

## Crisis in the Gulf of Mexico – How shall we respond?

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The Deepwater Horizon oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico can only be characterized as horrendous. But what can be done about it? The immediate issues are

- Stopping the volcano of oil spewing from the wrecked well a mile beneath the Gulf.
- Repairing the economic and ecological devastation it has produced.

It seems all but impossible. We can blame BP for putting their super-profits ahead of the lives and welfare of the people of our country, which they did. We can blame the U. S. government for failing to enforce laws intended to protect the environment, which it did. Ultimately we can blame an energy policy that feeds our addiction to fossil fuels spewing toxic substances into our air and water and threatening the survival of civilization through catastrophic climate change. *But none of that will stop the oil or clean up the disaster. Unless serious measures are proposed and taken on an emergency basis, none of that will prevent another disaster either.*

The solution depends on politics and science coming together. We need science to chart a course of action and we need politics – political leadership and political will – to make it happen. New laws and action by the Executive Branch are required, and that will not happen without a massive and united demand by the people to make it so.

This is what needs to be done to stop the oil volcano

- The U. S. Government must declare a national emergency and seize the U. S. assets of British Petroleum and deploy them for the purpose of mobilizing concerted efforts, based on the best science, to arrest the flow of oil on the Gulf floor.
- These resources must be deployed to hire masses of people in the containment and cleanup effort, based on the best science, to minimize the destruction of the Gulf environment and economic life. First priority for hiring in the effort should be given to those hurt most directly by the crisis.
- These measures must be implemented transparently, with full accountability to the people.

This is what needs to be done to prevent future disasters

- Until we are able to wean ourselves from this addiction, we must create a government agency to *really* oversee the oil industry in its operations,. This agency must have the authority to shut down oil operations and levy serious civil and criminal penalties when warranted. It must be staffed with committed geophysical and ecological scientists with no ties to the industry it is regulating.
- To hasten the demise of the oil-based energy economy, implement Fees on carbon consumption, collected at the point of import or extraction. This is the only real, effective method for reducing dependence on fossil fuels in the current global market economy. Ensure that tax credits and rebates are available for low income people who will be most hurt by the imposition of such fees.
- Provide tax credits and rebates for retrofitting existing homes, offices and factories for energy efficiency and solar power.
- Mobilize massive government investment in wind and solar energy farms and the energy infrastructure to support them - a crash program of research and development for new technologies and for capturing the energy of the sun and the wind.

## What happened in the Gulf?

The Deepwater Horizon disaster was predictable. It was a governmental and corporate crime. It was an inevitable result of the failure to adequately evaluate hazards and oversee oil company operations. It has been exacerbated by the corporate monopoly on technology for carrying out these operations at depths of 5,000 feet or more.

This disaster has already cost at least eleven lives and done billions of dollars of economic damage to the Gulf Coast. It is doing catastrophic and irreversible damage to the eco-system, especially of the Mississippi River Delta.

## Why Predictable?

Thirty-one years ago today, on June 3, 1979, an exploratory well named "Ixtoc 1" in the Gulf of Mexico, off the coast of Mexico, suffered a catastrophic blowout. This spill released 140 million gallons of oil into the Gulf of Mexico and constitutes the largest underwater oil spill ever – at least until now. Like the BP disaster it featured a failed blowout preventer (BOP). Like the Deepwater Horizon It was triggered when a sudden rush of oil and gas caused an explosion and fire on the drilling rig.

However, Ixtoc was at a depth of 160 feet instead of 5,000 feet. Even so, the well was only capped on March 23, 1980, almost ten months after it blew out. The technology for dealing with such a blowout has not changed since then. But these rigs are now drilling at a depth at which direct human intervention is impossible.

## The Environmental and Economic Impact

This wreck will have a catastrophic impact on the eco-system of the Gulf Coast and especially of the Mississippi River Delta, thousands of square miles of wetlands which are the result of millennia of the Mississippi River ecosystem. These vast tracts of water plants and grasses provide refuge and food to the young fish, shrimp and other denizens. Contamination by oil will destroy this breeding ground. In addition the subsequent loss of the plant life will allow the erosion of the land under it and the loss of the wetlands themselves.

These breeding grounds are the source of seafood for the entire Gulf Coast. Tens of thousands of people earn their living by fishing in this region. Already the spill has caused massive areas of the Gulf to be declared closed to fishing due to the oil and this loss of work could become permanent if the Delta wetlands are destroyed. Next to fishing and oil production, the next most important industry in this area is tourism, which has already been devastated by this spill.

## What is to be done?

Over 10,000 people from 135 countries of the developing world met on April 20-22 2010 in Cochabamba Bolivia, and declared:

*"Today, our Mother Earth is wounded and the future of humanity is in danger..."*

*"The capitalist system has imposed on us a logic of competition, progress and limitless growth. This regime of production and consumption seeks profit without limits, separating human beings from nature and imposing a logic of domination upon nature, transforming everything into commodities: water, earth, the human genome, ancestral cultures, biodiversity, justice, ethics, the rights of peoples, and life itself. "*

The BP Gulf disaster places this in sharp focus. Capitalism and the global corporations have sown the seeds of this and many other disasters. Crucial decisions affecting the health and indeed the survival of the human race are being made privately large corporations motivated exclusively by the drive for immediate profits. The measures we propose above will go a long way to restricting their ability to cause new devastation. Ultimately, however, a new economic system is needed - 21st Century ecologically sustainable socialism, "ecosocialism".

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