



Lessons to Learn from the BP Oil Spill

Mark Calzavara, Ontario-Quebec Regional Organizer for the Council of Canadians – who is drenched in fake oil – speaks to reporters while beating “oil drums.” The Council has been working with Indigenous groups to raise awareness about the need for a moratorium on oil and natural gas drilling in the Arctic.

In the wake of the BP disaster, the potential of offshore drilling in the Canadian Arctic has come under increasing criticism. The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, on behalf of Inuit Peoples, wrote to Prime Minister Stephen Harper calling for a “time-out” on drilling in the Beaufort Sea in order to take stock of environmental concerns and look at ways to minimize risks and impacts.



by Andrea Harden-Donahue

I remember when I first heard about the horror of the BP disaster in the Gulf of Mexico. I was in Cochabamba, Bolivia, with social movement representatives from around the world meeting at the World People’s Conference on Climate Change and Mother Earth Rights.

Since returning to Canada, I’ve come to appreciate how deeply the images of oil spewing into the ocean, eventually coating shorelines, and the devastating effects on wildlife and local economies have impacted people’s collective consciousness. Did you know that offshore drilling is expanding here in Canada? There are already three oil rigs off the coast of Newfoundland, and an offshore natural gas project near Sable Island, Nova Scotia. Perhaps even more concerning is what’s under way in the Arctic.

BLACK GOLD RUSH IN ARCTIC: THE ‘CANARY IN THE COAL MINE’ OF CLIMATE CHANGE

With the discovery of 90 billion barrels of oil and 1,670 trillion cubic feet of natural gas, more than 80 per cent of which is found offshore, Big Oil companies have set their sights on a new domain. Drilling of Canadian Arctic offshore resources could begin as early as 2014. BP – yes, the same BP responsible for the spill in the Gulf of Mexico – has already acquired three offshore exploration licences for the Canadian Beaufort Sea. Chevron is the latest player in Canada, winning a federal auction by agreeing to spend \$103 million

exploring a 205,000-hectare area in the Beaufort Sea.

It is no small irony that as sea ice melts because of climate change, fossil fuel drilling will become increasingly attractive. Summer ice-free waters and transportation routes through the Northwest Passage are just some of the climate change-induced realities that would make this possible.

The Arctic is already facing some of the most severe climate impacts, warming at a rate twice as fast as the rest of the world. Just recently, an 87-square-kilometre chunk of ice broke off the Petermann Glacier in northern Greenland. Some scientists are predicting that the Arctic Ocean will be completely ice-free in the summer by 2030.

BEAUFORT SEA, LOCATION OF THE NEXT BP DISASTER?

The difficulty of responding to and cleaning up an oil spill in the remote and fragile Arctic environment makes offshore drilling even riskier. As Michael Byers, author of *Who Owns the Arctic*, describes, the Arctic’s marine ecosystem is especially vulnerable, due to its short food chains and species already threatened by warming temperatures and disappearing sea-ice.

According to many commentators, a spill is also more likely in Canadian waters because Canadian rules for offshore drilling are even more relaxed than American rules. In December 2009, Canadian regulations shifted more responsibility to the energy industry for self-regulating. These include provisions meant to safeguard against oil spills.

LEAVE IT IN THE GROUND

The Council of Canadians has launched a campaign calling on our government to establish a moratorium on new oil and gas development in the Arctic. We began this work before the BP disaster, joining the Indigenous Environmental Network and Alaska-based REDOIL Network in March 2010, to protest the closed-door meeting in Chelsea, Quebec, of seven Arctic coastal states. Our message was simple: “Leave it in the ground!” In the coming months and years we will continue to build this campaign, as part of our climate justice work. We want to stop offshore drilling in the Canadian Arctic before it begins.

5 REASONS TO SUPPORT AN ARCTIC OIL AND GAS MORATORIUM

- As seen with BP Oil in the Gulf of Mexico, there is no sure-fire way to guarantee against a massive oil spill.
- Melting ice in the Arctic shouldn’t be seen as an opportunity for Big Oil to increase their profits with new projects – it is a serious warning signal of the climate crisis.
- A spill will devastate the fragile Arctic ecosystem.
- A spill will have devastating impacts on local Indigenous Peoples’ food security and cultural needs.
- An Arctic drilling moratorium is a logical first step in a just transition to sustainable jobs, energy and an improved environment for everyone.

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