

Letters on the Gulf oil crisis

24 June 2010

On “Gulf oil disaster: a trillion-dollar corporate crime”

Although the Exxon Valdez tanker oil spill occurred 21 years ago, its effects continue, as only 20 percent of toxic oil spill has been recovered. This is the layer that floated; the rest is lying underwater at various levels, also mixed in with the undersea vegetation, kelp, mussel beds and mud. A limited recovery of sorts is still talked about as fifty more years. That does not mean a number of species which have disappeared off the face of the earth through that spill will return.

Moreover, the large herring schools collapsed and have not fully recovered by a long way. A billion salmon disappeared and many schools of trout as well, after the oil went up one hundred streams the fish travel and breed in. Apparently, the viscous crude oil attacks the early stages of the reproductive cycle in the fish, such as eggs in their early formation. As well, the crude oil is a corrupting agent attacking the immune system, opening the fish for disease and/or viral attacks. Of course, there is a whole food chain involved too, starting with micro-organisms that were affected and 22 whales that perished.

In addition, BP has injected a million gallons of dispersant known as Corexit, understood as actually increasing the toxicity when mixed with the oil. It is known and banned in the UK because of its damage to the marine ecosystem and environment. The combination of oil toxins and sprayed dispersants throw up air born toxins which affect humans and wildlife. The forecast of strong or hurricane winds will carry these toxins far and wide.

A Dr. Sawyer explains, “The dispersants used in the BP clean-up efforts, known as ‘Corexit 9500’ and ‘Corexit EC9527A,’ are also known as deodorized kerosene”. “With respect to marine toxicity and potential human health risks, studies of kerosene exposures strongly indicate potential health risks to

volunteers, workers, sea turtles, dolphins, breathing reptiles and all species which need to surface for air exchanges, as well as birds and all other mammals. Additionally, I have considered marine species which surface for atmospheric inhalation such as sea turtles, dolphins and other species which are especially vulnerable to aspiration toxicity of ‘Corexit 9500’ into the lung while surfacing.” The “‘Corexit 9500’ dispersant is designed to breakup the slick at the water’s surface, sending the oil into the water column, and from there, to the bottom of the seabed where bottom residing organisms such as shrimp, crabs and oysters reside. One concern with the usage of such dispersants is that, aside from being themselves toxic, they do little more than hide the problem”.

“Toxicity of the petroleum products is increased when it is dissolved into the water by dispersants,” said Co-Counsel Robert McKee, Gulf Oil Disaster Recovery Group. “In essence, this activity is making aquatic organisms more exposed to chemicals’ harm. The attempt to make these floating tars and oils disappear from view by the use of dispersants increases the likelihood of poisonous effects in these oil polluted waters.”

Taking into consideration the Valdez spill of 11 million gallons as a 71 year recovery of sorts: How then, to assess, or even come to some understanding of the recovery time needed for the present BP spill of 60 million gallons, with no end yet in sight? Has the fishing industry in this area, presently on idle time, grasped the lengthy years or full century involved for a recovery—of sorts?

John C

Australia

17 June 2010

On “Obama’s Oval Office speech: A cowardly cover-up of BP’s crimes”

Mr. Obama is simply the public relations officer for British Petroleum. Start with this and everything else falls into place.

Phillip S
16 June 2010

It is quite easy to understand the author's frustration and anger with Obama speech, but he seems to assume that the latter and his administration, are somewhat dupes and cowards "under the thumb" of BP, who give Obama his "marching orders." This gives an altogether a wrong impression of the powerful forces and interests at play, and the politics involved.

The present administration, as well as the previous one, are partners with Big Oil, as well as with Finance Capital, embodied in Wall Street, as we observed with the massive bailouts of financial institutions with taxpayer money. This is no different: Obama, just as much as Bush, are in partnership with BP and the oil industry as a whole, in defending and maximising their profits, to the detriment of the population as a whole. This is simply how capitalism works. It also works assiduously to "externalise" its costs as much as possible, so that profits are maximised. The Bhopal case concluded last week bears ample testimony to that criminal behaviour.

Still, the Americans should not put credence to the Obama rhetoric and spin. Sadly though, there is little sign of any popular movement to force the current administration to enact justice in face of this unprecedented ecological and economical (man-made) disaster. The unions have been conspicuously silent, as their role is to defend capital whilst emasculating the workers.

The author is correct in noting that current Obama actions will do nothing to prevent a repeat of this catastrophe; on the contrary, it would embolden other operators to cut even more corners and take more risks in pursuit of profits.

Mirek
16 June 2010

On "Gulf crisis stokes Washington-London tensions"

BP doesn't do bankruptcy; BP does regime change. At least that is what it did in 1953 when, with the help of the CIA, the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (as it was then known) overthrew the democratically elected

Prime Minister and replaced him with a despotic Shah who ruled with an iron fist and crushed dissent.

Of course, the US is no third world country. During the so-called "American Century", especially after the second world war, no one would have dreamed of taking on the American Empire. (Japan had to be goaded into attacking Pearl Harbour by American pressure on Japan's shipping lanes.)

Things have changed substantially in the first decade of the 21st century. World markets have destabilized during three decades of neoliberalisation and have been dealt several serious blows during the course of American military adventures in the Middle East. Old economic and military alliances with other world powers have been usurped by American companies in the wake of military takeover, angering former friends in Europe and antagonizing old enemies in Russia and Asia. The Sleeping Giant awoken by the Japanese six decades ago is not the same giant we have today. This giant is itself on the verge of bankruptcy. We can all see that the American Empire is in its last days. The never-ending mideast wars have overstretched the economy and the military, causing widespread and deepening popular anger. Any attempt to institute a military draft would be met with much fiercer resistance than in the 1960s.

In such volatile times as these, it becomes more and more prudent to consider even the most fantastic of possibilities as holding some plausibility. It is true that the US still spends more on its military budget than the rest of the world combined. But as costs continue to escalate and the economy continues to waver, the US will at some point become unable to maintain the military infrastructure.

As of now, we can only speculate as to the meaning of the statement, "and the UK government stands ready to help". We know what it's meant in the past.

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17 June 2010



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