

Vote NO on Chevron/USW sellout tentative agreement! Rally the tens of thousands of oil workers to join Richmond, California refinery strikers!

Gabriel Black
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The tentative agreement (TA) between Chevron and the United Steel Workers (USW) is a sellout all down the line.

Workers have been on strike for two months to fight the cut in real wages contained in the national oil bargaining agreement. This agreement, which is now part of the deal the USW is presenting to workers, increases wages by only 12 percent over four years. With inflation at over 8 percent in a single year, this means workers will see a real wage cut of as much as 20 percent over the life of the contract.

Chevron is reaping all the benefits of this rise in costs. On Thursday, the day the news of the TA was broken by Reuters, the shares of Chevron reached their all-time high. Chevron is feasting on the pain and suffering experienced by millions at the gas pumps over the last few months. The company now boasts a \$350 billion market capitalization.

Only the most deceitful economist could claim “there is no money” to address striking workers’ needs.

Preliminary reports on the contract make clear that the TA is a slap in the face to workers. There is no signing bonus, according to Reuters. Nothing fundamental has been done to address rising health care costs. And, critically, no serious agreements have been made by Chevron to end its abusive work schedule and adequately staff the plant, a principal concern of workers.

By agreeing to this TA, the United Steel Workers is just confirming what thousands of oil workers across the country are beginning to realize: they are not on the side of oil workers. Whatever fiery language the USW cooks up for its pep rallies, it was the USW that from the start sought to prevent a unified movement of oil and gas

refinery workers.

Three months ago, USW President Thomas Conway was given his marching orders from President Biden in a closed-door meeting on February 24. There was to be no national oil strike, and everything would be done to prevent local strikes, Biden told the USW. Biden knew that a national oil strike would garner immense sympathy in the working class, galvanizing millions of workers angry at inflation and undermining plans to escalate the United States’ confrontation with Russia in what has now become a proxy war, with Ukraine as the battlefield.

Refinery workers are livid about this contract. After meeting with Biden, USW officials flew across the country to systematically batter down any opposition.

In Billings, Montana, at the Phillips 66 plant, workers voted the sellout contract down. USW leadership was then flown out to browbeat workers in a series of “informational meetings” to vote “yes.” Workers were intimidated with threats that, should they strike, the company would be free to fire them. The contract barely passed on the second vote.

At Valero’s refinery in Sunray, Texas, 350 workers voted down the agreement the USW tried to palm off on them, which contained within it the national agreement. Above all, they wanted to fight against changes in work assignments and schedules that would make their job more exhausting and dangerous.

The role of the USW can be best summarized in Conway’s own words. A few days after getting his orders from Biden, Conway proudly boasted that the “responsible contract” worked out between the USW and the oil companies would “not add to inflationary pressures.”

The statement, which was released as part of a bellicose press release pledging USW's support for the war drive, essentially meant: This contract is a sellout for workers and won't in any way touch the profits of big oil, so don't blame the USW for high oil prices.

The USW has barely spoken about the Chevron strike because they oppose it and want it to be shut down as soon as possible. In Richmond, where gas is \$6 a gallon, workers twice voted down the contract presented to them by the USW. The USW is now hoping that workers are demoralized enough from their isolated strike, with no strike pay, to force through the agreement.

There is a way for workers to win what they are fighting for.

Chevron and the oil companies cannot be bargained with. They refuse to adequately staff these massive, dangerous refineries, and they insist on driving down wages while they make record stock market gains.

A genuine struggle requires breaking through the isolation the USW has imposed on all refinery workers throughout the United States.

Richmond workers and refinery workers across the country are not alone. Their attempts to oppose this attack on them by the oil companies comes as millions of other workers, in the United States and internationally, are waging their own struggles against understaffing, low wages, inflation, and attacks to medical and retirement benefits.

Workers need new organizations that can represent them in a genuine, united struggle against the oil companies. Workers in Texas, California, Montana, and elsewhere have formed an Oil Workers Rank-and-File Committee (OWRFC). The OWRFC is an organization of, by and for the workers, independent of the trade unions and their political allies in the Democratic and Republican parties.

The OWRFC calls on Richmond refinery workers to vote "NO" on this rotten contract!

This, however, is only the beginning. A rejection of the contract must be the beginning of a mobilization of all oil and gas workers in a common fight. The strike at Richmond must be expanded, with a clear list of demands raised as the basis of a coordinated fight.

These demands should include:

- 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.

Workers at Richmond should further demand that the the strike continue, with full strike pay paid from the coffers of the USW, which has over \$168 million in cash on hand. No striking workers or their families should suffer when the union has tens of millions of dollars it could easily make available.

Workers must have adequate time to read and discuss the TA. Workers need the full agreement in their hands for at least five days so no tricks or fine print can be pulled. There must be no end to the strike until a vote to officially end it has taken place.

Oil refinery workers as a whole must fight for a reopening of the national oil contract free from the bullying and intimidation of the USW. A national strike of oil workers would be a powerful force that would immediately win the support of workers throughout the US and around the world.

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



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