

USW imposes sellout, seeks to wind down remaining oil strikes

By Jerry White
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Thousands of oil workers remain on strike at BP, Marathon, LyondellBasell and Tesoro refineries and petro-chemical plants in six states as the United Steelworkers (USW) union seeks to impose its pro-company deal on workers throughout the United States and isolate those still resisting.

Voting on local contracts at refineries owned by San Antonio-based Tesoro refineries in the states of California and Washington began Sunday and is scheduled to continue this week. Workers were scheduled to return to work this week at three Motiva Enterprises refineries in Texas and Louisiana, which are co-owned by Shell and Saudi-based Aramco. Striking hourly employees at Shell's refinery in Deer Park, Texas, approved a new contract last Thursday and are expected to return to work within two weeks.

The pattern agreement the USW reached with Shell on March 13 contains no commitments from the oil companies to address dangerously high levels of mandatory overtime and the practice of replacing full-time unionized maintenance workers with contractors who have no guaranteed hours or health care and pension benefits. It also includes a meager 12 percent pay raise over four years, barely keeping up with inflation, and allows the oil companies—the top five of whom made \$90 billion last year—to force workers to pay one-fifth of their health care costs.

The vote to return to work at several locations is not an endorsement of this sellout, which is an insult to the workers who have sacrificed for nearly two months. Instead, many workers recognize the USW has led them into an impasse and that continuing the strike under the direction of the USW, would be fruitless.

From the beginning, the USW called out only a fraction of the 30,000 workers it organizes in the industry, and then worked with management to starve

striking workers into submission. The union offered no cash benefits from its \$350 million strike fund, and forced workers to beg the union to pay bills, or to apply for welfare.

The major concern of the USW was to prevent the strike from escalating into a political confrontation with the Obama administration, with which the USW is closely allied.

During the vote by striking workers at the Tesoro Carson refinery near Los Angeles on Sunday, hundreds of workers took leaflets from supporters of the Socialist Equality Party, which called for a rejection of the sellout deal and a general strike by all oil workers despite efforts by USW Local 675 officials to intimidate them.

One worker told campaigners, “I voted against this contract. We are unhappy, but after seven weeks on the picket line, with the union not paying benefits, a lot of guys were frustrated and just wanted to get back to work. They kind of feel like we were striking for nothing.”

Several officials came out of the union hall and sought unsuccessfully to prevent workers from taking the leaflets. A leading figure in USW Local 675 is secretary-treasurer Dave Campbell, a supposed “left” union leader who has close ties to Democratic Party officials, including Black Congressional Caucus member Maxine Waters. Campbell played the central role in blocking workers at the ExxonMobil refinery in nearby Torrance, California from defying the USW and joining the strike after a February 18 explosion at the plant.

Well aware that the USW will do nothing to defend the workers remaining on strike, the corporations are taking a hard line in local talks at BP-operated plants in Whiting, Indiana and Toledo, Ohio, LyondellBasell

Industries' Houston refinery and Marathon Petroleum Corporation's Galveston Bay, Texas, and Catlettsburg, Kentucky, refineries.

At the Catlettsburg refinery, a federal mediator joined the talks between the USW and Marathon last week.

USW officials at the BP refinery in Indiana are seeking to posture as defenders of workers' "collective bargaining rights," with Local 7-1 president Dave Danko telling the *Chicago Tribune* the oil company's strategy is "right out of Gov. (Scott) Walker's playbook in Wisconsin."

In fact, Danko, like the rest of the USW does not give a hoot about the rights of oil workers. While fully endorsing the sellout agreement with Shell, Local 7-1 officials have tried to prevent WSWS reporters from discussing the expansion of the strike with workers at the refinery, where 1,100 are on strike. "Collective bargaining" for USW local officials, like the USW International, only means a seat at the table and more positions on labor-management committees to collaborate in the undermining of workers' wages and work conditions, while maintaining a minimal number of dues paying members.

Doug Sparkman, BP's chief operating officer, Fuels North America, wrote in an email to employees, "We are proposing collective bargaining agreements for Whiting and Toledo that ensure safe, sustainable and competitive operations, continue to fairly compensate employees and allow management the flexibility to make necessary changes during the life of the agreement..."

Danko told the *Tribune*, "We will continue to work with BP to get back to work. I'm confident at some point we'll agree."

To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

<http://www.wsws.org>