

“They represented Marathon, not us”: Refinery workers denounce USW sellout in national pattern deal

Tom Hall**8 February 2026**

Refinery workers: Speak out on the tentative agreement by filling out the form below! All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Refinery workers across the United States are speaking out to the *World Socialist Web Site* against the tentative national pattern agreement announced by the United Steelworkers (USW) covering 30,000 oil refinery workers.

The tentative agreement provides wage increases totaling approximately 15 percent over four years, along with a one-time \$2,500 signing bonus. At the same time it leaves intact forced overtime regimes, limited sick leave and longstanding staffing and safety issues. The USW bureaucracy has moved quickly to present the deal as the best that can be achieved, while signaling that individual locals—most notably at BP Whiting in Indiana—may be left to fight alone if they reject it.

To defeat this sellout, refinery workers need to take the struggle into their own hands by forming rank-and-file committees at every refinery and petrochemical plant. These committees should be elected by workers on the shop floor, not appointed by the union, and used to communicate across refineries, share information the USW is withholding and coordinate a common response to the tentative agreement.

In particular, refinery workers should mobilize to prevent the USW from isolating a strike at BP Whiting, where workers have authorized a strike and management is demanding even deeper concessions.

One Whiting worker told the WSWS, “We’re getting 15 percent over 4 years and a middle finger, and maybe just the middle finger at BP Whiting. How does this make sense?

“And to top it all off, I’m sure if we, at the BP Whiting Refinery, go out on strike, we’ll be on our own. The USW’s stance should be every refinery signs or we go out … plain and simple.”

At the HF Sinclair refinery in El Dorado, Kansas, one worker said the proposed wage increase does not even cover rising out-of-pocket costs.

“That big whopping 4 percent raise barely even covers our insurance premiums raise for this year. We voted on 25 percent wage increases; go fight for it! If a strike is needed, guess what? We voted for it, so issue a strike. The USW did not represent us, they represented Marathon. I would love to give the higher-ups in the Union a piece of my mind, and I would say a lot of their members feel the same as I do.”

At Chevron’s Richmond, California refinery, a worker pointed to the contrast between workers’ sacrifices and what the company and union are offering in return. “A fire took place here early last year February of 2025,” he said. “Operators and fire fighters working along side each other kept this event from going catastrophic.

“Meanwhile we have forced overtime hours of 12- to 13-hour shifts, 6 to 14 days straight, with 1 or 2 days off in between for over an entire year. We work to keep this company going and forced overtime and yet sick time stays the same, and vacation hours stay the same, and we get a slap in the face with wages. The \$2,500 signing bonus is a joke too.”

Workers in Northern California emphasized the crushing impact of cost-of-living increases and the erosion of time off.

“A slap in the face. We deserve better. We sacrifice our lives, our time, and our health, for these companies.

We work long hours, away from family. We miss birthdays, anniversaries, holidays. We have to be forced to work because we don't have enough time to be able to take days off liberally. We risk a write-up for a day off because we only get a total of eight sick days for the year."

The worker added:

"Vacation hours shouldn't be time that's used for health issues, family emergencies, or appointments. These companies expect total dedication from us and don't want to give anything back in return. They've taken incentive programs away and replaced them with 'recognition programs' they we ourselves implement for each other. They reduce bonuses and blame economic issues, but brag about record profits for shareholders. They reduce safety practices and programs, and say streamlining and productivity is the goal. These practices need to change. We deserve better."

Another Northern California worker underscored regional disparities ignored by the national agreement: "Living in California, the cost of living is so much higher than the Midwest and the gulf states. We've been behind the inflation curve for years and this settlement keeps us behind the curve."

A contractor working at Marathon's Galveston Bay refinery, though not covered by the USW agreement, offered a broader assessment of conditions facing workers in the United States.

Commenting on the claim that there is "no money" for workers while trillions are spent on war, he said: "That's messed up. That's just how it is in America. I mean, we're like a third world country. They try to make it seem like we the greatest in the world. But what is it really?"

He continued: "How they talk about third world countries is that, you know, people don't have nothing. ... we're working to pay bills. You know what I mean? It's not like we can save, you know, half of our check. They're already taking a third of our check in taxes. And if we aren't working, they try to get some kind of assistance, [the attitude is] 'get out of here. You're a bum.' It's just messed up how they taking all our money. Kids that was in college needed loan forgiveness. [They act like that] was a bad thing. But then if Israel need money, it's 'Here you go.'

"The country is trash. I mean, you can't even ride

down I-10 without it being backed up or full of construction. If you see people working on the highway, there might be eight workers on the whole interstate. You know what I mean? That's why I say we're like a third world country. We've got nothing. We are just crumbling. Everything crumbling.

"But to distract workers, every year they get a new boogeyman. Now it's the Muslims are the boogeyman. You know, back then it was the welfare people, the blacks, you know, always somebody to make you hate."

He also spoke about working conditions for contractors at the refinery, the country's largest. "We're getting 7 12s [12-hour shifts 7 days a week]. We get 84 hours a week. But then they changed the rule. Now they pay us 80 and a half hours because they're charging us for lunch, 30 minutes a day.

"It's the overtime" that people take the job for, he explained. "That's why people do it, you know. Some people got to work two or three jobs to make ends meet.

"It's capitalism. You know what I mean? It's wrong. Big time. I mean, what what's the point of having two trillion dollars when your brother is starving? ... but they got so much control and got the system set up the way they want, to where you are just living to work or you are going to be living on the street. You don't have a choice."



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