

As strike passes one-month mark

The way forward for oil workers

The Socialist Equality Party
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As the strike by oil workers in the US enters its second month, it is necessary to draw a balance sheet of the key strategic and political issues at stake in order to determine the way forward.

Although the corporate media conceals it, there is enormous support for oil workers throughout the country and indeed the world. Tens of millions of workers—dockworkers, teachers, telecommunication workers, auto workers, postal workers, health care workers and other sections of the working class—have suffered years of eroding wages and working conditions.

The biggest obstacle to mobilizing the strength of the working class is the United Steelworkers union, which has limited the walkout to only a fraction of the 30,000 USW workers in the industry. USW officials have ignored demands from rank-and-file workers for an all-out national strike, while providing a pittance in strike pay from its \$350 million strike fund.

Meanwhile, the AFL-CIO executive council, which held its annual meeting last month in Atlanta, took no action to defend striking oil workers. The inaction of the AFL-CIO recalls the backstabbing of the PATCO air traffic controllers fired by Reagan in 1981, which paved the way for a decade of union busting, mass layoffs and wage and benefit concessions.

The actions of the unions have encouraged the oil giants to maintain their hard line against workers' demands. While they shovel billions to their top executives and investors, the Big Oil bosses insist there is no money to improve safety, hire full-time workers or to relieve workers of crushing out-of-pocket health care costs. With production near pre-strike levels, the corporations have refused to even seriously negotiate and are simply waiting for the USW to wear down workers and condition them to accept another sellout agreement.

The intransigence of the companies must be met with an equal intransigence from the working class. But for this, a new strategy is needed. The Socialist Equality Party calls

for:

Form independent rank-and-file action committees to expand the strike!

If this struggle is not to be isolated, strangled and led to defeat, oil workers must take matters into their own hands. On every picket line and in every non-striking refinery, workers should elect the most militant and class-conscious workers as representatives to a rank-and-file action committee. The committee must take over the conduct of the strike while fighting for the fullest mobilization not only of oil workers but the entire working class.

These committees must be entirely independent of and organized in opposition to the unions. The unions, which have spent decades collaborating with the corporations and the state in imposing concessions and shutting down entire industries, are not working-class organizations, but corporatist entities—arms of management that function as labor contractors and policemen.

Shut down the entire oil industry! Mobilize the working class behind striking workers!

The first matter of business must be sending out pickets to call out workers in the non-striking refineries, chemical plants and oil terminals to shut the entire industry down. Delegations of oil workers should be sent to the steel mills, auto factories, ports, hospitals, public schools and other workplaces to call for solidarity action, including mass demonstrations and sympathy strikes, to back oil

workers.

For the international unity of the working class!

An appeal must be made to workers throughout the world who are fighting the same multinational corporations. This includes the 20,000 North Sea construction and oil rig workers fighting BP, Marathon and other oil giants, which are demanding that they work an extra 28 days a year, with no increase in pay, while the workforce is slashed by 20 percent. The nationalism of the USW, which subordinates workers to the profit interests of US-based multinationals, must be rejected and a fight waged to unify all workers, regardless of race, ethnicity or nationality.

It is not an accident that the struggle by the US for control of the world's energy supplies has been a chief factor behind the wars in Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries and the current confrontation with Russia and China, which threatens mankind with nuclear destruction. In the wars for world domination, the Democrats and Republicans function as tools of Big Oil and Wall Street, just as they do in the war against the working class in the United States.

For a political struggle against the capitalist system!

If workers are to be successful, their struggle must be expanded and developed into a confrontation not just with the oil companies, but the entire corporate and financial aristocracy and the two big-business parties—the Democrats and Republicans—that defend it.

The USW and the AFL-CIO are politically aligned with the Democratic Party and are undying defenders of the capitalist system. USW bargaining team member Jim Savage let the cat out of the bag when he declared that the union was opposed to a broader mobilization of workers to “keep the government from interfering with this labor dispute.” In other words, the union wants at all costs to prevent the struggle from developing into a conflict with the Democratic Party and the Obama administration.

But this is precisely what is required. As a spokesman of the financial aristocracy, Obama has overseen the

greatest transfer of wealth from the bottom to the top in American history. After bailing out the banks, he slashed the wages of new auto workers in half during the forced bankruptcy and restructuring of General Motors and Chrysler and implemented Obamacare and pension “reform” to shift the cost of health care and retirement benefits from the corporations to the backs of workers.

The White House has given a free pass to JPMorgan, BP, Tesoro, GM and other corporations—whose criminal actions have laid waste to workers' jobs, lives and communities. But if workers rose up in opposition, the Democrats and Republicans would not hesitate to use strikebreaking laws, militarized police forces and anti-terror measures in an effort to stop them.

The United States is not a democracy, but a plutocracy, where the super-rich control the political system and government. The only way to break this dictatorial hold over society is by mobilizing the working class in a powerful revolutionary movement that is aimed at putting political power in the hands of the vast majority of the population—the masses of working people whose labor in the refineries, factories, offices, schools, and hospitals produce society's wealth.

Only in this way can economic life be organized in a rational and egalitarian, i.e., socialist basis. This includes transforming the multinational oil giants into publicly owned and democratically controlled utilities, as part of a scientific plan for the production of global energy to meet human needs, not private profit.

The fate of the oil strike is bound up with mobilizing the widest sections of the working class in the US and internationally. This is only possible if rank-and-file workers take the initiative. We urge oil workers and their supporters to contact the *World Socialist Web Site* to organize this struggle and provide the necessary leadership to take it forward.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact