

Workers denounce USW sellout of California Chevron strikers

Gabriel Black
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Last Sunday, a two-month long strike of 500 Chevron refinery workers in Richmond, California was shut down by the United Steel Workers (USW) union, which forced through a sellout contract. Workers fighting to stop an inflationary pay cut, substantively improve staffing levels and get rid of hated, grueling work schedules, were handed a deal that was *worse* than what they started with.

The USW announced the tentative agreement on Thursday and then made workers vote the next day, Friday. Their strategy was that after two months of isolating these workers from their brothers and sisters across the oil industry, with no strike pay, workers were sufficiently softened up to allow them to push through the contract.

No tallies have been released of the vote count. News reports suggest it barely passed. Workers from the plant report that those who did vote “yes” included workers who had been deeply financially hurt by the two months of no strike pay (despite the USW sitting on more than \$150 million in cash, according to its latest Department of Labor filing).

Workers from around the country have expressed their outrage at this betrayal. Many want to let Richmond strikers know that they see what has happened and support them in their struggle against both Chevron and the USW.

Jonny, a sheet metal worker in Idaho and a member of the Sheet Metal Workers International Association, told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “It goes without saying that I stand in support of the Chevron oil workers in Richmond, California. After months of standing together against inflationary wage cuts, poor working conditions, and terrible work schedules, their struggle has been betrayed by the very organization that claims to represent their interests.”

Jonny continued:

The United Steelworkers long ago traded any alignment they once had with genuine workers struggles for a bigger piece of the capitalist pie. Workers should not be fooled into thinking it is just their local, or this round of leadership. The entire union apparatus has been transformed into a police force for the capitalist class, ensuring workers struggles are contained. That workers from different plants, shops, industries, geographic areas, of different races and ethnicities never combine their struggle, never fully realize the power they have as a class, as a force for revolutionary change, is a direct result of the suppression of strikes by the unions.

I urge you to continue this fight. Join or form a rank-and-file committee, to take the struggle out of the hands of the union leadership who has betrayed you, and into the hands of those this contract affects, you. The only way we win is if we stand together. The struggle of the oil workers must be joined to the struggle of all other workers across the country and around the world.

The WSWS also spoke to a BNSF rail worker who had read the WSWS’s coverage of the USW’s betrayal. Workers at BNSF have been fighting for near-identical issues as the Chevron workers. Above all, BNSF railway workers are forced into a grueling overtime schedule that prevents them from living a social life with their family and friends. Workers there have been without a contract at many of the railroad

lines since 2020. Their unions, like the USW, are playing a duplicitous role.

The BNSF worker said “Once again national unions show they stand with corporate interests over their members.” He continued, “This period of inequality will not end until we collectively say no more.’ Chad further expressed support for workers in building rank and file committees to oppose the USW’s treachery.

John, a worker at Chevron who participated in the strike, also spoke to the WSWs. In response to reading a WSWs article about the betrayal by the USW at Arconic, John said, “[the] USW told the oil workers we had a good deal too. When a few refineries decided they didn’t care, USW came to browbeat them back in line. More people need to stand up for what they believe in and not be swayed.”

John described the impact a national oil refinery strike could have had on the situation facing oil workers. “A national strike would remedy the situation rapidly [in my opinion],” he said. “Hell, more frequent sympathy strikes would be better, let alone a national strike.”

He added, “unions have outlasted their usefulness for the worker and have begun rotting from within... Class consciousness is better than a union.”

Chris, a local municipal employee who works in a city adjacent to Richmond, and had been following the coverage, also spoke to the WSWs:

The workers at Chevron in Richmond, California have been ‘sold down the river’ and ‘left out to dry’ by the very organization that falsely claims to support the interests of its members...the United Steelworkers Union, Local 5. This concerted effort to undermine the very workers that produce the wealth for both Chevron and the Union only serves to underscore just how related and in-step the Union and Chevron are in their desire to seek profits by exploiting the working-class.

In an area that is one of the wealthiest in the world, this contract is rightfully understood as a ‘slap in the face’ to those striking workers who have seen their wages cut under the effects of recent inflation all while Chevron has seen record profits. This is betrayal at its most honest

definition and one that won’t soon be forgotten.

On the social media platform Imgur, one commenter responded to the rotten deal with the question, “How is that legal?” Another user replied, “the laws of man do not apply to the gods of oil.” Earlier, a post based on the WSWs’s coverage of the Chevron strike went viral with over 100,000 views.

On a subreddit for oil and gas workers, commentators heatedly discussed the sellout, and what it said about the unions, in a thread based on a WSWs article. One oil worker gave the post an award (which can be given out on the site) in appreciation for shedding light on what happened. The thread was the third most popularly upvoted discussion over the last month.

The Chevron struggle won immense support from the working class. The USW, however, sought to isolate it, to demoralize the workers, and ram through the hated national contract.

The task now of workers at Chevron, as well as oil workers across the country, is to draw lessons from this struggle and begin preparations for a new fight, which is on the horizon. Workers do not need to wait until the expiration of their contract to break free of the isolation and defeat imposed on them by the USW. Build Rank-and-File Committees to openly discuss what has happened and begin making connections with thousands of other industrial workers who have drawn the same conclusions about the rotten character of the trade unions.



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