

The Gulf Spill Continues: Is Obama Powerless Against BP?

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After BP successfully placed a cap to divert some of the spewing oil into tankers, thousands of gallons continue to flow daily into the gulf. August is slated as the earliest date that any permanent solution may emerge. BP remains totally in charge of potentially the largest environmental disaster in the earth's recorded history, a fact that proves — in “check mate” fashion — that corporations dominate the inner workings of the U.S. government, a truth previously revealed by the bank bailouts.

More than one gigantic eco-system may be destroyed by BP, and the President of the U.S. is sadly reduced to lecturing in “serious tones,” with daily adjustments of tone based on the results of polling agencies.

When the polls reported that Obama wasn't taking the oil spill seriously enough, his next TV appearance depicted him as “outraged.” Yet his continuing lack of action doesn't match his new, stronger emotions; nor does his inaction match the dire seriousness of the situation.

Indeed, Obama continues to allow BP to lie about the seriousness of the spill, even when numerous independent scientists disputed BP's estimates of the spillage. Of course Obama knew that BP had a profit incentive to lie, while Obama has his own incentive to allow the lie — and continued lies — of BP.

One reason Obama doesn't challenge BP is because he's on their payroll. The news agency Reuters explains: “During his time in the Senate and while running for president, Obama received a total of \$77,051 from the oil giant and is the top recipient of BP PAC and individual money over the past 20 years, according to financial disclosure records.” (May 5, 2010).

In July, BP is set to give its shareholders multi-billion dollar dividends — prompting more toothless anger from Obama — while BP continues to maintain a healthy distance from taking complete accountability for the oil spill.

The results are sadly predictable: many of the effects of the spill will be permanent, while the cleanup and recovery will go on for years and decades, possibly costing the extinction of some species and the United States billions and maybe trillions of dollars in the long term.

BP will throw itself at the mercy of the courts, an elite entity much friendlier to the mega-corporations than to the millions of U.S. workers demanding justice. Add to the equation BP's elite attorneys and you have an eventual settlement — after years — that will equal the

tiniest fraction of the caused devastation. This prediction was all but confirmed by the mainstream media, when Curt Anderson of the Associated Press reported:

“More than half of the federal judges in districts where the bulk of Gulf oil spill-related lawsuits are pending have financial connections to the oil and gas industry, complicating the task of finding judges without conflicts to hear the cases...” (June 6, 2010).

Aside from the above financial blocks to holding BP accountable, there lays a deeper code of ethics that prohibit government interference into the matters of private corporations, no matter how great the damage done to the general public.

At the top of this corporate code of ethics is the sacredness of property rights, meaning that large corporations have complete control — outside the grasp of any government — to do what they want with their giant wealth and facilities, wherever and whenever they want.

To the U.S. government, this right pre-empts human rights, environmental rights, etc. Property rights are enshrined in every free-trade agreement the U.S. government signs, so that overseas corporate investments are strictly protected, prohibiting foreign nations from using U.S. corporate facilities for the social needs of their native populations. Although BP is a British corporation, the rules of this code are mutual and global.

Nowadays, the tiniest crack in the foundation of corporate property rights constitutes “communism” — a right wing accusation hurled at Obama after he partially nationalized General Motors and other institutions in response to the economic crisis. And although Obama intruded into the sanctity of property rights when the financial crisis exploded, it was with the general consent of the corporate establishment — who viewed those actions as necessary, short-term evils — meant to save the investments of the rich, while using taxpayer money to rehabilitate the companies before they were eventually handed back to shareholders.

The emergency in the Gulf of Mexico, on the other hand, is viewed by the corporate elite as a lesser crisis, demanding the government not set another precedent that would point to the necessity of public ownership.

Obama’s unwillingness to push aside BP and take government charge of the operation makes him an accomplice to the environmental disaster. For example, in order that BP be allowed to remain at the helm, Obama has given them professional credibility where none should exist — “they have the expertise and technology,” etc. BP’s actions prior to the spill constitute criminal negligence. The comments of BP’s CEO since the spill undoubtedly prove that the company views the disaster as more of an inconvenience, to be handled at their leisure.

Furthermore, every public appearance of a BP executive or spokesperson serves to minimize the crisis, implying that a less immediate reaction is required. Indeed, as a for-profit company, BP’s actions remain motivated by concern for their shareholders, whose only motivation is profit. In practice, this means fewer resources are dedicated to the spill than would be otherwise, since higher cleanup costs equal lower profits. One glaring example of this was cited in The New York Times, which quoted a scientist working for the Flow Rate Technical Group, a team of scientists trying to accurately gauge the flow of oil into the Gulf:

“It’s apparent that BP is playing games with us, presumably under the advice of their legal team,” Dr. Leifer said. “It’s six weeks that it’s been dumping into the gulf, and still no measurements.” (June 7, 2010).

Local government officials in Florida are also disgusted with BP’s lack of action in preventing the oil from landing on their beaches, while doing next to nothing in cleaning up the beached oil. The attorney general of Florida complained:

“I’m outraged...why are we waiting so long to do this? Why is the Coast Guard, Obama, BP waiting? They’ve seen it coming, so why are we waiting?” (Bloomberg, June 7, 2010).

Obama’s religious faith in BP to properly handle the spill — after it had no emergency plan to deal with such a spill in the first place — borders on lunacy. But the logic is sensible from the corporate prospective, which preaches that all is rational which protects profits.

In a sane world, BP’s executives would be facing severe criminal charges, and the billions of profits they’ve earned in the last year would be confiscated to pay for the cleanup. BP’s infrastructure would be taken under the control of the U.S. government, which could ensure that the job was done correctly, timely, and publicly, as opposed to the shield of corporate secrecy currently protecting BP.

The ultimate lesson of this environmental/economic catastrophe is that Obama is not at all serious about confronting corporate interests. Rather, he allows them to stampede over the public interests, ensuring that such disasters will happen again.

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