

Lockout of hundreds of oil workers continues in Beaumont, Texas

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5 May 2021

Days after ExxonMobil locked out more than 600 employees from its Beaumont, Texas refinery and packaging plant, United Steelworkers (USW) union leadership and the company have not met to negotiate a contract since Friday. ExxonMobil and the USW have been negotiating since January, but ExxonMobil claimed workers' health and safety demands "would significantly increase costs."

The company released a statement stating it had been bargaining "in good faith," but negotiations have yet to resume.

The oil company escorted USW Local 13-243 members from the plant on Saturday after union officials organized an "orderly transfer" of the workers off of the premises. ExxonMobil said it barred workers from entering because of the union's refusal to call for a vote on a contract proposal and fear that workers might go on strike. Days before the lockout, the company brought in managers from other facilities and hired temporary workers as replacements to keep the facility running.

After the USW handed over the plant to corporate management, workers formed a picket line at a lot adjacent to the plant. USW District 13 Representative Richard "Hoot" Landry told the *Beaumont Enterprise* Monday that the union scheduled picket activities outside the refineries and he had been meeting with district leadership. Landry said talks had been focused on workers' benefits.

"Workers will receive at least one more check from (ExxonMobil), but we are doing everything we can right now to secure resources from our international union and local communities within the state of Texas to provide benefits to our membership."

Union officials at the plant said they sent a request to the USW international leadership to help striking

workers by tapping into the strike and defense fund, financed by union dues to support workers during strike activity. Landry also stated the local union reached out to the Texas Workforce Commission to secure approval for unemployment benefits for locked out workers.

Landry claimed ExxonMobil locked out workers because the company wanted to maintain control of the situation. However, he admitted the union never wanted a work stoppage and actively worked to avoid one. By preventing a strike the USW has given all the initiative in the situation to the energy giant.

Neither the USW nor ExxonMobil has publicly revealed specific details in the conflict over a new contract, but company officials said there was strong disagreement between the two sides.

"We remain far apart on many important items and we do not publicly comment on the details of our discussions, unless warranted," the company said in a statement. "We can share that the provisions that are being sought are not new or unique within ExxonMobil or the industry. However, many provisions sought by the union are not part of other existing contracts the company has with the USW."

On Wednesday, local journalists reported the USW requested federal mediation in the labor dispute. The USW asked the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) to become involved, but ExxonMobil has not. Both parties must request mediation for federal involvement. ExxonMobil has not indicated if it will ask for mediation.

Meanwhile, ExxonMobil reported better-than-expected first-quarter earnings on April 30, marking the company's third consecutive quarter of beating predictions. ExxonMobil had a reported revenue of \$59.15 billion and net income of \$2.73 billion for the first quarter of 2021. The company generated \$9.3

billion in cash flow from its operations during the same period. In the last year, the company's market shares appreciated by 37 percent.

In the aftermath of mass layoffs in the oil and gas industry, the biggest US oil producer said it was considering cutting up to 14,000 employees globally, or up to 15 percent, to reduce costs. ExxonMobil reported its first annual loss last year as the COVID-19 pandemic battered energy demand.

Workers at the Beaumont refinery are engaged in a struggle against both the company and the union. If they are to be successful, control cannot be left in the hands of the pro-company and nationalist unions. The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and its affiliated Socialist Equality Parties around the world have called for the formation of the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) to unify and coordinate the growing, global opposition of the working class.



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