

PEOPLE'S WORLD

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August 29, 2015

Climate contradictions: Obama approves Arctic drilling, plans visit to Alaska

By Blake Deppe

After Shell proved, through blunders and its infamous reputation, that it is not fit to drill in the Arctic, Aug. 17 brought news that the Obama administration had granted them approval to do just that. The troubling development came just days after President Obama announced he would visit Alaska to discuss the impact of climate change on the region. Now, as the oil corporation further destroys the already-disrupted Arctic sea ice, the problem of global warming can only grow worse.

The move is especially bewildering for many, as the president has declared Alaska to be “the frontlines of our fight against climate change.” For a place of such importance, it hardly seems like an opportune time for the administration to greenlight a venture that will wreak environmental havoc, but that is what has come to pass. Even so, the approval has not gone unnoticed by activists.

Friends of the Earth climate campaigner Marissa Knodel said, “When Obama visits the Arctic this month, he must face the communities he is sacrificing to Shell’s profits.” Greenpeace executive director Annie Leonard added, “The president cannot have it both ways. Announcing a tour of Alaska to highlight climate change days before giving Shell the final approval to drill is deeply hypocritical.”



In an official report, however, Greenpeace seemed to suggest that the brunt of the blame does not lie with Obama, but rather, with the greed-driven company that seeks to ravage the Arctic. They noted that the president “has used his executive power to show climate leadership before. Earlier this year, he vetoed the Keystone XL pipeline in response to a nationwide public outcry, demanding the U.S. no longer champion policies and projects that accelerate climate change.

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“The world is watching Shell right now. [They have] a history of ineffective equipment. In 2012, one of Shell’s Arctic rigs ran aground and became stuck in Dutch Harbor. The technology does not exist to effectively clean up an oil spill in the icy and unpredictable waters.”

The greed-driven company, Shell, seeks to ravage the Arctic.

The unbalanced and contradictory approach the Obama administration seems to be taking in regard to environmental matters is confusing. That has grown more so with today's news that the EPA, which was responsible for the recent mishap resulting in a large mine waste spill, has proposed new regulations aimed at cutting methane emissions by 40 to 45 percent (from 2012 levels) over the next ten years. The rules would apply to new or modified sources of oil and natural gas and require energy companies to find and fix leaks and take careful steps to limit emissions. And yet, experts seem to point out that this is not quite cause for celebration.

Up in the Arctic, when Shell starts breaking up ice in its exploration for oil, more methane will be released into the atmosphere - enough, perhaps, to render the curbing of emissions from other manmade activities a moot point. Merritt Turetsky, a biology professor at the University of Guelph, Ontario, remarked, "Permafrost carbon feedback is one of the important and likely consequences of climate change, and it is certain to trigger additional warming. Even if we ceased all

human emissions, ice would continue to thaw and release carbon into the atmosphere."

Sierra Club executive director Michael Brune said, "Granting Shell the permit to drill in the Arctic was the wrong decision, and the fight is far from over. The people will continue to call on President Obama to protect the Arctic and our environment."

And the opposition to Shell's drilling is composed of more than just environmental activists. Hillary Clinton released a statement on the matter in the form of a tweet, saying, "The Arctic is a unique treasure. Given what we know, it's not worth the risk of drilling."

Brune added, "She's exactly right. Everything we know about dangerous oil drilling in the Arctic indicates it imperils a national treasure and is guaranteed to make our climate crisis worse. Allowing Shell to use unproven technology in the Arctic is a recipe for disaster and toxic to any climate action legacy."



Blake Deppe is a contributor to Peoplesworld.org.

First female U.S. train engineer inducted into N.D. Railroad Hall of Fame

By PAI

Ramona Dockter, the first U.S. woman to become a freight train engineer 39 years ago, is now the first U.S. woman freight train engineer in a state railroad hall of fame at the N.D. State Railroad Museum.

Ed Michael, of the rank-and-file Railroad Workers United, reported the induction of Ramona Dockter into the Mandan, N.D., hall August 16.

Dockter, a member of the United Transportation Union - now a division of SMART - served as a brakeman for six months until she became the first female engineer, employed by what was then the Burlington Northern, in 1976. She was an engineer for eight more years before retiring to raise her family, as the juggling between family and job got to be too much.

Dockter grew up in railroading, according to the Bismarck News-Tribune story about her induction that Michael posted. Her father, a railroader, too, was very supportive, as was her whole family. So were male co-workers, who encouraged

her to step up to the locomotive cab.

But the schedule's strange hours were another matter. It's also what eventually led her to retire. But not before she took classes in and on-the-job training about such things as locomotive mechanics and boilers.

"There's a tremendous amount of people who helped me along the way," Dockter said. "My babysitter, who watched my kids when I got called until my husband came home helped me a lot. The woman in Jamestown I lived with while I was working was so helpful. And the roadmaster, as well as the people I worked with, side by side, would teach me and make sure I knew what I needed to know."

While Dockter mostly drove freight trains, she told the paper she loved driving Amtrak trains. Amtrak runs through North Dakota on its way from Chicago and the Twin Cities to Seattle. Those trains, with seven coaches, not 100 freight cars, could go 70 mph, she said.

Ramona Dockter grew up in railroading.

South Africa: miners' killing marked with call for unity

By James Tweedie

President Jacob Zuma called on South Africans to remember the 44 people killed at the Marikana platinum mine on the third anniversary of the tragedy.

"This day must unite all of us as South Africans. Nobody supports the horrendous loss of life that occurred in Marikana," he said.

"We remember all who lost their lives, including those who were killed before and after Aug. 16, [2012]. All lives are equal and important."

Attempts by owners Lonmin - formerly British firm Lonhro - and the breakaway Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU) to undermine the established National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) saw a spate of murders of NUM members, mine security guards and police in the week leading up to August 16 2012.

That day, 34 AMCU members were shot dead by police at a rally near the mine in North West province - allegedly after they had attacked the officers with various weapons, though this version of events is hotly disputed.

More NUM members have been burnt out of their homes, assaulted and killed since then.

The day after the shooting, Zuma flew back from a regional summit in neighboring Mozambique and ordered a public inquiry.



The resulting Farlam Commission took almost three years to report, largely due to AMCU lawyer Dali Mpofu's failed attempts to blame the tragedy on Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Among the recommendations of the Farlam Commission's report, released by the president, were that the conduct of the police should be investigated, especially at a second shooting site where half the 34 deaths occurred.

National Police Commissioner General Riah Phiyega duly submitted her comments to the president. However, Lonmin - now owned by Swiss giant Glencore Xstrata - has yet to acknowledge its responsibility for the tragedy as detailed in the Farlam report.

The African National Congress called on mining companies to "learn lessons" from the tragedy and improve living conditions in mining communities in line with the Mining Charter - one of Lonmin's failings identified by the commission.

AMCU, also indicted by Farlam, marked the day with a commemoration for the 34 who died at its rally, but not for those murdered before or since.

**Swiss giant
Glencore Xstrata -
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Indigenous youth sue U.S. government over climate change

By Andrea Perkins

The grown-ups should know better. And soon, if a group of young activists have their way, the adults will be taken to task in court. Twenty-one teen activists, including 15-year-old hip-hop singer and youth advocate Xiuhtezcatl Tonatiuh Martinez, are suing the U.S. government, all the way up to President Obama's office.

"The Federal Government has known for decades that CO2 pollution from burning fossil fuels was causing global warming and dangerous climate change," said Xiuhtezcatl in a press release announcing the suit on Aug. 12. "It also knew that continuing to burn fossil fuels would destabilize our climate system, significantly harming my generation and generations to come. Despite knowing these dangers, Defendants did nothing to prevent this harm. In fact, my government increased the concentration of CO2 in the atmosphere to levels it knew were unsafe."

Climate scientist James Hansen, who is both supporting them and appearing on the lawsuit on behalf of "future generations," issued a proclamation in support of the suit, noting that his granddaughter Sophie is one of the plaintiffs.

"In my opinion, this lawsuit is made necessary by the at-best schizophrenic, if not suicidal, nature of U.S. climate and energy policy," Hansen wrote in his declaration.

Correa: Ecuador superará situación económica

Granma

El presidente señaló que una de las medidas adoptadas fueron las salvaguardias, que se aplican desde marzo pasado a un tercio de las importaciones con el fin de evitar la salida de divisas

El presidente Rafael Correa se refirió a la situación económica nacional a internacional a través de su cuenta en Twitter.

El presidente Rafael Correa se refirió a la situación económica nacional a internacional a través de su cuenta en Twitter. Foto: Presidencia de Ecuador

QUITO.—El presidente Rafael Correa se refirió a la "situación económica durísima" que atraviesa el país, producto de la apreciación del dólar y la caída del precio del petróleo, principal exportación nacional, que en la jornada llegó a su mínimo en seis años, "pero saldremos adelante", dijo, al anticipar que se enfrentará el escenario con equilibrios macroeconómicos.

"Situación económica durísima, pero también saldremos adelante. El petróleo sigue cayendo, y el dólar se ha apreciado, lo cual hace al Ecuador un país caro", escribió el mandatario en su cuenta en la red social Twitter.

Correa señaló que una de las medidas adoptadas fueron las salvaguardias, que se aplican desde marzo pasado a un tercio de las importaciones con el fin de evitar la salida de divisas, aunque "son un paliativo pues falta el principal instrumento: tipo de cambio".

La agencia Andes precisa que en Ecuador circula como moneda única desde el año 2000 el dólar, que se viene apreciando en los últimos meses mientras países como los vecinos, Colombia y Perú, devalúan sus monedas, lo que encarece las exportaciones ecuatorianas y abarata las importaciones. En tanto que, la principal fuente de entrada de divisas del país, la venta del petróleo, se ve afectada por la caída de los precios por barril.

"Lo principal es mantener los equilibrios macroeconómicos", indicó el estadista ecuatoriano quien también recordó que ya se están aplicando medidas para apoyar a Carchi, provincia limítrofe que ha visto reducido su comercio considerablemente, por causa de la depreciación del peso colombiano.

Las declaraciones del presidente se dieron en una jornada denominada "lunes negro" en los mercados internacionales.

La coyuntura económica mundial experimentó el pasado lunes una secuencia de malas noticias, producto de la caída de las principales bolsas del mundo y el desmoronamiento de los precios de las materias primas, incluido un petróleo en su costo más bajo en seis años.

Además, el tipo de cambio de las principales divisas de América Latina registró caídas a mínimos en 22 años en relación con el dólar estadounidense.