

Obama green lights new BP Gulf oil drilling

Tom Eley
3 November 2011

The Obama administration has given BP the go-ahead to begin four new deep-sea oil exploration operations in the Gulf of Mexico only 18 months after a blowout on its Deepwater Horizon exploratory rig killed 11 workers and caused the worst oil spill in US history.

The drilling will take place in the Keathley Canyon 192 miles southwest of New Orleans in 6,000 feet of water—1,000 feet deeper than the Macondo well, site of the Deepwater Horizon disaster. The permits were approved by the US Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, Regulation and Enforcement (BOEMRE), successor to the discredited Minerals Management Service (MMS), the regulatory agency that failed to correct numerous violations aboard the Deepwater Horizon.

The granting of new exploratory drilling rights to BP takes to a new level of shamelessness the subordination of the Obama administration to corporate interests. Not only has there been no punishment for any executive from BP, Transocean, or Halliburton—the three corporations whose profit-driven negligence caused the April 20, 2010 blowout—but BP has now been given the green light to launch four new wells engaging in the same sort of deep-sea exploration as took place at the Macondo well.

The Obama administration claims that there are “tough new standards” in place for deep sea oil drilling. But aside from such bald assurances—and the changing of the letters MMS to BOEMRE—it is not clear precisely what these changes are.

In a statement regarding the new drilling permits for BP, the BOEMRE explained these purported new regulations in the following terms:

“Before approving this EP, BOEM [sic] confirmed BP’s compliance with the bureau’s rigorous, heightened standards established following the Deepwater Horizon tragedy.

“In July 2011, BP announced additional safety

enhancements and performance standards they would voluntarily implement in connection with its deep water drilling operations in the Gulf of Mexico. BOEM has verified that BP has met the relevant voluntary performance standards.”

This “self-compliance” to “voluntary” regulations is the same concept of regulation that led to the Deepwater Horizon disaster and that prevails in every branch of US industry, including food processing (which has made millions sick in recent years) and finance (which set the stage for the global economic crisis begun in 2007).

Commenting on the decision, Obama’s chief of the Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, Michael Bromwich, declared that BP has a *good* offshore drilling record.

“They don’t have a deeply flawed record offshore,” he said “The question is: ‘Do you administer the administrative death penalty based on one incident?’, and we have concluded that’s not appropriate.”

Far from a “death penalty,” BP has suffered no penalty at the hands of the federal government. According to Congressman Ed Markey of Massachusetts of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, BP has yet to pay any fine.

Financial analysts are now confident that the Obama administration will not pursue BP for “gross negligence” in the Gulf oil disaster, in spite of overwhelming evidence, including a lengthy paper trail and survivor testimony documenting the short cuts and reckless decisions taken to speed the Macondo Well into production. If BP is found to have been grossly negligent, under the Clean Water Act it could face billions in additional fines.

BP’s share prices rallied last month after one of the other corporations implicated in the Gulf disaster, Anadarko Petroleum, paid out \$4 billion to settle all claims between the two companies. “The settlement

[was] also an indication that BP was not guilty of gross negligence for the spill,” according to a financial commentator.

The Anadarko settlement will also allow BP to end payments into the escrow fund set up by the Obama administration as a means of shielding the oil giant from lawsuits. The “claims facility” fund is overseen by Washington lawyer Kenneth Feinberg, who previously has protected the federal government from inquiries into the 9/11 terrorist attacks by victims’ families, and chemical firms from veterans made sick by the defoliant Agent Orange used in the Vietnam War. BP’s payments into Feinberg’s fund “will finish in 2012, a year ahead of schedule,” according to the British *Daily Express*.

It was also announced last week that BP will expand its operations in North Africa. It is one of several western oil majors which have benefited from the NATO onslaught against Libya and the toppling of the Gaddafi regime, with which it had previously signed exploratory contracts.

“We are absolutely planning to go back in and all the signals are that [the Transitional National Council] wants us to and expect us to come back,” BP’s Chief Executive Bob Dudley told reporters on October 22. “It’s just a matter of time and we’ll begin an exploration program.”

The newly-elected interim prime minister of Libya, Dr. Abdurrahim El-Keib, is a faculty member of the Petroleum Institute, a think-tank funded by BP and the same constellation of British, French, and US oil firms that stand to benefit the most from the regime change in Libya.



To contact the WSWWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact