

“The working class has the most power it’s ever had”: US oil refinery workers speak out on contract battle

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Are you an oil worker? Contact the WSWWS and let us know what you think about the extension of the contract, the USW’s news blackout and the company’s “final offer.”

Although the contract for 30,000 oil refinery and petrochemical workers expired on February 1, the United Steelworkers union is keeping workers on the job despite rejecting the “final settlement” from Marathon Petroleum. The corporation, which is leading negotiations for 12 energy companies, is demanding workers accept annual wage increases of 2 to 3 percent, although inflation is 7.5 percent. With gas prices at a seven-year high, the oil companies are racking up huge profits and spending billions on stock buybacks to boost the fortunes of their biggest investors.

The following comments were recently emailed to the *World Socialist Web Site* from oil refinery and petrochemical workers across the US.

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I work at Marathon’s largest refinery. They’re forcing employees to work extended hours on their days off in order to get the facility running again after last week’s power outage. USW is failing to utilize the great opportunity we have to show them how much they actually need us. We should have safely shut the plant down and given them strike notice, but, instead, USW has us standing around holding signs while they force us to restart the refinery. Marathon has refused to come to the table, and USW is fine just waiting until they feel like negotiating again. The union wants us to show our solidarity by coming to these planned “actions,” which accomplish nothing. We have the power to bring these greedy f.....s to their knees, but the USW leadership is unwilling to do anything. We’re going to end up getting a sell-out contract shoved down

our throats because these incompetent fools running the show are in bed with the companies. Your articles on this subject are being passed around by my coworkers, which is great because, even being union workers, they are mostly conservative and typically wouldn’t read anything written by a leftist publication. Please keep the articles exposing USW leadership as the rats they are coming. I would love to be able to call some of my union brothers and sisters “comrade” in the future.

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Hello, I am an oil worker at a Chevron refinery in Salt Lake City, Utah. I am a member of USW local 931. I am not a member of the local leadership team and have no interest in getting involved on that level. That being said, I am staunchly pro union and I believe in order to get the disparaging wage gap in this country to narrow, it’s going to have to be through the use of unions. I believe the working class will not be able to get better safety practices, better wages, health insurance benefits, pensions, and even 401ks without solidarity. As you already know, the 1% in this country gained unimaginable wealth during the COVID pandemic while the working class has suffered loss of wages. With these profits being an all time high, many companies are still claiming “poverty” when it comes to increasing wages and what it will do to their bottom line. I believe the power of unionizing is the solution to getting these demands met.

With all that said, I’m writing you right now to inform you that I am very disappointed in the leadership of the USW, at least on a national level. The very fact that the USW chooses to leave the vast majority of its membership in the dark during such an important time is an absolute insult to the very membership that is supporting them through the

payment of union dues. The way I view it, they are just bidding time for Mother Marathon to find and train contingency workers, especially if this 24-hour rolling contract results in a strike. It makes me sick to my stomach to think about the negotiating power the union has lost by playing right into Marathon's hand.

For instance, if Marathon's Galveston Bay went on strike before the weather issues that caused the ~590,000 barrels/day refinery to shut down. There is no way contractors and contingency workers could get a refinery up and running very easily from an issue like that. A refinery that size is roughly 20% of Marathon's daily output. I'm sure at that point Marathon would see the benefit of taking some of the USW demands more seriously.

Surely the loss of profits from that refinery alone would make up for the piddly wage increases they presented at the negotiating table. In the grand scheme of the company's profits, it's basically free to them, I wish I had the exact numbers of how much money that refinery makes in 1 day. I am very disappointed in the USW and if we end up settling for meager wage increases, unaddressed safety concerns such as fatigue and limited turn around schedules, I'm afraid I may have to pull my union dues. If I'm not paying my dues then I do not feel I deserve to reap the benefits that we currently have. I have been considering going into a different line of work for some time now, but if these negotiations go as poorly as it seems, I believe I will bite the bullet and leave this field.

The working class has the most power it's ever had now and it's failing to be utilized by the USW. Unless this is a negotiation tactic I'm unaware of (leaving the membership in the dark), I just have to assume that there is some under the table deal going on between the USW and Marathon. Thanks

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The 2022 USW contract negotiations are a joke. You have the International in bed with the company, it's a conflict of interest if you ask me. I've been an operator for over 30 years and this is the worst negotiations I've ever seen. We pay union dues but are kept in the dark about what is going on. The company was told no rolling 24 hour extensions, only to be later told the 24 hr extensions were granted. What kind of half ass threat was that? The company is laughing at the union. We want better staffing so we don't have to work as much

overtime. But why would the international want that? Our dues are no longer a flat rate monthly payment, it's now based on a percentage of how much we make. The more overtime we work the more the international gets. The companies are making record profits and their CEOs are being compensated with huge bonuses all off the sweat of our backs. How much overtime is management putting in every year? They're being compensated with huge bonuses, meanwhile inflation is at 7% and they have the audacity to offer us 3% raises. What a joke.

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