

“They are coming for everybody”: BP Whiting lockout enters fourth month as workers call for nationwide action

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The lockout of more than 850 oil refinery workers at BP’s massive Whiting, Indiana facility has entered its fourth month. On March 19, after workers overwhelmingly rejected an insulting fourth contract proposal that would have massively cut pay and benefits, the energy giant locked them out of the plant.

Since then, negotiations have remained completely stalled. The two sides met briefly in late May and once more on June 10, only for talks to break off immediately.

Locked-out workers who spoke with the *World Socialist Web Site* last week say that BP is dragging out the lockout to starve workers into submission while they wait for a corporate-friendly federal mediator to be appointed by the Trump administration to force through an agreement.

“The company is not bargaining in good faith right now,” Justin, a locked-out worker, told the WSW. “They are just showing up to meetings because they are legally obligated. But they’re not taking anything off the table at all.”

The Whiting lockout is a critical battleground for the entire working class. BP is attempting to enforce a contract that would eliminate 100 union jobs, expand the use of low-wage contract labor, cut hourly wages by \$8 to \$10, shut down the facility’s environmental department and implement artificial intelligence (AI) replacements without any job protections.

Furthermore, BP is demanding a 150-day future strike notice and seeking to remove the Whiting facility from the National Oil Bargaining Program (NOBP) pattern agreement timeline. This “divide-and-conquer” strategy is aimed at isolating Whiting workers and negotiating agreements facility-by-facility, stripping workers of their collective leverage.

The company’s demands for drastic concessions are particularly grotesque given its soaring profitability. The U.S.–Israeli war against Iran, which erupted in early 2026 and triggered a major energy crisis in the Persian Gulf, has sent global oil prices through the roof, with crude oil spiking nearly 50 percent in March alone and rising over 70 percent across the first quarter.

According to reports in the *New York Times* and corporate financial statements, global energy giants are reaping massive profits from the war. First-quarter earnings for 2026 show European majors capitalizing heavily on market volatility and supply disruptions: Shell’s earnings jumped 24 percent and TotalEnergies’ grew by 29 percent compared to the same period

last year, while BP itself recorded a staggering 132 percent rebound in profits. In the United States, ExxonMobil’s quarterly revenue soared past Wall Street expectations to a massive \$85.14 billion.

“BP had record profits this year. Made more money than it’s ever made in its history,” Justin remarked. “And their response is to cut our pay... while the CEO is making \$11 million. Don’t take from the people in need, or the people who have less than you.”

To keep the refinery running, BP has brought in managers and outside contractors, many of whom have not operated active refinery units in years or possibly ever.

Jason, a veteran maintenance worker, pointed out the sheer hypocrisy of the company’s claims of poverty. “They are paying guys double what most people make here an hour for replacement workers,” he said. “So it’s obviously not about money. The company is making billions and billions, especially with the war happening.”

The safety consequences of using scab labor have already been felt by the surrounding community.

In late May, a major “system-related” power failure disrupted operations at the refinery, forcing massive quantities of toxic gases to be burned off through flaring stacks. Dark smoke and intense odors of hydrogen sulfide and sulfur blanketed the area. Whiting resident Lisa Vallee confirmed that despite being registered for emergency text and email alerts, she received no warning from the company or municipal officials.

“All the vets are out here on the picket line,” Jason said, warning of the immense danger of running the highly volatile plant with scab labor. “A lot of those people they have in there haven’t run the unit in ages. Things don’t run the same; units have been upgraded or modified since they last worked them.”

The Whiting lockout has exposed not only the ruthless corporate drive for profits but also the bankruptcy of the USW bureaucracy. While Whiting operators have shown immense courage and determination, standing on the picket lines for over 90 days, they are being kept entirely isolated by the international union leadership.

Last year, refinery workers across the country voted overwhelmingly on a national bargaining program to secure substantial wage increases, job protections against automation, and strict safety guidelines. However, the USW apparatus deliberately

defied this democratic mandate, signing a national pattern agreement that settled contracts for the vast majority of the 30,000 oil workers nationwide while leaving vulnerable locals to fight the energy conglomerates alone.

This is a well-worn playbook for the USW bureaucracy. Last year, the union left Chevron refinery workers in Richmond, California, and ExxonMobil workers in Beaumont, Texas, entirely isolated when they were locked out for over 10 months. Today, the same strategy of lockout and isolation is being deployed against Whiting workers and striking refinery workers in Martinez, California.

On April 27, 120 members of USW Local 5 walked out on strike at Marathon Petroleum's Martinez Renewables facility in California. Marathon has cynically claimed that because the plant processes waste vegetable oil and animal fat into renewable diesel, it is not covered by the NOBP. The company has used this loophole to demand sweeping concessions, impose brutal mandatory overtime, and ignore severe understaffing—conditions that led to a catastrophic furnace fire in November 2023, which left operator Jerome Serrano with third-degree burns over 80 percent of his body.

Despite the identical nature of the struggles in Whiting and Martinez, the USW international leadership has made no effort to mobilize its national membership or coordinate joint action.

“As soon as the national contract settled, everybody else, you know, no one else went out,” Jason reflected. “When we are with our national brothers and sisters, we are 30,000 strong. Now, we’re out here in kind of a mess. It’s a playbook. If they get what they want here, it’s coming for everyone else next time. When the contract is up for everybody else in four years, they’re coming for everybody.”

While the company has a clear strategy, the USW has presented no strategy to the rank-and-file on how the fight can be won. Local 7-1 President Eric Schultz in a recent statement has only begged BP to “stop using this lockout to pressure workers” and return to the bargaining table—a plea that falls on deaf ears. Meanwhile, the USW sits on a massive strike fund worth hundreds of millions of dollars, which it doles out in paltry weekly strike benefits while top union officials pay themselves six-figure salaries.

The assault on BP workers takes place alongside a broader offensive against the living standards of the working class in Northwest Indiana. On May 2, the regional electric utility NIPSCO ended a month-long lockout of more than 1,700 workers after forcing through a concessionary contract that gutted job security and safety protections.

NIPSCO and BP coordinated their offensives, locking out approximately 2,500 industrial workers in the region simultaneously. While NIPSCO workers were locked out, Northwest Indiana residents saw their utility bills skyrocket, in many cases doubling over the past year.

“We had some of them (NIPSCO workers) here, and certainly we sent some of ours to picket over there,” Jason said, describing the solidarity felt among rank-and-file workers.

The soaring cost of energy and basic goods has placed a double squeeze on Whiting workers, who must battle inflation on the kitchen table while receiving no wages. The high cost of living in

the Chicagoland area, heavily driven by transportation costs and corporate price-gouging, has provoked widespread anger.

The experience of the Whiting lockout demonstrates that workers cannot wage a successful struggle if they remain shackled to the USW apparatus. The union tops have proved time and again that they function as tools of corporate management, policing the workforce and ensuring that strikes and lockouts do not disrupt the overall flow of corporate profit.

To win this fight, Whiting workers must take the conduct of the struggle into their own hands. The WSWS calls for the immediate formation of an independent rank-and-file committee at the Whiting refinery. This committee, democratically run by the workers themselves, must:

- **Break the isolation:** Establish direct lines of communication with the striking Marathon workers in Martinez, California, Chevron workers in Richmond, and steelworkers at Gary Works, Cleveland-Cliffs, and ArcelorMittal.

- **Mobilize the working class across the region:** Reach out to autoworkers at the Ford Chicago Assembly Plant, Dakkota, Flex-N-Gate and other logistics and healthcare workers across the Chicagoland region.

- **Demand real strike pay:** Demand that the USW release full strike pay from its massive strike fund to completely shield locked-out workers from financial ruin.

- **Prepare nationwide industrial action:** Assert that an attack on one is an attack on all, preparing coordinated, industry-wide strikes to defend jobs, safety, and wages.

The union bureaucrats have demonstrated beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are working on behalf of the company. Rather than organizing a unified counter-offensive, the USW leadership operates as an auxiliary arm of management—policing workers, keeping separate struggles carefully quarantined and bleeding the rank-and-file dry on the picket line to pressure them into concessionary agreements.

It is time for the rank-and-file to have its say and to take leadership of this struggle into our own hands. To break through the isolation and force a retreat by the energy conglomerates, workers must organize themselves independently of the union apparatus.



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