

As potential USW/Chevron deal nears

Striking Richmond, California refinery workers must turn to working class allies in fight against Chevron

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The strike of 500 workers at Chevron's Richmond, California oil refinery is now well into its fourth week. Workers seek to end Chevron's hated "standby" policy which prevents workers from living normal lives and to get pay increases that address the historic surge in living costs, with inflation nationally at 8.5 percent.

The strike at Richmond takes place as hundreds of thousands of people have taken to the streets to protest the surging cost of living worldwide— including in Sri Lanka, Spain, Iraq, and Peru. In opposing inadequate pay raises, the striking Chevron workers speak for all sections of workers, in the United States and elsewhere, who are being immiserated by the crumbling value of their paychecks.

The strikers' battle is not just with Chevron, but with the United Steelworkers (USW), which in March sought to impose a sellout national contract that delivered a pay cut to workers when adjusted for inflation. Inflation is at a 40-year high of 8.5 percent year-on-year, but the USW is telling workers they will only get an average raise of 3 percent. Many refineries, like the Phillips 66 refinery in Billings, Montana, voted the national contract down, only to be browbeat into voting "yes" on the same agreement by national representatives flown out to ensure it passed.

On Monday, the financial press reported that Chevron had met with the USW bargaining team, offering a deal. The USW has announced it is working on a "reply," but has not issued any other information.

Striking workers must be warned. Whatever agreement the USW and Chevron come to will not be a win for workers but a massive defeat.

Chevron is perfectly content paying its army of scabs to keep production going until they get their way, even if it means poorly running the facility and putting the Bay Area at risk. Meanwhile, the USW has starved workers on the picket line, with virtually no strike pay for weeks. Moreover, the USW has barely mentioned the strike to some 30,000 oil and gas workers nationwide in the union, precisely because they want to contain it. But how will striking oil workers fight Chevron if they fight alone?

The way forward for workers is to break out of this straitjacket imposed on them by the USW and help build the Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee (OWRFC) to unite all oil workers in a common struggle against the surging cost of living. This includes connecting them with other sections of the working class—nurses, autoworkers, and others—who are fighting, like refinery workers, for better staffing, less overtime abuse, and wages that take into account inflation.

Around the world, workers, including oil workers, are fighting the same conditions. In the UK, oil workers at ExxonMobil just held a one-day strike in defiance of an insulting 2.5 percent pay increase.

The OWRFC was formed by refinery workers, particularly in Texas, to create a democratic organization of rank-and-file workers aimed at breaking the isolation of the corporatist trade unions and uniting oil workers with other sections of the international working class.

Striking Chevron workers have enormous support in the working class. Last week, for the second time, a *World Socialist Web Site* article about the strike went

viral on the social media platform Imgur, getting over 165,000 views and over 130 comments. One top comment stated, “inflation has made wages unlivable for working people.”

Last week, student and teachers from Sacramento issued statements of support for Chevron workers to a WSWS reporting team visiting the Sacramento teachers strike.

“The system is rigged and that’s a fact,” said Stephanie, a high school student. She said she wished Chevron workers “the luck and support they need right now.” Adding, “It’s hard to see that we’re all struggling right now.”

Simon, another student supporting striking Sacramento teachers, stated that Chevron workers “should be getting a fair treatment as well for their work.” He added, “the economy is so messed up. I don’t want to have my children live through a depression... prices are rising every week. It’s getting to the point where people have to walk or take the train instead.”

Theresa, a worker in the East Bay, told the WSWS that it was time for Chevron to “give in” to the demands of workers. She said she commiserated with striking Chevron workers and workers all over the world, being “overwhelmed with high cost of home and store prices,” and with people’s “homes in jeopardy” across the region.

Geraldine, a former postal worker in Richmond, also sent a statement of support to Chevron workers, writing, “Chevron’s profits are greater than they were before the pandemic, yet they continue to disrespect their workers with wage offers that will quickly put them in the red as inflation goes through the roof.” She continued, “Besides the lousy pay offer and the over-priced health insurance provision, Chevron’s requirement that workers be on standby repeatedly for on call work with no compensation is an outrageous infringement on the freedom of the workers’ lives. People fought and died for the 8-hr day decades ago. Greed, not necessity, dictates mandatory overtime at Chevron. In this way they avoid hiring the needed help and thereby save money at workers’ expense.”

While workers at Chevron have enormous support in the working class, they need new organizations to break through the isolating conditions imposed on them by the USW, which seeks to, above all, avoid any kind of

genuine, unified struggle against the oil companies.

The Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee, above all, fights for the unification of workers in the United States and internationally to oppose the onslaught against the living standards of the working class.

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



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