

Oil workers: Reject the national agreement! Mobilize to prevent isolation of BP Whiting workers!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
13 February 2026

Organize a fight against the sellout agreement! Fill out the form below for assistance setting up a rank-and-file committee at your workplace.

The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees urges refinery workers across the United States to reject, by the widest possible margin, the national pattern agreement announced by the United Steelworkers (USW). We call on workers to organize from below to fight for a contract that meets your demands, taking all necessary action, up to and including a national strike.

In particular, workers must organize to prevent the isolation of their 800 brothers and sisters at BP Whiting, where management is attempting to take the facility off pattern in order to impose even deeper cuts.

In August, USW members voted to ratify a bargaining program under the National Oil Bargaining Program that called for 25 percent wage increases, meaningful job protections against the introduction of AI, and improvements to healthcare. According to the USW's own policy book, the bargaining program is "mandatory."

Instead, the bargaining team took those demands and tossed them in the garbage. The tentative agreement provides only 15 percent over four years, with no protections against automation and no changes to healthcare.

The wage offer is all the more insulting because the last contract provided only 11 percent over three years. As one worker put it, "Our wages have decreased so significantly over the past 5 years due to inflation." The oil companies—which together made more than \$100 billion in global profit last year, including \$41 billion for ExxonMobil and Chevron alone—try to portray refinery workers as entitled. But, as another worker said, "it still feels like lower middle class" working "at a job that's basically a bomb," referring to the ever-present danger of catastrophic fires, chemical leaks and explosions.

A Beaumont, Texas worker explained, "We deserve a better deal. The workers on the West Coast desperately need

a better deal" to keep up with the spiraling cost of living. In areas like Northern California, where Chevron's Richmond refinery is located, housing costs are out of control as money flows into the pockets of wealthy executives from Wall Street speculation.

AI and automation are major issues. Properly used, these technologies could dramatically improve safety, including through drones and crawlers for inspections and AI systems to assist operators at control panels. Instead, as on the railroads, in logistics and elsewhere, they are being used to cut jobs on top of what has already been slashed. According to government statistics, there were 160,000 refinery jobs in 1987. Now there are only 63,000, and many of those positions are held by super-exploited, nonunion contractors.

Management is indifferent to safety. A BP Whiting worker warned, "We've had two near disasters in the last two years in this place." A massive explosion at Chevron's El Segundo refinery last October rocked suburban Los Angeles.

Grueling 12-hour shifts under the Dupont schedule and similar systems push workers to the point of exhaustion. Companies are attempting to impose even worse conditions at some facilities. A US oil worker in Tacoma explained, "They're trying to make overtime mandatory, where you're basically 'on call.'" This would leave workers chained to the job 24/7, as rail crews already are.

Unite in defense of BP Whiting workers!

All this is more than reason enough to vote the contract down. But worst of all, USW officials are demanding that workers abandon the BP Whiting workers to their fate. This is emboldening management, which is demanding a six-year contract and that workers waive legal rights regarding automation. "Regardless of what was agreed upon at the

national level between Marathon and the international USW, the Whiting Refinery is, in no way, obligated to follow the ‘pattern,’’ a company spokesman arrogantly declared.

BP workers are determined and have voted by 98 percent to strike. But if they are left isolated, BP will be able to wear them down and impose concessions.

According to one Whiting worker, “They’re doing exactly what they did at Beaumont” in the 2021–2022 lockout, which brought a major facility out of the national pattern. A strike at Chevron’s Richmond refinery in 2022 was similarly isolated. “Every oil company is looking at BP right now to see what happens.” If they can take the biggest refinery in the Midwest off pattern, “get ready because the next one is you, and it will happen.”

If they can take one facility off pattern, then nobody is safe: management will divide and conquer workers facility by facility. Reports have already been received that the Ineos plant in Texas City is also attempting to go off pattern.

Urgent action is required. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) calls on refinery workers to take the following measures:

- **Reject the contract!** The entire process lacks legitimacy. Marathon negotiated with a “bargaining” team that flagrantly violated members’ instructions, operating behind a wall of silence. Workers should accept no deal that does not, at a minimum, meet the program ratified by the membership.

- **Hold meetings and elect rank-and-file committees made up of trusted workers—not career union officials.** The current bargaining team should be replaced with a new one composed exclusively of active refinery workers.

- **Acting through these committees, establish lines of communication across facilities, bypassing the control of the USW officialdom.** Refinery workers have every right to take whatever national action is necessary, up to and including a national strike, to win their demands and prevent the isolation of BP Whiting. The USW’s \$1.8 billion in assets—financed by workers’ dues—must be put toward the struggle and strike pay, not the salaries of bureaucrats.

A new leadership is necessary. USW bureaucrats take their orders from management, not the workers. Their disregard for the bargaining program shows that they operate outside any democratic accountability.

The bureaucracy also functions on behalf of the government. During the last contract, the late USW president Tom Conway met with Biden behind closed doors during negotiations. He then openly bragged that the new contract—11 percent over three years—did not contribute to “inflation.” In other words, it made workers poorer as prices rose.

The oil and gas industry is backed by the entire political

establishment, which wages wars around the globe for control of oil and critical resources. The last contract was settled on the eve of the US-NATO war in Ukraine, which was used to cut off Russian oil and gas exports. This time, negotiations are taking place amid the Trump administration’s escalating attacks—from the attack on Venezuela to the massing of warships against Iran.

Refinery workers must fight to mobilize a different social force: the working class. Workers everywhere are fighting exploitation and defending democratic rights. There have been strikes by Kaiser and New York City nurses and by educators in San Francisco. There have also been mass walkouts by high school students and protests against ICE raids, raising the question of a general strike.

A refinery strike would meet with broad support and would have a galvanizing effect on the entire working class. The strikes of 1934 and 1937, during the Great Depression, sparked a wave of struggle that built the industrial unions. A similar situation is emerging today. Millions are looking for a new way forward, and refinery workers can provide leadership.

But everywhere, union bureaucrats are trying to break this momentum, isolating one hospital in New York City by sending three others back to work. In San Francisco, they ended a strike with a deal brokered by Nancy Pelosi and the mayor, a scion of the billionaire Levi Strauss fortune.

The working class needs new channels through which to assert itself. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees is fighting to build those channels by helping workers form independent rank-and-file organizations—transferring power to the shop floor and giving workers the ability to override sellouts through action from below.

If you agree, take up the fight! The IWA-RFC will assist refinery workers in establishing a rank-and-file committee. For more information, fill out the form below.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact