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Cover-ups and 'cost-savings' ooze from BP records

By John Wojcik

Seventy-seven days after oil from the destroyed Deepwater Horizon started gushing into the Gulf of Mexico, only a mere 67,000 barrels have been recovered. Far, far less than the 491,721 barrels a day BP said, in March, that it could skim off the water in the event of a spill.

Louisiana union leaders, environmentalists and others are saying that the disparity between what BP told government regulators in March and what it has actually been able to do results from a willfully misleading manipulation of numbers.

The first step in the numbers game, local officials claim, was a report BP issued in March that said it had the capacity to skim and remove 491,721 barrels of oil per day.

"The claims they filed with regulators back in March were never questioned by the government. No one checked to see if any of what the company was saying was true. BP never shared any information about any technology they had available to accomplish this. They didn't show any pictures and no one in the media asked about any of their claims even weeks after the spill began," said International Longshoremen's Association Local 3000 Secretary-Treasurer Chris Hammond.

With as much as 4 million barrels discharged into the Gulf as of this week, the skimming opera-



tions have captured less than 900 barrels a day.

The second step in confusing matters came when, just days after the disaster, BP began lowering expectations. It issued releases that said it had a skimming capacity of "more than 171,000 barrels per day," far less than the figure it had given the government only a month earlier.

The Sierra Club and a host of other environmental groups say that just as the company has been playing games with spill numbers, it can be

T H I S W E E K :

- **Cover-ups and 'cost-savings' ooze from BP records**
- **Editorial: Demand help for Haiti now!**
- **Progressive challenge: defeat the GOP**
- **La vuvuzela, la cultura africana y el espíritu del fútbol**
- **Illinois nuclear plant lock out**

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expected to play games with numbers related to damage caused by the spill.

Environmentalists note that on Monday, the joint operations center for the federal government and BP said more than 671,428 barrels of an "oil-water mixture" had been reclaimed. Up until

Union leaders, environmentalists and others are saying that the disparity between what BP told government regulators in March and what it has actually been able to do results from a willfully misleading manipulation of numbers.

Monday journalists have been reporting the numbers as solid oil recovery figures. With BP now admitting that 90 percent of what has been recovered is water, the true amount of oil skimmed is the relatively small 67,000 barrels of oil.

Simple math calculations indicate that had the amounts in BP's March response plan been accurate, 38 million barrels of oil could have been recovered by now - more than what most say is the total amount of the spill.

"This has been a cat and mouse game since March," said Earthjustice attorney Colin Adams. "We want real figures instead of inflated estimates on what they are cleaning up and deflated estimates on how much is gushing out."

There are new reports, meanwhile, of disturbing similarities between instances of company curbs on safety measures prior to the Gulf disaster, in which 11 were killed and prior to its 2005 Texas oil refinery explosion in which 15 were killed.

BP enacted major "cost savings," a new report says, just before the earlier deadly explosion at its

Texas City plant. The company cut inspectors and maintenance workers by the dozens to save just over \$1 million, eliminated safety calendars for \$40,000 in savings, eliminated safety shoes for workers to save \$50,000 and eliminated safety awards to save \$75,000.

Internal e-mails and reports obtained by the House Energy and Commerce Committee this week show that in the days before the Deepwater Horizon explosion BP made five critical choices to save money, even though it knew that the well had a severe gas flow problem. The report to Congress documenting this information was written by a Halliburton contractor responsible for cementing the well.

"This was after they decided, with the backing of the Bush administration in those years, to skimp on paying the \$500,000 it would have cost to put in a simple shut-off valve," said Robert "Tiger" Hammond, president of the Greater New Orleans AFL-CIO.



John Wojcik writes for the People's World.

Demand help for Haiti now!

By PW Editorial Board

Although \$5.3 billion in immediate aid was pledged to help Haiti after its Jan. 12 near-apocalyptic earthquake, only two percent, or \$45 million, has been donated. Brazil was the first and only country to have donated -- \$40 million -- to the reconstruction effort. It was joined by Norway - with \$5 million -- earlier this month.

The island is full of nongovernmental organizations and other assistance groups working diligently on the micro-level to help Haitians rebuild their country and lives. However, macro-reconstruction aid on the state-level is incredibly slow.

The Haitian government estimates more than 300,000 people died from the disaster. Millions are homeless at the start of hurricane season. Last week, a U.S. Senate report painted a bleak picture of millions displaced from their homes, while rubble and collapsed buildings still dominate the landscape.

Former President Bill Clinton and Haitian Prime Minister Jean-Max Bellerive are heading up the effort to raise the \$5.3 billion. The World Bank is overseeing the effort.

But "rich" countries may be backing off their pledges for help because of the deep and long economic crisis. After the recent Group of 20 summit in Toronto, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon warned that rich countries may attempt to balance their budget shortfalls on the "back's of the poorest people."

While nations may slash their deficits, Ban warned they still had to honor their commitments on Haiti.

Haitian union leaders have criticized the donor efforts, charging financial and foreign interests are calling the shots in reconstruction. Labor activists in Haiti, Canada and the United States also warn that donor money has to invest in good jobs - not back to sweatshop conditions so prevalent in the pre-quake days.

Truthout reports that much of the aid pledged may never arrive. "A lot of it has gone straight back to donor nations, as with the \$.40 on every U.S. government aid dollar that paid for the U.S. military presence in Haiti for, at least, the first two months after the quake." Haiti must not be forgotten. Demand help now!

Haiti must not be forgotten. Demand help now!

Progressive challenge: defeat GOP in November elections march

By Rick Nagin

Defeating the Republicans in November must be the top priority for all progressives. The pundits tell us incessantly that Democrats will lose seats and possibly control of Congress because usually (but not always) this is what happens to the party in power in midterm elections. The Republicans hope this narrative will help demoralize Democratic voters, but their main message is that President Obama and the Democrats are responsible for the unrelenting economic crisis.

This crisis was caused by the Republicans and the Republicans are doing everything possible to sustain and aggravate it. If they do gain seats in November, we can expect further gridlock in order to set the stage for a return to power in 2012.

Given the fierce resistance the Republicans have mounted to all steps to relieve the crisis, the claim that the Democrats are responsible for the continued high unemployment and despair is nothing but Big Lie propaganda. It is the Republicans, not the Democrats, who have blocked extending unemployment benefits.

The Republicans justify their sabotage of relief measures by shedding copious crocodile tears over the deficit. But they are the ones responsible for the deficit when they controlled Congress and bestowed unconscionable tax breaks on the super-rich, massive unfunded outlays for two unnecessary wars and huge unfunded handouts to insurance and drug companies under the so-called Medicare Modernization Act.

Anyone who blames the Democrats for the ongoing crisis or accepts the phony concern about the deficit has fallen victim to cynical Republican Big Lie propaganda.

Unfortunately this includes some on the left who seem more inclined to attack Obama and the Democrats than to build the movement to defeat



the ultra-right. That movement depends on electing Democrats, some of whom may in fact be less than inspiring. But only if Democrats are elected will the progressive movement have the time and space to grow.

If the right wing returns to power, the situation will be much worse. The Bush-Cheney administration will be mild in comparison. The rightwing is hell-bent to destroy the current administration and guarantee that nothing like Barack Obama happens again. They will mount an unprecedented attack on the living standards and rights of labor and the American people. The assault on the environment and the military threat to all nations on earth will escalate. Given the blatantly fascist orientation of the corporate-funded Tea Party and their cheerleaders in the media and much of the Republican Party, the dangers inherent in the November elections must be a clarion call to action for all of labor and all democratic and progressive-minded people.

Those who minimize the importance of the elections have already accepted defeat, are irresponsibly playing directly into the hands of the enemy. An all out effort is needed.

Those who minimize the importance of the elections have already accepted defeat.

Illinois nuclear plant locks out 200 steelworkers

By Pepe Lozano

More than 200 workers were on the picket line last week in Metropolis, Ill., after their employer, Honeywell International, locked them out of their jobs, June 28.. The lock-out was the company's reaction after a stalemate was reached in contract negotiations with United Steelworkers, the union representing the workers.

The company says its response was mainly because the union had refused to sign an agreement that would give 24 hours notice before any strike.

Yet, critics charge, the company did not give the workers any 24-hour notification regarding the recent lockout.

Union officials claim the real reasons holding up negotiations have to do with the workers' retirement and health benefits.

Both sides have been meeting for a month. Their previous contract expired last month.

Mike Hillebrand, with the union, Local 7-669, said the company has been planning the lockout for some time.

"We just want to keep our benefits that we've got; our health care and retirement and they're wanting to throw that out," he told reporters with wsiltv.com.

The plant normally has 385 workers yet since the lockout the company has brought in 60 "replacement temporary contingent" workers [also known as scabs] from the Shaw Group, one of the largest nuclear U.S. contractors..

Until an agreement is reached, union members say they'll man the picket line 24-hours a day.

La vuvuzela, la cultura africana y el espíritu del fútbol

Por Wayne Edge

Las trompetas vuvuzela son destinadas a ser una de las memorias más duraderas de la Copa Mundial 2010 celebrada en Sudáfrica. El nombre de la trompeta proviene de la palabra Zulu "hacer ruido." Un instrumento similar, la corneta, se usa en Brasil y en otros países latinoamericanos.

La vuvuzela fue creada por miembros de la Iglesia Bautista Nazarena alrededor de 1910. La religión fue fundada por Isaiah Shembe y combine las tradiciones cristianas con las africanas, como se reflejan en la tribu Zulu. Guiados por el sonido de la corneta, cada año los seguidores de Shembe caminan descalzos en un peregrinaje de tres días desde Durban hasta su santa montaña, Nhlankazi, como homenaje a su padre fundador, que ellos consideran como un profeta africano con poderes extraordinarios de sanación a un nivel superior a Jesús.

La vuvuzela refleja un espíritu de fútbol en África que resulta difícil contemplar desde los confines tranquilos de Europa o EEUU. Las trompetas han provocado controversia, pero al negarse a prohibirlas en los juegos, a su crédito, el presidente de la FIFA, Sepp Blatter, respondió que "no debemos que tratar de pintar con colores de Europa una Copa Mundial africana. El fútbol africano y sudafricano significa ruido, emoción, baile, gritos y diversión".

Durante la partida entre Ghana y Australia, yo vi una escena extraordinaria. El niño llevaba puestos lentes oscuros gigantes, una gorra makarapa con los colores de Ghana, y tenía una trompeta vuvuzela en la mano. Sus papás, blancos sudafricanos, gritaban por Ghana. Durante la primera parte de la partida, los papás se ponían de pie o gritaban con la acción en el campo de juego. El muchacho miraba inatento. Más tarde, llegaron unos aficionados locales y ocuparon los asientos directamente debajo de él, unos con vuvuzelas que tocaban con gran ánimo. Cuando se tocaban las trompetas vuvuzela, el grupo de aficionados de Ghana se puso animado. Algunos de los hombres tocaban sus tambores, comenzaban las mujeres a bailar. El muchacho miraba a su papá, que lo señaló que estaba bien, y el niño se unía al coro y tocaba su vuvuzela. Y, para no darse de vencidos, los aficionados australianos también tocaban sus vuvuzelas y gritaban por su propia selección. Por la próxima hora el niño estaba bien animado gozando de la vida. Al terminarse la partida dudo que el niño supiera el resultado, pero se divirtió como nunca. Había compartido con su papá y su mamá uno de los momentos brillantes de esta vida: una partida de fútbol de la Copa Mundial 2010 en un día que recordar para siempre.

NATIONAL CONTACT

Editorial: (773) 446-9920 Business: (212) 924-2523
Email: contact@peoplesworld.org