

One month since the Deepwater Horizon blast

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One month after the Deepwater Horizon explosion, the worst oil spill in American history continues and is fast becoming one of the greatest ecological catastrophes in human experience.

The blast itself claimed the lives of 11 workers. Now its effects threaten to wipe out the economy of an entire region of the United States, and could potentially spread destruction to other countries as well.

Oceanographers and other independent scientists estimate the spill is gushing as much as 70,000 barrels a day, equivalent to an Exxon Valdez every 3.5 days.

Every institution in American society—the government, BP and the media—are implicated in a deliberate effort to cover up the extent of this disaster.

Against the official attempts to downplay the disaster, the *World Socialist Web Site* put forward its own analysis, warning on May 3 that the event had become an “American Chernobyl,” exposing the rottenness of the American ruling class, government, and media.

The succeeding weeks have only substantiated this assessment. It has been revealed that the Obama Administration exempted BP from conducting an environmental impact study on the Deepwater Horizon, implicating the White House in the disaster. A 2004 government study has come to light showing that, far from being totally unexpected, most blowout preventers on rigs like the Deepwater Horizon failed under similar circumstances. And the redacted paper trail of inspections of the Deepwater Horizon has exposed criminal malfeasance on the part of the corporation and the government agency responsible.

Meanwhile, the government and BP have continued a coordinated campaign to deceive the public. On Tuesday, *Forbes* magazine interviewed Tony Hayward, the Chief executive of BP, who summed up his thoughts on the spill as follows: “Do I feel that anything I’ve done I would have done differently? Not at all.”

Hayward then went on to gloat about his company’s response to the spill. “It’s called containment,” he said. “Deploy everything we can get our hands on at containing the [oil] in the far offshore. Which thus far has been extraordinarily successful as almost none of this has gotten to shore.”

As Hayward’s interview was posted, thick patches of oil were seeping into the marshes at the mouth of the Mississippi River. A local coastal management official told CBS News Wednesday: “Tell that son of a bitch to get on a plane and take a look at what we’ve got in our backyard.”

Government scientists, meanwhile, have confirmed that a portion of the spill has entered the “loop current”, which could take the spill up the coast of Florida and beyond. US officials are reportedly in discussions with the government of Cuba, where the oil could make landfall on the country’s northwestern beaches, and there is a potential that it could even reach Western Europe.

Aside from their jaw-dropping arrogance and complacency, Hayward’s claims about “containment” have a certain validity. In the Gulf, BP’s policy of “containment” translates roughly into “sink all the oil to the bottom, where it can’t be seen.” To this end, the company has sprayed hundreds of thousands of gallons of toxic chemical dispersants into the spill, potentially exacerbating the environmental impact.

The more fundamental policy has been that of containing information about the spill. The corporation has steadfastly resisted the release of information about the disaster, only begrudgingly making public a few short video clips showing the geyser of oil spewing out of the floor of the Gulf.

It has not made public its findings from air samplings that could reveal environmental hazards to workers battling the spill, not to mention the population of the Gulf Coast, posed by evaporating oil and the burning of

crude. This information is being withheld even as fishermen and their families report increasing incidents of illness. The 11 who died in the blast on the Deepwater Horizon will tragically not be the last of BP's victims.

As for the collection of more systematic data on the amount of oil flowing from the underwater pipe or how it is dispersing into the Gulf, this like everything else is treated by BP as "proprietary" information.

And the Obama administration has proven content to allow BP to do so, designating the international oil company the "responsible party," effectively in charge in all efforts to stop the spill and mitigate its impact, while the government has assumed the role of its servile adviser and apologist.

It is impossible to assess, much less confront the catastrophe on this basis. All of BP's actions, from the criminal negligence that led to the disaster to the ongoing cover-up, are driven by its profit interests and those of its biggest investors and multi-millionaire executives. That the Obama administration has sought to keep the response to the Gulf disaster in BP's hands only exposes its own complete subordination to these same interests.

The claim that BP has deployed "everything we could get our hands on" to fight the spill is patently untrue. Fishermen report that only between a fifth to a third of boats in the area nearest the spill were signed on to help in the clean up. When WSWS reporters visited southern Louisiana, they saw hundreds of boat captains, ruined by the spill, waiting in line for hours every day at BP coordination centers, trying to get a job containing the spill.

America has at least 15 million unemployed people; but apparently none of them can be put to work fighting the greatest ecological catastrophe in the country's history.

The spill has demonstrated very clearly who really rules society. Corporations are allowed to kill their workers, ruin tens of thousands of fishermen, and put hundreds of thousands more people out of work. They are not held accountable; facing neither criminal prosecution or even severe financial penalties.

But every institution in American society is implicated, and not just in the immediate disaster. All of them, the government, both major parties and the media are responsible for promoting over decades the

policies of deregulation and privatization and the conception that the profit motive would resolve all problems. These policies and perspectives combined to make this catastrophe—and many more like it yet to come—inevitable.

Just as the financial meltdown on Wall Street that has decimated the jobs and social conditions of workers across the planet, the BP environmental catastrophe has laid bare the immensely destructive effect of a system that subordinates production and every facet of society to the pursuit of private profit and the piling up of wealth for a narrow financial oligarchy.

The pre-condition for confronting this catastrophe in a rational, effective and internationally coordinated manner is taking not only the management of the present crisis, but the entire assets of BP and the other energy conglomerates, out of the hands of their capitalist owners and placing them under public control.

These immense resources cannot be left in the hands of corporations that view both their own workers and the environment itself as merely expendable means to realize profit. Instead, they must be utilized to fully compensate those in the Gulf, and anywhere else affected by the spill, and, more fundamentally, to restructure the global economy to provide environmentally sustainable sources of energy and guarantee every human being a decent and secure standard of living.

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