

# Lies and evasions in defense of BP

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The White House press conference Thursday, the first held by President Barack Obama in nearly ten months, was devoted to presenting his administration as an active crisis manager in the Gulf oil catastrophe, rather than a handmaiden for BP, the giant oil company whose profit drive is responsible for the worst ecological disaster in US history.

Despite the now ritualistic reference to being “angry and frustrated,” however, Obama exuded indifference. Shortly before he spoke, reports emerged of new estimates confirming that the amount of oil already released into the Gulf far surpasses the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill—a fact that Obama failed to mention in his opening remarks.

With the government’s passive and virtually nonexistent response now so obvious that it has become the subject of criticism from within the president’s own party, Obama focused his remarks on the claim that the federal government, not BP, was in charge of the operation to plug the Deepwater Horizon well and of the efforts to defend hundreds of miles of vulnerable coast line, now being hit by a surge of toxic crude oil.

“Our teams are authorized to direct BP, in the same way that they’d be authorized to direct these same teams if they were technically being paid by the federal government,” he claimed.

If this account is true, so much the worse for Obama, since he has declared his administration responsible for the actions taken by BP over the past month: covering up the dimensions of the spill, failing to cap the well, and hampering the clean-up operation.

The truth is that the US government is prostrate before the power of the giant multinational oil companies, just as it was before the demands of Wall Street for a trillion-dollar bailout. The two parties that rotate control of the government are both political instruments of big business, and their top priority, particularly in a crisis situation, is to safeguard the

interests of the financial aristocracy.

Obama admitted in his remarks to the press conference that there had been a “cozy and corrupt relationship...a scandalously close relationship between oil companies and the agency that regulates them.” But he suggested that this connection was established under the Bush administration and no longer existed. That is only one of the many lies delivered during the hour-long media event.

The record shows that Obama and his Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar—who has a record of criticizing the Bush administration from the right for being too restrictive on the oil industry—took numerous actions over the past 16 months to accelerate drilling in the Gulf.

As the *World Socialist Web Site* noted on May 10 (“Obama administration blocked efforts to stop BP oil drilling before explosion”), the administration intervened in a federal court case in support of oil drilling in the Gulf of Mexico, and Salazar specifically cited BP’s Deepwater Horizon operation as one that should be allowed to go forward.

An initial court decision—handed out only days after Obama gave BP an environmental waiver for its Deepwater Horizon rig—ruled that oil drilling in the Gulf was being carried out without sufficient study of its impact. Salazar praised a subsequent court decision, handed down in July 2009, which allowed the BP project to go forward and thus condemned much of the US Gulf coast to environmental catastrophe.

Obama’s proposals in response to the disaster are a further demonstration of the administration’s subservience to the oil monopolies. While he announced that he would extend a moratorium on new deepwater wells for six months and delay or cancel new projects off the coast of Alaska, Virginia and the western Gulf, this was the least the White House could do under the present circumstances of widespread

public outrage. The administration also announced that 33 “exploratory” drills will be temporarily suspended—without noting that the vast majority of rigs in the region will continue unhindered.

The president announced no punitive measures against BP or the oil industry as a whole. While admitting the oil industry had engaged in “corrupt” relations with federal officials, Obama did not suggest that any corporate executive should face prosecution for such activity.

Obama appeared both unwilling and incapable of expressing the outrage and hatred felt by millions towards the giant oil multinational. Instead, he declared, in words that seem almost provocatively indifferent to public feeling, “BP’s interests are aligned with the public interest to the extent that they want the well capped. It’s bad for their business; it’s bad for their bottom line. They’re going to be paying a lot of damages....”

There have been no calls from leading Democratic politicians for BP executives to be arrested, prosecuted or jailed, or for the seizure of the assets of the giant multinational to pay for the untold damage it has caused. This under conditions in which a decision to use BP executives themselves to plug the hole would receive mass support—as an option that, in any case, could only have beneficial consequences.

The corporate-controlled media is likewise deaf to popular anger. Not a single question from the media representatives at Obama’s press conference suggested any punitive action against BP. This silence is all the more notable because in the last few days, there have been extensive exposures in the major daily papers—the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, even the *Wall Street Journal*—of actions by BP officials in the days and hours leading up to the Deepwater Horizon explosion that amount to criminal negligence.

One question from Fox News was critical of some Obama administration rhetoric as excessively anti-corporate—Salazar’s “keeping the boot on their throat” claim. Obama quickly disavowed Salazar’s remark, saying, “We don’t need to use language like that.”

Far from such language being excessive, it is only a pale reflection of the hatred felt by millions for the giant corporations and banks that first caused the greatest financial crisis and deepest economic slump since the Great Depression, and now have caused the

greatest environmental disaster in the history of the United States, and perhaps the world.

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*The author also recommends:*

The profit system and the BP oil catastrophe  
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The Gulf oil spill: An American Chernobyl  
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