

A massive crime compounded by a massive cover-up

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The Obama administration is in full propaganda mode in an effort to declare an end to the Gulf oil disaster. The way is being prepared for the oil industry in the Gulf to return to business as usual, while working people, whose livelihoods were stripped away by the Deepwater Horizon disaster, will be left to fend for themselves.

The administration is promoting claims that most of the oil erupting from the leak has either been contained or evaporated, with only a quarter posing a continued threat to the region.

The claim, advanced in a report by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and promoted by the National Incident Command in the Gulf, is simply the latest in a long record of lies and falsifications. From the beginning, the policy of both BP and the Obama administration has been to cover up the true size and scope of the oil spill. It was NOAA which provided the claim in the days immediately following the April 20 blowout that only 5,000 barrels per day were spilling into the Gulf, and continued to drastically underestimate the size of the spill throughout the crisis.

Like those claims, the current numbers were immediately challenged by independent scientists. Among them was Susan Shaw, the director of the Marine Environmental Research Institute, who told the press, “The blanket statement that the public understood is that most of the oil has disappeared. That is not true. About 50 percent of it is still in the water.” Others, like University of South Florida chemical oceanographer David Hollander, who described the findings as “ludicrous,” have said as much as 75 percent of the oil remains unaccounted for.

Even if the administration’s numbers were accurate, this still means that more than 100 million gallons of oil remain in the Gulf (either on the surface or sunk to the bottom of the sea)—about ten times more than was released by the Exxon Valdez.

The widespread concerns of scientists did not deter the administration from its public relations campaign. Carol Browner, the director of the Office of Energy and Climate Change Policy, went on NBC’s “Meet the Press” Sunday to assure the American people that “the vast majority of oil is gone.” The same day, Thad Allen, head of the National Incident Command, appeared on CBS’s “Face the Nation” to congratulate BP, saying they have done “very well” with operations at the wellhead. His only criticism of the oil giant was for errors in judgement regarding their public relations campaign.

Under pressure from the oil industry to rescind the moratorium on offshore drilling, scheduled to end November 30, Michael Bromwich, the director of the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management Regulation and Enforcement indicated this week that his agency was prepared to do just that, saying “I think it’s everybody’s hope that we will feel comfortable enough that the moratorium can be lifted significantly in advance of November 30.”

The oil companies will return to drilling without having been compelled to make changes to their safety practices. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (Democrat—Nevada) recently withdrew a bill calling for stricter regulations on deepwater drilling and greater financial penalties for corporations responsible for spills.

The campaign to minimize the impact of the spill is also designed to reinforce the administration’s efforts to ensure the continued profitability of BP. The grossly inadequate \$20 billion compensation fund set up by BP and the Obama administration only serves to shield the oil giant from overwhelming financial liabilities. The fund is administered by Kenneth Feinberg who was appointed by President Obama and, it has been revealed, is on the BP payroll. Feinberg’s job will entail settling only those claims against BP which he designates as “legitimate,” while working to prevent costly litigation for the

company.

Above all, no one will be held accountable—either in BP or the government, which facilitated the disaster by giving free rein to the company to ignore safety and environmental regulations. The Obama administration’s investigation into the cause of the Deepwater Horizon disaster stands exposed as a farce. The New Orleans hearings, co-chaired by ConocoPhillips board member William Reilly, amounted to little more than public relations events in which representatives of BP and the US Coast Guard were given the opportunity to present the company line unchallenged.

These events expose the absolute dictatorship that corporations like BP exercise over American society. They expose a political system in which both the Democrats and Republicans function as direct agents of the corporate elite. Just as the financial speculators on Wall Street escaped prosecution for the criminal activities which led to the global economic crisis, the executives at BP, if the administration has its way, will escape the Deepwater Horizon disaster unscathed.

With unbridled contempt for the population, the administration—along with the entire political establishment and mass media—believes that it can simply declare “mission accomplished” and move on from the worst environmental disaster in US history.

But it is in for a rude shock. The blatant criminality exposed by the BP oil spill, combined with the thoroughly corrupt and cynical response of the government, has only added to mounting public outrage in the US, outrage that will find political expression, sooner rather than later. When it does so, it must be based on the realization that there can be no serious response to disasters like the Gulf oil spill—and no serious effort to prevent the next disaster—that does not address the problem at its source: the capitalist system.

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