of our Central American neighbors. They are acting out of a strong moral conviction that human rights abuses have been committed and the fingerprints of the U.S. government are frequently evident. The mass media seldom cover the seamier sides to U.S. involvement in Central America and the implications are usually off-limits for extended discussion.

David Kirsh, a staff member of this paper and author of "Central America without

Crying Uncle," recently submitted a piece on U.S. complicity with the Salvadoran death squads to the News & Observer. Opinion page editor Steve Ford refused to run it because, "there are too many facts." When asked if the piece could be re-submitted without so many facts and more in the mold of an opinion piece, Ford responded, "I doubt that would do it. How would you substantiate what you are saying?"

## 1991, October

### Two marines refuse war's immorality



Conscientious objectors Sam Lwin (recently released from the brig), Erik Larsen and Tahan Jones.

**While the Marine Corps has notified a lawyer representing several of the conscientious objectors in the brig that their applications will no longer be processed, Amnesty International has declared many of these men "prisoners of conscience."**

by Kevin Carter

Erik Larsen and Tahan Jones are two Marines who don't have to worry about being sent back to Saudi Arabia if Iraq does not comply with cease-fire agreements. They're being held at Camp Lejeune awaiting courts-martial on charges of desertion and missing a movement.

The two Marines applied for conscientious objector status—Larsen on August 28, 1990, Jones on Oct. 26, 1990—and like 19 other Marines now held in the brig at Camp Lejeune, found the rules of the game had been changed. Under normal conditions Marines filing applications for conscientious objector status are given noncombat duty while their applications are reviewed. Staff Sgt. Gethicker, a public relations officer at Lejeune, says that this process usually takes "about 90 days."

Jones has waited eight months to find out if the military will declare him a CO. The Marines now held in the brig found that between the months they applied for CO status and their courts-martial the Marine Corps had let the applications pass from desk to desk in a disheartening game of political hot potato until their trials were over with.

Since early June, six Marine COs have been released from the brig, leaving 19 men still serving time. The longest sentence so far is that of Enrique Gonzalez who is serving a two and a half year sentence. While the Marine Corps has notified a lawyer representing several of the conscientious objectors in the brig that their applications will no longer be processed, Amnesty International has declared many of these men "prisoners of conscience."

Michael Marsh, a representative of the War Resister's League, says conditions in the brig are just like those in any prison. "They don't have any freedom or privacy whatever." Marsh worries about their physical and mental well-being. Normally prisoners in the brig are allowed to go outside for an hour or so of exercise each day. But Marsh says, "For a good portion of the summer they weren't allowed outside at all." Guidelines in the brig state that prisoners will not be allowed out when the temperature rises above 90 degrees or when it rains. The weather in Jacksonville this summer? Hot. And when it wasn't too hot it rained.

The GAO (Government Accounting Office), an agency with powers similar to those of a congressional committee and empowered to report to congress, has initiated an investigation into whether the procedures and regulations for people applying for conscientious objector status during the Gulf War were violated by the military. Representatives Ron Dellums (CA) and John Conyers (MI) plan to introduce legislation that will change the process of applying for conscientious objection.