

Reject the BP Whiting contract! Organize rank-and-file committees to prepare a national struggle!

International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees
11 March 2026

The following is a statement addressed to BP refinery workers in Whiting, Indiana, who are voting today (Thursday, March 12) on a six-year contract. For information on or help building a rank-and-file committee, fill out the form below.

BP Whiting refinery workers must decisively reject the concessionary agreement the company and the United Steelworkers (USW) bureaucracy are attempting to impose. But rejection alone is not enough. The vote must become the starting point of a broader movement uniting Whiting workers with the 30,000 refinery workers covered by the USW national agreement and the tens of thousands of contractors working in refineries across the United States.

The attack on Whiting is a test case for the entire industry. If BP succeeds here, every oil company will follow the same playbook. This is why the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees calls for this fight to be transformed into a common struggle of refinery workers everywhere, drawing behind them workers in other industries.

Achieving this unity requires initiative from workers themselves. Whiting workers should establish a rank-and-file committee to organize the struggle, independent of the USW apparatus. This committee should reach out directly to refinery workers at other plants, share information about the contract fight and prepare coordinated action to defend wages, safety and jobs throughout the industry, up to and including nationwide strike action.

Every refinery worker has a direct stake in defeating BP's demands. The proposed agreement contains attacks on a scale without precedent in recent decades. It would cut wages by \$8–10 an hour, eliminate roughly

100 jobs out of a workforce of 800, expand the use of nonunion contract labor and force workers to sign away protections related to AI-driven automation. The company is also seeking a six-year contract, removing Whiting from the national bargaining cycle.

If imposed, this agreement will pave the way for oil companies to dismantle national bargaining altogether. Corporations will demand concessions refinery by refinery, claiming each facility must make sacrifices to remain “competitive.” What is imposed on Whiting today will become the model for attacks on refinery workers everywhere tomorrow.

These concessions are being demanded in an already dangerous industry. The Whiting refinery has experienced multiple evacuations in recent years, underscoring the ever-present danger facing workers. Catastrophic explosions remain a constant threat, as demonstrated by last year's blast at the Chevron refinery in El Segundo, California. Grueling schedules only intensify the risk. Contractors are frequently forced to work seven days a week on 12-hour shifts, while operators endure the exhausting “DuPont” schedule, including a six-day stretch of 12-hour shifts each month. Cutting jobs and expanding contract labor will only worsen an already unsafe environment.

The USW international has deliberately left Whiting workers isolated despite the national implications of this struggle. Across the rest of the industry, the bureaucracy is rushing to impose the national “pattern” agreement announced last month. That deal provides wage increases of just 15 percent spread over four years, contains no meaningful improvements to safety and includes no protections against job losses through automation or artificial intelligence. It allows the

companies to continue working refinery employees to the bone while preparing sweeping technological changes that threaten thousands of jobs. Moreover, this deal was reached in open defiance of the clear instructions given by the membership when it voted on the National Oil Bargaining Program last year.

By pushing through this concessionary framework everywhere else, the union leadership is attempting to prevent refinery workers from mounting a unified response to the attack at Whiting.

This is also a war contract. For the second time in a row, the USW bureaucracy has negotiated a deal that would guarantee labor peace just as the oil giants stand to reap enormous profits from rising energy prices driven by war. In January, the Trump administration carried out the kidnapping of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro, and the United States has now launched a major, criminal and unpopular war against Iran that is shaking global energy markets. As always, it is the workers that will be made to foot the bill, through rising prices and, especially in the event of a ground invasion, with the lives of their sons and daughters.

The previous refinery contract was negotiated right at the start of the war in Ukraine, which sent oil prices soaring to \$120 a barrel. At the time, former USW president Tom Conway openly boasted that the agreement would not contribute to inflation. By this he meant above all that the 11 percent wage increases over three years would make workers poorer in real terms.

The contract was reached following intensive closed-door discussions between Conway and then-president Joe Biden. Today the USW is headed by Roxanne Brown, a longtime political lobbyist for the union who never worked in a refinery or steel mill, underscoring the intimate ties between the union bureaucracy and the government.

The BP agreement will likely be rejected, particularly since Local 7-1 itself has called for a “no” vote. But the decisive question remains: How can this struggle be won?

Workers must prevent a repeat of what happened in 2022 at ExxonMobil’s Beaumont refinery in Texas, where workers were isolated during a bitter 10-month lockout. With no serious support from the USW leadership, they were eventually forced to accept a contract that removed them from the national pattern

framework and imposed sweeping concessions.

The central task facing Whiting workers today is to break the isolation of their struggle. A rank-and-file committee should establish lines of communication with refinery workers across the country, as well as with the steelworkers throughout northwest Indiana and workers across the broader Chicagoland region. The outcome of this fight will set a precedent for steelworkers as well, whose contracts are set to expire later this year.

Where local refinery contracts have not yet been rushed through under pressure from the union apparatus, workers should fight for their rejection. But regardless of the status of these agreements, refinery workers everywhere must come to the defense of Whiting workers. Joint actions should be prepared, including a nationwide strike. Delegations and pickets at other facilities should be mobilized to prepare the broadest possible support for such actions.

This struggle must be organized from below. Workers should build a rank-and-file strike committee to assert democratic control over the fight, ensure transparency in bargaining and counter the deliberate efforts of the USW apparatus to sabotage opposition.

Refinery workers are in a powerful position to advance demands that meet their needs, not those dictated by corporate profits. These include a four-year contract, wage increases that keep pace with inflation—including automatic cost-of-living adjustments—strong protections against job losses through automation and genuine workers’ control over safety conditions in the plants.

The fight at BP Whiting can become the catalyst for a nationwide movement of refinery workers against concessions, dangerous working conditions and the drive for profit that threatens the lives and livelihoods of workers across the industry.



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