

Letters from our readers

18 May 2010

On “Obama administration blocked efforts to stop BP oil drilling before explosion”

I would like to amplify a couple of points brought up in this article. I worked in a section of the energy industry (pipelines specifically) for nine years, until 1985.

The filing of environmental reports has always been resisted by all sectors of the industry as unjustified government meddling in a company’s private affairs. The fact that the Democrats, who always received the blame from this industry for its woes, now are actively setting aside environmental regulations—probably in violation of the law—underscores the final descent of that party into utter degradation.

I admit to being a non-expert, but I can provide a little background on the water-gas crystals. They are called hydrates. They are *not* frozen water or frozen natural gas. Hydrates form quickly when water and gas are mixed together at certain critical combinations of pressure and temperature (which may be well above the freezing point of water; I have heard of onshore gas fields having hydrate problems even on land when temperatures fall below about 50 degrees Fahrenheit. Hydrate formation can practically shut down a gas field in the winter—precisely when natural gas is needed for home heating).

Given the disaster unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico, where a gas pocket was the likely initiating event in this blowout, it is interesting that no one seems to have given much thought to the possibility of gas hydrates clogging the “dome” until after it happened. I do not know if they thought it would not be a problem, or if it was overlooked in the rush to get something—anything—publicly out there, or if the project was above the heads of those who were assigned to design the dome and its deployment.

To me, it just proves the obvious: that the “experts” who are running our world are a bunch of ignoramuses who derive their pay and profits on the good old idealist notion that this is a static and unchanging universe. Then, one day, it does suddenly change in a way that cannot be escaped, evaded, or denied. That is the moment when the

emperor is revealed to have no clothes and the hysterics begin. That is where we are now.

On the “junk” plan: It at least has the right name. The ambient water pressure at 5,000 feet of depth would be about 2200 psi—over 150 times atmospheric pressure. The flowing pressure in the wellhead is no doubt greater than that, and this pressure would have to be overcome in order to “shoot” anything into the wellbore. This could probably be done, subject to operational difficulties. But this plan is indeed a gamble. Depending on the flow velocity, solid debris could rapidly erode the metal away and increase the outflow rate. Ultimately, it would be a race between two contradictory behaviors: erosion versus bridging. The “experts” are putting their money on bridging, i.e. blocking, the flow. But what guarantee do we have that the erosion effect will not outstrip the bridging effect?

Technically, if nothing can be done, the oil and gas will flow out until the static pressure in the wellbore drops below the aforementioned 2200 psi, at which point the seawater’s back pressure would stop the flow. I doubt if anyone knows when that would happen or what the total cumulative spillage would be at that point. Any credible estimates on this question will have to come from experienced (and financially disinterested) reservoir engineers; do not listen to anyone else’s numbers.

CH

Texas, USA

10 May 2010

On “US Senate begins oil spill cover-up”

What you may not realize is that this pool of oil and natural gas is huge. It cannot be stopped because the pressure at the source is 70,000 psi. You can, at this moment, kiss all the tourism, fishing, and industry in the south goodbye. This is deck chairs on the Titanic. It’s over. We’ll only have to wait and see how long it is before the oceans die and with them mankind.

PK

12 May 2010

On “US media demands Greek-style austerity for

American workers”

Great essay. I’ve been hearing about how “we can’t afford” a decent life and that “we” have to “tighten our belts” from rich people in the mass media at least since the early 1990s. Sickening.

Greg S

New Hampshire, USA

14 May 2010

On “Imperialism and the political economy of the Holocaust”

Congratulations on your thoughtful and penetrating analysis. Quite enlightening and stimulating.

As regards Hitler’s idea that Europe must be unified not through a federative process, but rather by force applied by the strongest nation, I detect the influence of Bismarckian concepts. It could not be otherwise, since Hitler, as an Austro-German, was educated in accordance with nationalist German and latter-day Roman Catholic values. One could regard Hitler’s ideas as a mixture of Bismarck’s power politics (no need even to invoke Nietzsche) and the anti-Semitic rantings of Karl Lueger, Vienna’s longtime mayor.

As a matter of fact, even Bismarck’s ideas were nothing new: a number of leading European nation states were united through force and intimidation by the strongest of a group of rival statelets. France by the rulers of Ile de France, Germany by Prussia, the Netherlands by Holland, Italy by Piedmont-Sardinia, Spain by Castile,

Hans V

12 May 2010

I appreciated this article. In all history lessons and discussions provided by documentaries that I have been exposed to, I always considered there was a lack of consistency in the arguments explaining the reason for the horror and destruction of both World War and why a continent engaged in genocide against the Jews and the suppression and disintegration of the unity of workers organization and command. Solid, enlightening article. It is amazing that it is the analysis by Marx that provides the clarity to explain these historical horrific events.

Eulogio B

13 May 2010

On “Britain: The Tory press and ‘democracy’”

The similarities are many between the last Canadian election and the recent British one, especially in the media

responses largely supportive of the conservatives and in their attempting to delegitimize coalitions unfavorable to the right. Stephen Harper and the media were successful in defeating a center-left coalition by claiming the opposition did not have the right to take power without an election...you know the story.

MB

13 May 2010

On “Lena Horne, 1917-2010”

This is another outstanding obituary contributing to the excellent coverage of past culture as well as history that your site is known for. I first saw Lena Horne on UK TV on ITV’s *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* sometime in the late 1950s where she topped the bill that evening. Her performance was outstanding, resulting in her not only getting a major ovation from the audience that evening but a very rare offer to return for the following week’s show by compère Bruce Fosythe (in his pre-*Strictly Come Dancing* days) when he used the line given to semi-finalists at the end of every “Beat the Clock” quiz, “Can you come back next week?” I think this was also the only time that such an offer was made to a top-of-the-bill artist since they changed the star performer for each show.

Naturally, Lena could not repeat that very rare triumph the following week, which was in itself unrepeatable in its one-off nature of a spontaneously unique outstanding performance, but her rendition of “Old Fashioned Tango” plus her professional expertise and human dignity as a great artist, will always remain in my memory.

Tony W

13 May 2010



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