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Capitalism's Bleeding Gulf

BP's Deepwater Horizon Explosion in the Gulf of
Mexico

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2011

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cause of our unhealthy consumption of petroleum. Workers have lost lives because of profits made from petroleum. Species will die off if we do not immediately put an end to big oil. Our air has been poisoned and water rendered unusable because of toxins that are produced because of our energy consumption. The destruction of our natural environment that sustains our civilization will continue and completely devastate our planet making it unsuitable for life until we bring capitalism to a grinding halt.

capitalist profit motive. These sources of energies don't have the lobbying power of capitalist governments. In other words, capitalism must finally be put to rest as a great human failure that has destroyed millions upon millions of working class peoples' lives, killed off our environment and the animals and plants that inhabit the natural world, and put us one step closer to the end of civilization. Not only has capitalism contributed to that, the drive for profit through the use of fossil fuels such as oil is what fuels the military-industrial complex. BP is the largest supplier of oil and gas to the military-industrial complex as well as BP being its number one contractor. There are many benefits if we stop the use of oil altogether. It effectively hinders imperialism and hegemony.

Conclusion

Over the course of a few months, BP and the federal government have shown that their response to the disaster in the Gulf Coast has been less than adequate. Although with the recent capping of the flow of oil gushing millions of gallons of crude oil into the Gulf of Mexico, that is only a temporary solution until two relief wells are drilled which aren't even guaranteed to solve the problem. One thing is the effort BP is making does not stop offshore drilling in the Gulf for operations will continue. Drilling will continue at the expense of the environment, the wildlife that lives within it and along the coastlines, and the many workers relying on a living ecosystem in order for them to work and sustain themselves. The Gulf of Mexico is an essential part of the everyday lives of workers in the south, yet it is destined to be a dead body of water with many species of wildlife soon to be extinct because of capitalist greed and a sympathetic state protecting the interests of corporations and their shareholders. We must look forward and build our society using sustainable energy. One day soon will come ending offshore drilling because we can no longer put our oceans at risk be-

With its barriers, islands, peninsulas, marshes and inlets, the Gulf Coast of the United States is known for its rich ecosystem and vast wildlife inhabiting the Gulf Coastal Plain. The region attracts many tourists who sightsee and fish along the marshlands in Louisiana, and enjoy the white sands spending their summers across the Panhandle of Florida and the barrier islands called the Emerald Coast. While experiencing the natural surroundings of the Gulf Coast, tourists can see the historical significance of the cultural heritage of the Creek Indians, French and Spanish influences that coalesced to create a unique southern gulf culture along the five states that make up the southern coast of the U.S. Indeed, tourism is a major factor in the Gulf Coast's economy, along with the fishing and shrimping industries so interconnected with the heritage along the Gulf. Yet, it only takes one disaster to turn this major tourist area that brimmed with natural beauty, vibrant culture, and contributed to a major part of the economy, into a desolate dead sea.

Blowout

Drilling at depths of 5000 ft. in the Macondo Prospect, situated in the Mississippi Canyon deep within the Gulf of Mexico, lay the submerged ruins of the Deepwater Horizon. The offshore drilling rig owned by Transocean and leased by British Petroleum (BP) drilled for crude oil in Block 252 of the canyon in the U.S. exclusive economic zone. This 9 year old semi-submersible oil rig was 41 miles off the Louisiana coast when methane gas pushed its way up and out of the drill column and expanded onto the platform of the Deepwater Horizon. The platform quickly ignited and exploded at 9:45 P.M. CDT on April 20, 2010. The explosion killed 11 workers and injured 17, many others escaped by lifeboats and helicopters. Despite a three day search operation by the U.S. Coast Guard, the workers that lost their lives due to the explosion were never found. Multiple

ships attempted unsuccessfully to extinguish the flames, and after 36 hours, the burning Deepwater Horizon finally sank, destroying the driller rising that connected the wellhead on the ocean floor to the oil rig.¹²

Several weeks preceding the blowout at BP's Deepwater Horizon, workers had noticed leaks at the rig's blowout preventer (BOP). Workers complained about this issue and the danger that could ensue, yet nothing was done to resolve the leak that finally led to the explosion at Deepwater Horizon. Although the leakage was reported to both BP and Transocean, the problem was not rectified and the operation continued until the BOP failed. The question now is if Transocean and BP were aware of the leakage, why was this allowed to happen? It's actually rather simple to explain. BP's internal documents and the House Committee on Energy and Commerce's investigation show that BP was clearly trying to cut corners in the construction of this well. BP's poor decision making exacerbated the construction of an unstable well, which includes the design of the well, as well as preparations for testing the cementing of the well and making sure that the well was properly sealed on top.

Additionally, these reports claim that BP chose a cheaper and faster design for the final string of casing. To cut costs and maximize profits, BP went with a method that utilized a tapered string, which is the steel pipe lining the well, that is 7 to 10 million dollars cheaper than any other. This tapered string method offered less protection, especially if the cementing job was not done properly and gas rose up the well as reports noted.

BP is the largest producer of oil and gas and has a heavy hitting record of environmental as well as work condition violations. In 2005, BP's refinery in Texas City, TX exploded resulting in the

¹ Transocean, Transocean Deepwater Horizon specifications www.deepwater.com

² Offshore Technology. Com, Macondo Prospect, Gulf of Mexico, USA www.offshore-technology.com

parks, the plan is to 6,500 sq miles of the desert to import into Europe. If they were to cover .3% of the desert, the entire continent of Europe would be fully powered through the use of the solar panel technology. But, the use of solar power is not without criticism. Of course, how can we use solar power in the evening when the sun has already set? An approach that is being explored is to melt salt by using thermal energy. This method would retain the heat long enough to power a turbine through most of the night. Solar maps are detailed layouts displaying historical information will also help. These would show geographical regions showing solar trends making it possible to locate general regions not just by solar power but also by higher resolutions.³⁴³⁵

Many of these alternatives for energy production will take decades to benefit the world over. Until then, we must decrease the amount of oil and gas we use. We must limit the amount we spend driving and opt for dependable mass transit system such as rail systems and buses. For overseas hauling, computerized wind sails can help navigate ships. If the conditions are right, fuel costs can be reduced by 10–30% while under the ideal wind condition, costs can be reduced by 50% for ships.³⁶

With ecological catastrophes such as the BP Deepwater Horizon explosion, Exxon/Valdez, Ixtoc and Shell in Nigeria, these serve as examples that our dependency on oil and gas as a means of energy must change immediately. Of course, society will need to transition at a pace that is appropriate to implement the necessary changes for energy consumption. Wind power and solar power are alternatives that are viable that could replace oil and gas.

The problem though is that the only way we can truly move towards an ecological society that is sustainable is doing away with

³⁴ Brit Liggett, Solar Energy from Sahara Will Be Imported To Europe Within 5 Years, inhabitat.com... (June 2010)

³⁵ Duncan Graham-Rowe, Can the Sahara Light Up Europe with Solar Power? Recent Development in CSP www.worldchanging.com (April 2010)

³⁶ Skysails, Turn Wind Into Profit, www.skysails.info (Accessed July 2010)

facturing of wind turbines is slowly increasing showing an increase in production in 2009. With just 10 gw online, that is enough energy for 2.4 million average homes. So far, Texas has the largest amount in wind power capacity, and Iowa produces the most energy through the use of wind turbines.³¹

Natural gas is the leading energy source in Europe, but wind power is catching up quickly. Sooner rather than later, the use of wind turbines will be the number one source of energy in Europe. The manufacturing of new wind turbines and use of wind power exceeded the use of new natural gas power in 2008 and 2009. Germany and Britain lead Europe in the use of wind power with Germany having the largest increase with 1 gw of wind power coming from offshore sources. Bulgaria and Romania are also elevating the use of wind turbines.³²

In Morocco, they have initiated a large wind farm project to be completed in 2020. The 165 wind turbines are located in the town of Melloussa outside of Tangiers. The plan in Morocco is the largest on the African continent and will join another wind farm in Northern Morocco which has a 54 megawatt capacity. The Melloussa wind farm is estimated to supply 140 megawatts of energy through the use of wind turbines. It will also provide 42% of the energy for Morocco.³³

Other than wind power, there is solar energy. The Sahara Desert if covered with solar panels could produce enough energy to power the globe. In fact, the European Union plans to start exporting solar energy within the next five years which will be 20% of renewable resources by 2020. With the use of photovoltaic systems and wind

³¹ Matthew McDermott, How's the US Wind Industry Doing? Manufacturing Growing More Slowly, But Record Installations in 2009 www.treehugger.com (April 2010)

³² Megan Treacy, Wind Power Catching Up With Natural Gas In Europe www.ecogeek.org... (June 2010)

³³ Brit Liggett, Africa's Biggest Windfarm Debuts in Morocco inhabitat.com (June 2010)

death of 15 workers and injuries of hundreds more. If it is not evident that BP's capitalist greed caused them to cut corners putting workers at risk, At this refinery alone, they were fined over 87 million dollars for safety violations. should be proof that BP is not at all concerned with the safety of workers, the surrounding communities, and the environment from where they exploit massive amounts of crude oil.³

Clearly, BP CEO and President Tony Hayward was well aware of the many problems of drilling at such depths and that the wellhead was unstable from the start. After all, engineers stated that it was a "nightmare well", yet Tony Hayward and crew made decisions for "economic reasons", cutting costs and in turn increasing chances of a massive blowout. And, their decisions did cause a major catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico that is now inundated with 90.4 to 178.6 million gallons of oil.⁴

After the Deepwater explosion, President Obama imposed a six month moratorium banning exploratory drilling in the Gulf of Mexico. The decision was based on water depth. Thirty-three oil rigs stopped operations, but shortly afterwards, Louisiana Federal Judge Martin Feldman, who holds stock in Transocean, overturned the President's moratorium. Now the Obama administration has imposed another moratorium to ban offshore drilling until November 30, 2010. This decision is no longer based on water depth but instead focused on shortcomings of BOP's and equipment, and the industry's "inability" to contain massive oil spills. But, what good is a moratorium that shuts down operations of thirty-three rigs when there are nearly 4,000 active oil rigs and gas platforms along the Gulf Coast?⁵⁶

³ New York Times, BP Plc. News. topics.nytimes.com?..

⁴ Congress of the United States, House of Representatives, June 14, 2010 energycommerce.house.gov (June 2010)

⁵ Newsweek, Judge Overturns Obama's Drilling Moratorium www.newsweek.com... (June 2010)

⁶ Greg Boland, Oil and Gas Exploration oceanexplorer.noaa.gov

Capping the Well and Cleaning Up

BP used several different methods to stop the gusher caused by the Deepwater Horizon explosion before capping it on July 15, 2010. Of course, previous methods to stop the gusher failed but it is worth mentioning the ideas of the brilliant engineers at BP. First attempted was a method called “Top Hat”. A 125 ton cap of concrete and steel was lowered over the gusher by ROV’s to temporarily stop it. But, when placing the four story domed cap, it failed because the umbilical hose quickly filled with methane hydrate. Methane hydrate is an oil slush that forms at very low temperatures, so naturally this would happen considering the wells riser was so deep in the sea that it reached temperatures of 30 degrees.

Second was “the straw”. BP sent ROV’s down to the base of the well where the primary leak was located at the riser. The ROV’s then inserted a 4 inch wide pipe into the riser to suck the remaining gas and oil to the surface. Next, BP tried to pump heavy mud and other fluids into the riser valve function. The flow would then start to trickle and mud could be chased with concrete to plug the riser and the well’s structure on the seabed. This procedure was called “Top Kill”.

There was also the “junk shot” plan, which would have been a desperate measure taken by BP as a last resort. BP was to shoot masses of golf balls, rope, tires and other random bits and pieces of garbage into the riser.⁷

There was also talk about nuking the well. The Russians used a nuke to seal a blown out well seeping oil and it was a success for them. So why not consider this? Really, how much more damage could BP possibly cause to the Gulf of Mexico? Surely not enough because in the end, these capitalists can leave the area anytime like Tony Hayward did when he went to watch his boat race in the U.K.

⁷ Erik Sofage, Grading the Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill Improvised Cleanup Tech, www.popularmechanics.com... (May 2010)

exacerbated by the BP disaster. Also, from personal experience at meeting between Governor Crist of FL, Senator Bob Graham, Commissioner Garcia and the Santa Rosa Island Authority on 11 July 2010, one of the members of the round table discussion mentioned that workers weren’t doing their jobs and that the contractors need to start doing better background checks on workers. There are a lot of people of color on the cleanup crews. Class, culture and race are on the intersecting margins of oppressions of capitalist environmental destruction.

As anarchists, we must socially insert to the popular movements that are mobilizing against BP and its destruction of the Gulf of Mexico. Anarchists along the Gulf Coast are positioned along the coast to significantly influence the movement surrounding the disaster. We must argue for and build a movement independent of the familiar formula of staff run, top-down movements catering to the states rule of passive and peaceful engagement and compromise to the capitalist elite. This movement must be militant, a movement with teeth and tearing apart capitalist exploitation and state repression. A movement that will up the ante or else we will see nothing change.

Moving forward

Even though workers self-management on the oil rigs would be the most desirable since workers know best what methods to use and would regulate appropriately concerning safety standards, self-management does not guarantee that disasters of this nature will be avoided. There are no ways to control accidents from happening, and these massive spills with detrimental effects on the environment are proof that we must move forward, explore and put to use alternative energy sources to satisfy our energy consumption.

One source of energy has been used for centuries, and that is using wind mills as a source of energy. In the United States, manu-

oil and Corexit 9500 that workers are exposed to during the clean effort. At one point in time, workers were not even issued respirators. In fact, if workers supplied their own respiratory protective PPE's, BP threatened to fire these workers who were only concerned with their own safety. Of course, this only proves once again that BP is not concerned with safety of workers that they exploit and would rather the workers suffer the many effects of the toxic mixture of oil and Corexit 9500 and the oppressive summer heat of the Gulf Coast just to save on expenses. We can see this in BP's track record of violation of safety standards and piss poor managerial decisions of operating any oil rig whether it is offshore or onshore.²⁹ Many workers have reported symptoms similar to workers on the cleanup of Exxon/Valdez which is severe headaches, nausea and breathing problems. BP informed cleanup workers that they would not be "bothered" by the oil once encountered. This is just another example of capitalist cutting costs and making profit by endangering workers who are doing the cleanup for the pigs who cut corners to save money that caused the explosion.³⁰

Intersecting Fronts

The BP catastrophe must be analyzed closely. Indeed, it is one of the worst ecological disasters in the United States but is much more. As mentioned previously, the economy has been impacted leaving many workers without work. To top it off, an unemployment extension billed was just rejected in senate to extend unemployment benefits. Also, over time much of the cultural traditions that come from the area will start to disappear as native workers leave the area in search of employment in other sectors if at all possible during the economic crisis that first reared its head in 2007 and is now

²⁹ Clint Guidry, Letter to President Obama, www.rikiott.com (May 2010)

³⁰ The Huffington Post, Gulf Oil Spill Cleanup Workers Getting Sick, Scientist Compares It To Exxon Valdez www.huffingtonpost.com... (June 2010)

and leave the hell on earth BP created to be left to the proletariat to clean up the mess capitalism created.

At the moment, BP is using skimmers in the cleanup effort. Many of the people navigating the skimmers are commercial fishermen that BP put out of work because of the explosion. In all, there are a total of 433 skimmers being used in the cleanup operation for the entire gulf. There are 850 skimmers in the southeast and 1,600 in the continental U.S. that are available but not being used by BP. There is plenty of red tape involved, A giant Taiwanese supertanker called "A Whale" was going to be converted into a skimmer and brought from Portugal into the Gulf of Mexico, yet this did not happen because bureaucrats it was determined that dispersants would stop the ship from collecting significant portions of oil. The U.S. Coast Guard also grounded 16 skimmers responding to the Gulf oil disaster because of safety regulations and until the ships were inspected. Obviously, the skimmers that are necessary for the cleanup aren't being used for one reason or another.⁸⁹¹⁰

More than 500,000 feet of boom has been laid through the Gulf to stop oil from reaching the shoreline. Boom is an orange inflatable used to contain oil, but it does have its limitations. The waters in the Gulf are vast and rough, making it difficult for the boom to work properly and contain the oil.¹¹

⁸ Chris Kirkham, Red tape keeps prized oil-fighting skimmers from Gulf coastline, www.nola.com... (June 2010)

⁹ Paul Roux, Giant oil skimmer 'A Whale' deemed a bust for Gulf of Mexico spill, www.nola.com... (July 2010)

¹⁰ Jonathan Strong, Coast Guard defends grounding oil sucking barges in gulf, dailycaller.com... (June, 2010)

¹¹ Gwen Filosa, Boom used in Gulf oil spill works in limited way, experts say, www.nola.com... (May 2010)

Contrasting Catastrophes

The disaster in the Gulf is only the fourth largest ecological disaster caused by an oil explosion. The 1979 Ixtoc oil spill is the third largest. It was finally capped on March 23, 1983 and took 10 months to clean. In total, Ixtoc spilled 3 million barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico. The circumstances of Ixtoc are similar to the Deepwater horizon with pressure building up and shooting up causing an explosion. But, it caused very little ecological damage. During the Gulf War in 1990, the Iraqi government intentionally dumped oil into the Persian Gulf to stop Marine amphibious units approaching Kuwait. There was about 11 million barrels spilled doubling that of Ixtoc and causing long term damage to impacted salt marshes along the coast. Recovery of the area is decades away. While there is little information on the largest spill in the U.S. the Lakeview Gusher in California blew due to a lack of technology in the first quarter of the 20th century. Its heavy flow of crude oil created rivers of oil that workers had to cut off using sandbags and barricades. The worst example of ecological destruction because of invasive oil industry is Nigeria, which we will come back to later in this essay.¹²

Blackout

The coverage of the catastrophe in the Gulf has been limited in scope. Limited in the sense that the media is only exposing certain amounts due to a media blackout imposed by BP and their capitalist cohorts. There have been instances where activists and journalists have been threatened with arrest if they were to examine the impact areas. Gag-orders have been imposed on cleanup workers,

¹² Sean XVX, The Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill: An Explanation, (June 18, 2010)

This outsourcing also undermines a vast majority of workers in the labor pool who expect more pay and better conditions. Since the financial crisis and the massive loss of employment, many workers are without work and have been looking for work regardless if the work is outside their field and the remuneration it offers. The statistics officially show the percentage of unemployment of Louisiana at 7.0, Mississippi at 11.0, Alabama at 10.3 and Florida at 11.4. But, these are the percentages documented through the Bureau of Labor Statistics and are not at all representative of the overall percentage of workers that are not documented, collecting benefits and actively searching for employment. Additionally, many of the workers on cleanup crews are brought into the region meaning that many workers along the gulf applying for jobs with BP contractors are left unemployed.²⁸ This shows again in capitalist spirit that BP is going to cut costs one way or another to ensure that they still profit at the expense of the working class along the Gulf Coast.

Many workers along the gulf coast especially in the seafood industry have been unemployed for months, and BP definitely sticks the knife much deeper when hiring outside contractors leaving many local workers seeking employment out in the dark. If not one of the lucky workers hired on to be subjected to toxins and oppressive heat, fishermen are now hired out as tour guides to showcase the destruction of the environment caused by the Deepwater Horizon blowout. They are making significantly less as being disaster tour guides for officials and bureaucrats while showing how BPs greed has destroyed the very environment fishermen call their home.

What also constitutes that this is a blatant attack on the workers is the treatment of workers cleaning up the oil spill. There has been criticism about the health hazards created by the crude

²⁸ Bureau of Labor Statistics, Regional and State Employment and Unemployment Summary, www.bls.gov (July 2010)

tar balls and water inundated with crude oil and toxic dispersants? So, workers in the service industry will either lose work altogether or experience a decrease in income because of a stagnant tourist season offset by big oil.

With the use of contractors, BP is also able to cut costs and still make profit through exploitation of prison labor. In May, over 200 inmates currently housed in work release facilities have been hired out for 8 to 10 USD in contrast to the much higher wage of 18 USD other workers currently receive hourly for their labor in the cleanup effort. The contract company SG& S Oil Recovery Products LLC has trained more than 148 prison laborers in Hazardous Waste Operations and Emergency Response (HAZPOWER).

For more than two years, the owner of SG & S Oil Recovery Products LLC, Jay Gaddick, has exploited prison labor because he knows prisoners face dire consequences through stiff punishment if inmates are not compliant with bosses. Petty capitalists like Jay Gaddick enable the predatory and parasitic nature of corporations such as BP who are always looking for a way to get around paying a decent wage to workers by simply exploiting prisoners who often take huge risks if they don't fit the mold of what bosses expect. This is typical of capitalism. A vital part of their profit making scheme is to outsource to contractors who hire labor for far cheaper than a hire a worker who is not in a desperate situation. Additionally, the Department of Corrections garnishes 40% of the prison workers wages for various reasons. Not only are these workers' labor being exploited for such a low wage, the state is taking a considerable amount of income from them. If it is the goal of the DOC to reintegrate prisoners back into society, they sure are giving them a dose of what the working class has always known which is exploitation by capitalism and oppression by the state.²⁷

²⁷ Adam Nossiter, Far From Gulf, a Spill Scourge 5 Decades Old, www.nytimes.com (June 2010)

which prohibit them to speak with activists or media.¹³ BP has even gone as far as to buy off certain search words pertaining to the disaster. When a user does an internet search using certain words, the user will be redirected to the company's official website for BP's point of view. There has been a complete media blackout, and BP is hiding the truth and will continue to mislead about the facts of what's going with the disaster they created.¹⁴

Kindra Arnesen, wife of a commercial fisherman, was given unlimited access to Unified Command. Breaking her silence on June 19, 2010 at the Gulf Emergency Summit, Kindra spoke of officials coming into impacted areas and the term "balloons and ponies" that was given to them by joint operations. What this means is that BP allocates all resources to the impacted area so it looks as if they are doing the job and remaining committed, but upon departure of the official, all resources are moved out. As a victim of an impacted area, the information Kindra gave people at the Gulf Emergency Summit was disturbing and verifies that what we receive as information through mainstream media is limited in scope and that BP is hiding the truth from us.¹⁵

Ecological Devastation

With each attempted method of capping the blown out well, there will be major ecological devastation to the impacted areas along the gulf coast. Already many geographic areas that make up the gulf coast are ecologically sensitive and shorelines have been receding for many years due to many reasons. One reason is that the gulf coast is prone to many storms and major hurricanes, most

¹³ Tom Eley, Censorship and cover-up in the Gulf oil disaster, www.wsws.org (July 2010)

¹⁴ Emily Friedman, BP Buys "Oil" Search Terms To Redirect Users To Official Company Website, abcnews.go.com... (June 2010)

¹⁵ Brasscheck TV, We Mean Nothing To the Government", www.brasschecktv.com. (June 2010)

recently it saw Katrina, Rita and Ivan. Much of the areas impacted by the crude oil from BP's Deepwater Horizon are still recovering from the damage caused by the storms over the past few years but now are even more at risk due to this disaster. created by the poor decision making of BP maintaining proper safety equipment to prevent blowouts of this magnitude. As the crude oil approaches the already receding coastline, the oil will seep into the soil and contaminate plants.

In the Gulf, two coral reefs, the Gulf Flower garden banks and the Florida Reef tract, are at risk. The coral reefs in the gulf host 25% of marine life. Studies show that dispersants and oil droplets are far more toxic than crude oil which will in effect cause much more significant harm to the coral reefs. Furthermore, the use of dispersants will cause widespread death to tiny colonial animals that build the reefs and slow the growth rates of coral colonies. According to a scientific study in 2000, in 20 years "the living corals on many of the reefs will be dead and ecosystems dependent on them would be severely damaged".¹⁶

Corexit 9500, a controversial dispersant, is being sprayed from airplanes as part of the clean-up effort. Developed by Exxon and manufactured by Nalco, Corexit 9500 is a solvent that is four times more toxic than the crude oil gushing from the blown out well. The combining of the dispersant and the crude oil, in addition to the heat of the Gulf of Mexico, will make an even more toxic substance that will be devastating to sea and plant life in the gulf. In fact, the U.K. Marine Management Organization is one of several countries to ban the use of Corexit because the dispersant is one of the most toxic dispersants being manufactured today.¹⁷

Much of the wildlife in the Gulf of Mexico is at risk due to the oil and Corexit. Although the ecosystem is resilient, much of the

¹⁶ NOAA, Oil Spills in Coral Reefs: Planning and Response Considerations response.restoration.noaa.gov (February 2010)

¹⁷ Yobie Benjamin, BP Oil Spill Corexit Dispersant Suspected In Widespread Crop Damage, www.sfgate.com... (June 2010)

part in the local economy. We have to take into consideration how much of the profit that BP and any capitalist thug in general give back to the communities where they are exploiting resources.

Dispossession

Many working class people living in the areas most impacted by the BP gusher of oil will be displaced. Reasons ranging from health issues caused by the toxic dispersants, the burning of oil out in the gulf, and because of the loss of income due to being put of work. Some of these working class families are deeply rooted in these areas where commercial fishing is dominant and what provides them with the means to live as well as contribute to their community through a localized economy. Yet, with the all the oil sheens and plumes, the workers in commercial fishing are now without jobs, and many workers have been in the seafood industry for generations. Indeed, this means that with the loss of the commercial fishing industry, that an integral part of these workers culture will diminish, or thinking the worst case scenario, disappear altogether.

Attack on the Working Class

All though out the Gulf Coast region, many workers will be affected because of the BP catastrophe. Commercial fishing and tourism are a vital part of the economy and both industries have seen significant declines as a result of the blown out well spewing millions of gallons of crude oil a day into the gulf. The Deepwater Horizon blowout shows us big oil is an industry that can completely destroy itself while destroying other industries at the same time. The gusher of oil in the gulf has stopped commercial fishing for the time being and will increase a massive dead zone in the gulf that already exists. Also, service sector jobs will be greatly affected because who wants to vacation along beaches filled with

yield much more death of marine wildlife and birds that use the Gulf of Mexico as a stopping point during their migration.²⁵

Third World within the First

Since the Deepwater Horizon catastrophe, all eyes have been on the Gulf Coast region because of how BP and the federal government have handled the situation. With all the attention, many other ecological disasters at the hands of capitalist exploitation of fossil fuels for a petroleum based economy have seeped into the public's mind as mentioned previously. Let's take a look at Nigeria. Nigeria has been ignored until the Deepwater Horizon explosion. For the past 50 years, Nigeria experiences an Exxon/Valdez oil spill every year due to military conflict, corroded and old oil pipelines. Nigerian swamps and mangroves have been destroyed due to Shell's oil business. Many Nigerians are dependent on fishing as a local resource for their economy, yet it is impacted by capitalist exploitation of oil. It is proof that there are no interests other than corporate interests.²⁶

Yet, the Deepwater Horizon explosion in the Gulf of Mexico does not constitute third world conditions for the gulf states but it does serve as a waking example of how capitalists treat working class (and surprisingly those in privileged working classes also) people in general. Capitalism creates toxic and dangerous environments destroying our ecosystems which will cripple local economies. They offer no real solution of cleaning up what is left and restoring the conditions to a pristine state.

Capitalists make absolutely no contribution to the communities affected unless it is imposed by the state. They don't even play a

²⁵ Bob Warren, Louisiana Wildlife and Fisheries report latest numbers on oil-impacted birds, turtles and dolphins www.nola.com... (July 2010)

²⁶ David Ferrara, Prisoners hired in oil relief efforts, trained in hazardous materials work, blog.al.com (May 2010)

wildlife is endangered and the oil and dispersants spell out certain death, possibly even extinction in more extreme cases, for birds and sea life along the Gulf Coast.

Many animals have already died because of methods used in the cleanup effort. BP puts the Gulf Coast's wildlife at risk by hindering volunteers who are trying to aide in rescuing animals that are tainted by crude oil. Many of these volunteers are trained professionals that are coming to rescue animals affected by oil, yet BP makes the volunteers go through HAZMAT training as well as a three month waiting period before they can actually get to work. So, in the meantime, after the training of the volunteers, what are these workers supposed to do? The workers are instructed to call a BP hotline and report the animal. Worst of all, BP tells workers that if they attempt to move the animals and the animal dies, the individual that tried to save it is liable for the animal perishing. Volunteer workers are also told after they rescue the animal that they should not do anything for three hours in order for it to "stabilize".¹⁸

There has already been a massive backlash throughout communities, wildlife preservation organizations and media regarding the effects of the oil gusher and the methods of cleaning it up and how it will affect wildlife. Concerning endangered sea turtles, many have perished in burn zones. Trapped with other sea life in 500 sq mile burn fields, many of these endangered sea turtles such as the Ridley Kemps have been burned alive. Conservationists have accused BP of stopping rescue efforts to clear the impacted areas of endangered wildlife. Basically, when BP enters into an area where they intend to burn oil floating a top the water, there will be almost no chance of survival for the sea turtles. Another issue presented is that oil floating in the gulf puts younger generations of sea turtles at risk after hatching along the shores. It is natural in-

¹⁸ Ryne Ziemba, Is BP Saving Money By Letting Wildlife Die, www.inweekly.net (May 2010)

instinct for the baby turtles to automatically make their way from the shore and enter into the Gulf, and once they do, they are at risk because they will encounter oil. As David Godfrey of the Sea Turtle Conservancy organization suggests, the young sea turtles are “doomed” once they enter the oil polluted waters of the gulf. In an effort to save future generations of sea turtles, conservationists are planning on digging up 1,000 nests and moving them to hatcheries. Two groups of Ridley Kemps nests that were dug up and moved have already hatched at NASA’s Kennedy Space Center and have been released into the Atlantic Ocean.¹⁹²⁰

Six months previous to the Deepwater Horizon explosion, Brown Pelicans had been removed from the endangered species list. Brown Pelicans showed resurgence in population growth after hurricane Katrina. With close to 50 years of recovery, the Brown Pelicans were at a safe level and no longer endangered. Many of the Brown Pelicans had been exposed to pesticides and DDT. Also, these birds were almost non-existent in Louisiana and actually had to be brought into the area from colonies in Florida. Now, one can see images of Brown Pelicans coated in crude oil and the lives of these birds are at great risk because of the Deepwater Horizon gusher. The danger the birds face is that when their feathers are coated with the oil it will harden, hindering flight. The Brown Pelicans will also not be able to control internal temperature which could lead to dehydration and overheating. Younger Brown Pelicans are also coated in oil because the parent unintentionally wipes oil on them in their nesting colonies. Other risks they face is being poisoned by toxins through the fish that

¹⁹ Suzanne Goldenberg, BP accused of killing endangered sea turtles in cleanup operation, www.guardian.co.uk... (June 2010)

²⁰ Steven Sicleoff, Hatchlings Get Helping Hand, www.nasa.gov (July 2010)

they prey on, and that the toxins from the dispersants and oil will seep into the eggshells of pregnant birds.²¹

Dead fish have also been reported floating around Lake Pontchartrain in Slidell, LA. Scientists are still testing the fish to find out the exact cause, but there was a thin sheen of oil close to where the fish died. Tar balls were first spotted in July washing ashore Lake Pontchartrain.²² There have been reported fish kills in Mobile Bay in Coden, AL where people have witnessed thousands of dead catfish washing ashore.²³

On June 17, 2010, an investigation was started concerning a 25 foot sperm whale that was found dead around 77 miles south of the Deepwater Horizon gusher. There have also been many reports to NOAA and Unified Command stating that witnesses have seen sperm whales swimming in the oiled water.²⁴

The impact to wildlife along the Gulf Coast has been tremendous, and as of July 15, 2010, 2986 birds along a five state radius have been rescued, although not all survived. 718 of the birds either arrived dead or were euthanized because of the deadly effects of BPs irresponsibility and capitalist greed that caused the birds deaths. 660 turtles have been rescued. Along the Louisiana coast, 106 of the 660 turtles were recovered but only 9 survived with 97 dead due to the oil and dispersants. 64 dolphins were rescued but for 35 that were found around Louisiana, it was too late. This is only the beginning of the collapse of the precious ecosystem with the death of the animals. The long term deterioration of the ecosystem will

²¹ John Platt, Delisted and in danger: Gulf oil spill threatens Brown Pelicans months after they are dropped from endangered species list, www.scientificamerican.com... (June 2010)

²² David Hammer, Tar balls reach Lake Pontchartrain, www.nola.com... (July 2010)

²³ Steve Alexander, Fish Kill Concerns Residents, www.wkrg.com... (May 2010)

²⁴ Bob Warren, First dead whale found in Gulf since BP rig explosion and oil spill www.nola.com... (June 2010)