Support the Chevron workers in California! For a national strike to overturn the sellout agreement!

Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee
22 March 2022

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

Workers at Chevron's Richmond, California, refinery who walked out on Monday have taken a courageous stand that every rank-and-file oil worker should actively support. By rejecting not one but two local contract proposals, they have dealt a powerful blow against the efforts by the United Steelworkers to impose its pro-company national agreement on oil refinery and petrochemical workers across the country.

The Chevron workers at the San Francisco Bay Area refinery are demanding higher wages, shorter work hours and better health and safety protections after working up to 70 hours a week and risking their lives during the pandemic. But the USW is forcing these 500 workers to battle the giant oil company alone and is keeping nearly 30,000 USW members on the job, including thousands at Chevron's other operations in California, Utah, Texas, Mississippi and Louisiana.

If this struggle is left in the hands of USW President Conway & Co., the USW will isolate and starve out the Chevron workers, just like they did during the 10-month-long lockout of ExxonMobil workers in Beaumont, Texas.

This cannot stand. Behind Chevron are all the oil bosses. It is time that all oil workers stand with the Chevron workers. We must mobilize our full strength in a national strike to shut down the industry and win the demands that all oil workers deserve and need.

The Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee (OWRFC) was formed last month to give workers a new voice and organization, which is democratically controlled by the ranks and independent of the corrupt company stooges in the USW. We insist that the national agreement is illegitimate. It was sold to workers based on false pretenses, brought to a vote without sufficient time to study and discuss it, and rammed through using thuggish methods of lies and intimidation.

From the very beginning the USW has functioned as the enemy of rank-and-file workers and a tool of the oil bosses and the corporate-controlled Biden administration. Even though we were in the best position in decades to strike—with refinery capacity limited due to equipment failures and other problems, and popular hatred against price-gouging by the energy monopolies—the USW kept us on the job for three weeks after the February 1 contract expiration. Then, after claiming the two sides were miles apart, Conway suddenly announced an agreement on February 25.

The timing was significant. The agreement was announced the day after the Russian invasion of Ukraine and three days after Conway held a private discussion with President Biden and top executives from the Energy and Defense Department. There is no doubt that the president instructed Conway to sign a deal to prevent a strike as the US was ramping up for a confrontation with Russia. In the time since, the companies have made even more money profiteering from the war crisis, while Conway boasted he had signed a "responsible" deal that did not "add to inflationary pressures."

To ram through the contract, USW national, regional and local officials threatened to put individual plants out on long, fruitless strikes, with little or no financial support from the union's massive strike fund, if they rejected the deals. When workers at the Phillips 66

© World Socialist Web Site

refinery in Billings, Montana, and Richmond Chevron workers voted them down any way, the USW made them vote again.

But the Chevron workers have called the USW's bluff. They voted down a virtually identical deal for a second time. Like the rest of us, they know the pitiful raises in the national deal will make us poorer four years from now because of runaway inflation. Gas prices in the San Francisco Bay Area are the highest in the nation at $5.91 a gallon, and Chevron workers have seen health care premiums and other out-of-pocket expenses rise by 28 percent in the last year alone due to previous USW givebacks.

Chevron, which made $15.6 billion in profits last year and is making even more money due to the war crisis in Eastern Europe, has denounced the Richmond workers for being greedy, saying USW Local 5's meager demand for a 5 percent raise "exceeded what the company believes to be reasonable and moved beyond what was agreed to as part of the national pattern bargaining agreement."

In other words, the oil bosses are saying: "We had a deal with USW President Conway and the rest of the union executives we bribed, but the workers are getting in the way!"

To deliberately isolate the Chevron workers, the USW is keeping the rest of us in the dark once again. In a perfunctory text Monday, the USW wrote: "Standing in Solidarity w/USW Local 5 & the over 500 oilworkers in Richmond, CA as they began an unfair labor practice strike against Chevron at midnight last night."

What the text did not say is that the Chevron workers are rebelling against the treachery of the USW itself!

Richmond refinery workers don't need phony statements of solidarity from USW executives or more photo ops staged for the news media. Chevron workers need real solidarity. All oil workers should prepare for a national strike. We cannot allow our brothers and sisters in Richmond to suffer the same fate as those in Beaumont. United, we can win this fight.

As we have stated before, the OWRFC fights for the demands workers need, not what is "affordable" to the oil bosses. This includes:

- A 40 percent raise and the restoration of Cost-of-Living Adjustments (COLA);
- Restoration of the eight-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.

Our battle is part of a far broader struggle of the working class. A staggering 1 million people have lost their lives in the US from COVID-19 because profits have been prioritized over life. Teachers in Minneapolis and Sacramento, railroad workers in the US and Canada, truckers, supermarket workers and other workers across the world are fighting demands for endless sacrifice from billionaires who profited from the pandemic, the run-up in prices and the drive to war.

Everything depends on what we, the rank and file, do. We must build the leadership to fight for our lives and livelihoods and create a better future for the current, past and next generations of workers.

If you agree with this fight, you should join and build the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee in your refinery and petrochemical plant. To join or to get more information, email oilworkersrfc@gmail.com.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact

© World Socialist Web Site