

COMMENT

Trail of Destruction

THEY SPEND BILLIONS OF DOLLars every year to keep their 'clean image', rather green image—the British Petroleum (BP). Their popular brand of advertisement appears in the media across the globe. But an environmental, wildlife, and human catastrophe has been unfolding before the world's eyes since the April 20 explosion at the Deep Water Horizon oil rig in the Gulf of Mexico. While marine ecosystems are threatened with a Chernobyl-like situation, BP and the Obama administration continue to down-play the enormity of the problem and its global impact.

Evidence has come from many sources revealing BP was aware of safety concerns, but did nothing about them.

Its lack of preparedness for this disaster—highlighted by its series of failed, makeshift repair attempts —has shown the priorities of the oil industry. Vast amounts have been spent on extraction, but next to nothing has been spent on technology to deal with highly likely spills.

From day one, BP has acted desperately—not to stop the estimated 100,000 barrels of oil a day spewing from its destroyed well—but to stop bad publicity affecting its corporate image.

No doubt BP's sheer arrogance during the Gulf crisis has shocked many democrats and liberals in the First World. But for those in the Third World, this kind of behaviour would actually mark a step up in the oil industry's standard practice.

Spills on the scale of the Gulf of Mexico disaster occur each year in the Nigerian delta, the British *Guardian* said on May 30. The difference is that, in a Third World country like Nigeria, neither the company nor government even bothers to clean it up.

BP's long history of destructive behaviour in its pursuit of profit is far from unique to the oil industry. But it is emblematic of the approach these companies take to people and the planet.

There are other, lesser known, examples of BP's approach. BP was implicated in massacres near the Orensa pipeline in Colombia in the 1990s, an October 1998 *Guardian* article said.

BP's operations in places such as the Niger Delta, Kuwait, Iraq, Papua New Guinea, Algeria, Libya, Somalia, Yemen and Aden have all been accompanied by horror stories of exploitation and misery.

No country has been ravaged by BP as much as Iran. BP originated in 1902 as the Anglo-Persian Oil Company (APOC). It was set up to exploit the oil reserves of Iran. What matters in the end is business interests—'it is both in the US interest and the UK interest that BP has a strong future' despite the Gulf tragedy. □□□