

For real solidarity with Chevron workers! Expand the strike to all refineries!

Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee
6 April 2022

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

Dear Brothers and Sisters at the Chevron Refinery in Richmond, California,

In the weeks since you walked off the job, the United Steelworkers has kept oil workers around the country in the dark about your strike. We have been told nothing, save for a brief text message sent out to inform us you had begun an unfair labor practices strike. Local USW officials in Texas and other states claim to have no more information about your strike than rank-and-file workers do.

We are being led to believe that your fight is solely about local issues and has nothing to do with the National Oil Bargaining Program (NOBP) agreement. We understand that you in Richmond are being fed the same lies—that you were the only site that did not want this terrible four-year deal, which lowers our standard of living and does nothing to improve our working conditions.

This is a carefully orchestrated effort to keep workers from realizing the truth: that none of us were happy with the sellout contract we were tricked into signing; that we were prepared to strike to get a better agreement, and that the USW was working behind our backs with the oil bosses and the Biden administration to reach a deal, which USW International President Tom Conway boasted “does not add to inflationary pressures.”

We established the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee (OWRFC), which includes refinery workers in Texas and other states, in late February to oppose the USW sellout deal, establish lines of communication between workers at different refineries and petrochemical plants, and to provide a real voice and leadership to win the demands that we and our families deserve.

As we all know, the oil companies are making obscene profits. Many of us have never seen crack spread numbers

like those right now. Facilities are running at or near max rates, turnarounds are being rushed or delayed, days off are becoming increasingly rare. The oil companies are milking the situation dry to maximize their profits, which are extracted from our labor. Now, they will be pumping out even more profits because our labor will be cheaper thanks to the paltry 2.5-3.0 percent increases imposed upon us by the USW. With the prices of gas, food, housing, medical and everything else going up, can anybody remember what they spent their signing bonuses on?

While we, the workers, cannot afford the gas we refine, corporate profits were the highest since 1950 last year, the oil companies spent billions on stock buybacks to enrich their shareholders, and CEO pay hit record heights in 2021. Chevron boss Mike Wirth pockets \$30 million a year, while we’re told we must endure a cut in real pay for the next four years!

On Wednesday, Wirth and five other oil executives were in Washington for a bit of play acting in Congress. Politicians pretended they cared about the impact of high fuel prices on working people, while the CEOs were indignant over the suggestion that they might be deliberately driving up prices. “I want be absolutely clear,” Wirth declared, “we do not control the market price of crude oil or natural gas, nor of refined products like gasoline and diesel fuel, and we have no tolerance for price gouging.”

Workers all over the world can only laugh out loud. The “market” is not some mysterious and all-powerful force that is independent of the class interests of the capitalist owners of the global oil industry. When the pandemic hit and demand sharply fell, the multinational oil giants slashed production, closed refineries and laid off tens of thousands of workers. While oil consumption will soon surpass pre-pandemic levels, production will not. The corporations are more than happy to reap massive profits

while they work us to the bone and skyrocketing prices empty the pockets of working people.

Despite the phony protests of the big business politicians are doing nothing to curb the giant profits of Big Oil. But Biden, working with the USW, has essentially capped the pay of the workers who risked our lives in Covid-infected refineries, claiming that anything more than a two or three percent raise is “inflationary.”

Prices shot up even further after the war in Ukraine began and economic sanctions were imposed on Russia. Rather than de-escalating the conflict, however, Biden is hellbent on waging an all-out war for regime-change in Russia, which can only lead to world war. While the oil companies and other giant companies lick their chops over the prospect of taking control of Russia’s vast energy reserves, the government is telling workers to “sacrifice” for a war that none of us wants.

Just days before announcing the sellout national agreement, Conway held secret talks with Biden to prevent an industrywide strike and keep oil flowing through the pipelines. During informational meetings, USW officials bullied workers, telling workers at each local that they were the only ones displeased with the contract and willing to strike to get a better deal. We were led to believe that if we struck, the USW would isolate each refinery and put us on starvation-level strike benefits until we surrendered. Using the workers in Beaumont as an example, USW convinced us that being on strike alone would mean months of sacrifice with nothing gained.

Richmond workers have called the USW’s bluff and are fighting back. You are taking a stand for all workers, and you must not fight this battle alone.

The OWRFC demands:

1) Chevron workers receive their full pay for the duration of the strike. The strike fund was built up with workers’ dues money, and it belongs to us, not to Conway and his corrupt pals who are sitting on \$168.8 million in cash, according to its latest filing with the US Labor Department. Providing strikers with full pay will show the company we mean business.

2) Overturn the national contract. This wage-cutting agreement was dictated by the Biden administration and rammed through by the USW based on false pretenses and intimidation and is therefore illegitimate. In every local, workers should demand a revote on the contract and

prepare now for a national strike.

3) We demand a 40 percent increase and full COLA. Our families cannot live on 3 percent or even 5 percent raises when inflation is at a 40-year high. At the same, fully paid health care and pension benefits must be restored. This must be combined with other demands, including the restoration of the eight-hour day, additional paid time off, and the conversion of contract workers into full-time workers.

The giant corporations have more than enough money—which we produced for them—to meet these just demands. But to win them, it is necessary to mobilize broader sections of workers.

Across the world right now workers are going into struggles for the exact same things. In Sri Lanka, the island nation off the coast of India, hundreds of thousands of workers have taken to the streets over the cost of living. In the UK, refinery workers at Exxon Mobil will begin striking this Friday after rejecting a 2.5 percent pay increase. Throughout the US, whether among teachers, autoworkers, West Coast port workers or truck drivers, there is support for our fight.

We know there is great interest among all oil workers. Last week a post, based on an article by the *World Socialist Web Site* on the Chevron strike, went viral on the social media site Imgur with over 100,000 people reading it. The top comments were all from sympathetic USW workers, none of whom had been told anything about the strike.

To unite these struggles, we must take this fight into our own hands, establish lines of communication between workers at all refineries and prepare joint action.

If you agree with this message and want to know more about joining the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee (OWRFC), email us at oilworkersrffc@gmail.com.



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wsws.org/contact