

Build the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee! For a national strike to protect oil workers' lives and livelihoods!

Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee
24 February 2022

To join the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee, email oilworkersrfc@gmail.com.

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

It has been more than three weeks since the expiration of the National Oil Bargaining agreement. Many of us are frustrated and angry over the refusal of the United Steelworkers leadership to call out every oil refinery and petrochemical worker across the country.

Instead, the USW has unilaterally decided—without the slightest input from the rank and file—to keep us working and making profits for the energy monopolies. United Steelworkers President Tom Conway and National Oil Bargaining Program Chair Mike Smith have not said how long they intend to drag this out, and all we have been told is that the photo ops in front of the refineries will continue indefinitely, even though they do not have the slightest impact on the production or profits of the companies.

The USW even threw away the golden opportunity we had after a power outage forced the temporary shutdown of its largest facility, the Galveston Bay Refinery (GBR). Instead of calling a walkout after workers safely closed the facility—a move that would have brought the company to its knees—the USW forced GBR workers to put in 16-hour days to get the refinery up and running again.

Marathon has only been emboldened by this backstabbing by the USW. The day after it released its insulting “final settlement” offer, the company announced it had made \$9.7 billion in profits last year. Instead of using the money we made for them to raise pay, increase staffing levels or upgrade the ancient and dangerous equipment we work with, the company’s board of directors voted to spend \$5 billion on stock buybacks to boost the fortunes of investors and top executives who are already disgustingly wealthy.

We have lost years of our lives from working long hours and being exposed to carcinogenic and mutagenic chemicals every day. We face the risk of a major accident when equipment that should have been replaced or repaired is left to run until failure due to the companies’ greed.

While those in charge were safely tucked away at home, we

have risked our lives during the pandemic and have been forced to work intolerable hours to cover for coworkers who had to stay home to care for loved ones with COVID-19 and those who got sick themselves.

We have not seen a significant pay increase in decades. Many workers are already living paycheck to paycheck or not far from it as the cost of housing, vehicles, health care and other necessities of life continue to rise. We are “essential” when it comes to keeping the money flowing into the hands of the super-rich shareholders but not essential enough to guarantee us a decent life.

While Marathon CEO Michael Hennigan got a 103 percent salary hike in 2020, the company is offering us a 3 percent raise. With inflation currently running at 7.5 percent, this means accepting a devastating cut in real wages for the next three years.

The horrific “contract” imposed on ExxonMobil workers at the Beaumont, Texas, refinery and packaging facility is a warning to us all. After isolating the locked-out workers for nearly 10 months, the USW forced workers to vote on five-year deal that quadruples the probationary period for new workers—from 6 to 24 months—and gives management unilateral power to assign workers to any job it wants. The slave’s charter accepted by the USW will encourage every company to drive out higher-paid, senior workers and replace them with new employees, who can be hired and fired at will.

What we fight for

We have formed the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee because enough is enough! Our committee will strive to unite all oil refinery and petrochemical workers, whether you are currently working, laid off, retired or a contract employee. It will be democratically controlled by rank-and-file workers ourselves and provide a real voice and leadership for all workers determined to fight for secure and safe jobs, and

enough time off to rest and take our family lives back.

We don't want any more extensions. We want to show what power we have as workers by stopping the operations of Marathon, Chevron, Shell, BP—and ExxonMobil—until we win our just demands.

We demand the USW end its conspiracy of silence and backdoor negotiations with the oil bosses. Rank-and-file workers, elected from every region of the country, must be allowed to monitor all negotiations and report information back to local workers.

A strike date must be set before the end of February. This must be a full strike, not a partial or limited strike, like in 2015, which allowed the companies to shift production to nonstriking facilities.

To show the corporations we are prepared for a real battle, every worker must be provided with his or her full income from the USW Strike and Defense Fund, which has been built up with workers' dues money. The salaries of Tom Conway, Mike Smith and all the International, regional and local officials must be immediately reduced to the level of striking workers.

At the same time, the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee recommends that workers not ratify any contract unless it includes the following:

- A 40 percent raise and the restoration of Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA);
- Restoration of the 8-hour day;
- Expansion of paid time off, including a six-week vacation during the first year of service and one month of paid paternity leave;
- Fully paid medical benefits;
- The hiring of more full-time workers;
 - The establishment of worker-run health and safety committees and the abolition of corrupt joint labor-management committees;
 - Workers' control over production rates and input over capital expenditures;
 - Fully paid pensions and retiree medical benefits after 25 years of service;
 - The elevation of contractors to full-time positions, with the same pay and benefits.

The oil executives and their stooges in the Pittsburgh headquarters of the USW will howl that none of this is possible. But the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee fights for what workers and our families need, not what the multimillionaire oil executives and their bought-and-paid-for hacks in the USW say is affordable.

The whole history of the working class, including the courageous struggles to unite black, white and immigrant oil workers and their defiance of government anti-strike measures during the world wars and the Korean War, has demonstrated that nothing can be won without determined struggle.

Our principles

To ensure that the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee will fight for these and other basic rights, its work will be organized along the following principles:

The committee must be controlled by workers, not an army of petty functionaries. To protect the independence of the committee from the union apparatus, membership will not be open to current or former union officials. This is the only way to ensure free, open and democratic discussion and to prevent spies and the victimization of militant workers.

Our committee will be based on the methods of the class struggle, not class collaboration. Contrary to the self-serving claims of the USW functionaries, the interests of workers and the bosses are not the same. Everything the working class ever achieved was won in bitter struggle against the corporations and the politicians who are owned by them.

The independence of the committee from both big business parties and the corporate-controlled government. We welcome workers of diverse political opinions, but our committee will not be controlled or influenced by the big business parties. This is particularly critical as the Biden administration is determined to prevent any strike by oil workers as it gears up for war with Russia.

For the unity of oil workers around the world. US workers are working for global corporations, which can only be fought for by uniting energy workers across all national boundaries. American workers have more in common with the workers of Russia, China, Mexico and other countries than they do with the billionaires and corporate-controlled politicians in the US. It is only through our common struggle that can finally put an end to the pandemic, the danger of new wars over oil and other resources, and guarantee that we, the workers, who create all of society's wealth, can have a future free from want, inequality and the horrors of war.

If you agree with our program, then join us! Contact us today by emailing oilworkersrfc@gmail.com.



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