

ECONEWS

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THE OIL THAT MUST AWAKEN US

What a mess. Where can we find the appropriate analogy to describe what's happening in the Gulf of Mexico, where oil has been pouring out of the ocean bottom for over a month?

Imagine it's your home, and a harmful gas is leaking out of the basement floor. You cannot move out and live elsewhere, and the gas will be in your home for 10, 20, 30 years, slowly poisoning your family.

That's what it's like for all the birds, fish, marine creatures, wetlands plants and tiny organisms that live in and around the Gulf. 'Catastrophe' is the only word that really captures what's happening. And for all the people who live around the Gulf who earn their income from it.

In the beginning, BP said the well was leaking 1,000 barrels a day. Then they said 5,000 barrels. In late May, the US Geological Survey said 12,000 to 19,000 barrels a day. If so, it may be pouring out as much as the Exxon Valdez oil-spill every 3 weeks. This is a disaster that will be with us for the rest of our lives - and the oil could yet spill out into the Atlantic.

And on June 1st, the Atlantic hurricane season begins.

How did we get into such a mess? And why is the oil-spill so much more commanding of people's attention than the larger and more ominous trouble brewing that can also be laid at oil's doorstep - global warming?

To understand our dilemma, we must go back 800,000 years, when our ancestors first discovered how to control fire. Using fire, we were able to migrate around the world.

Then four thousand years ago, we discovered coal - these strange black lumps of rock that burnt with an intense heat. We didn't have a clue what they were, but we were happy to burn them. It was the same with our discovery of oil, also four thousand years ago in

Persia. We worshipped it, but we did not know what it was.

Even as recently as 1858, when the first modern oil well was struck in Petrolia, Ontario, most people had no idea what it was or where it came from.

Even now, when we know that coal, oil and gas come from ancient fossilized forests and sea-creatures, we are still behaving like our ancestors. We have found something bright and shiny and we are consuming it for all it's worth, no matter the consequences.



We are primitive - and we are behaving in a primitive way, in spite of our all our technology, drilling into ever deeper waters in the world's ocean, tearing Alberta's boreal forests apart to get at the tar sands, ripping the tops of mountains to dig out the coal, paying billions to Middle Eastern oligarchs to buy their oil even while knowing that they are giving some of the money to Al Qaeda, and other terrorist groups that want to destroy the West.

These are not the signs of mature behaviour. These are the signs of a desperate addiction that causes intelligence to be suspended. Seeking to cast blame - on BP, Obama, whoever - is to miss the point.

It is the miasma of our addiction to all the toys that this abundance of cheap energy brings us that has caused us to tolerate the tar-sands, the deep-ocean

drilling, the mountaintop removal, and the environmental devastation that follows in their wake.

Maybe this will finally mark the end of our innocence, and wake us up. Unlike global warming, it is visceral, visible and immediate. It appalls our mammalian senses.

Now, more than ever, is the time for serious and urgent planning to divest ourselves of these fossil fuels that are polluting our oceans, fouling our air, corrupting our politics, and warming our planet.

Now, more than ever, is the time to place a permanent moratorium on drilling for oil or gas in the Arctic, signing an Arctic Treaty as we did for the Antarctic in 1959 - and Canada should lead the way.

Likewise, our MPs in Ottawa must affirm the moratorium on drilling for oil on Canada's west coast, making it permanent and inviolable.

The amazing truth, of which most people are unaware, since the media lacks scientifically trained journalists, is that we are about to make an epoch-making transition to sources of energy that are green, nature-friendly, and will never run out.

Through the combined renewable resources of wind, solar, tidal, wave, hydro, solar thermal and geothermal energy, combined with far greater energy efficiency and lifestyle changes in the way we travel, we can leave the dirty fossil fuels behind us, along with global warming, asthma, and the other forms of foul pollution they create.

The fossil fuels are but a stepping stone into the Solar Age, which once established, can last a billion years. That is the future we can step into, if we will but choose.

But choose we must, for time is running out.

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