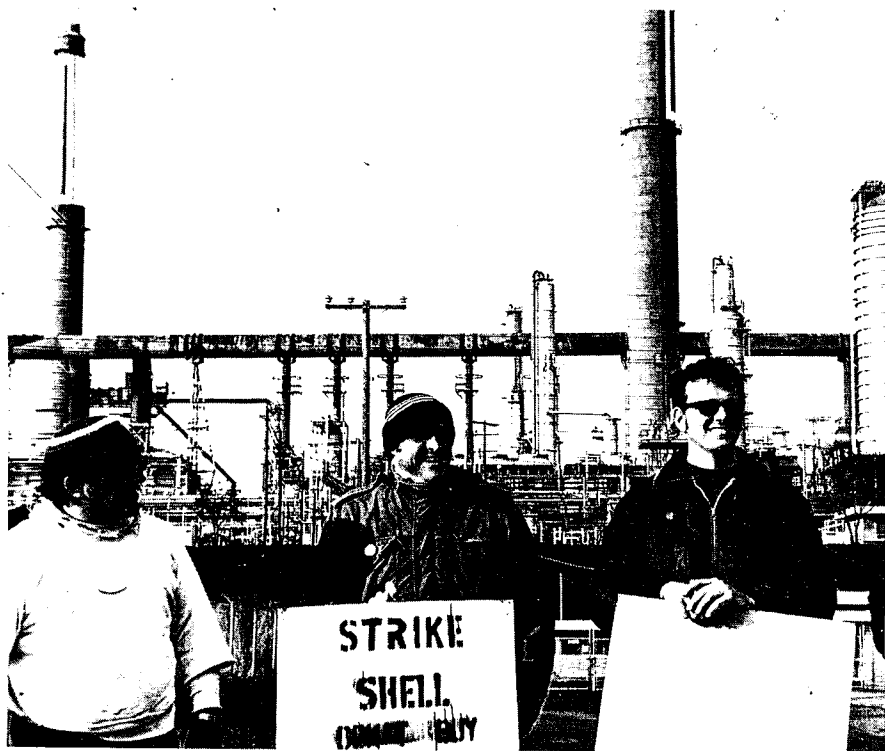


Millions of working people face hazards on the job. This pamphlet is the story of the Shell Oil Strike of 1973—the first national strike for health and safety contract protection by a trade union.

We believe that the story of the Shell Strike will be of interest to working people who face similar struggles in the years ahead, in the auto industry, steel, construction trades or wherever the health and safety of workers is sacrificed for profit.



OUR LIVES ARE AT STAKE

workers fight for
health and safety



by Barry Weisberg

40¢



SLIDE SHOW—SHELL STRIKE 1973

The Shell Strike Support Committee in the Bay Area put together an hour-long narrated slide show of the Strike, including interviews with strikers around the country. This slide show can be rented or bought from United Front Press. Please contact us if you are interested.

Barry Weisberg worked with the Bay Area Shell Strike Support Committee and helped organize support for the strike and boycott in a number of cities. He is a staff member of United Front Press.

Published by:
UNITED FRONT PRESS
P.O. Box 40099
San Francisco, CA 94140

JULY 1973

BULK RATES

20% off on 10 or more copies
40% off on 50 or more copies

Send for Our Free Catalogue.

"Henderson was ordered to light off a furnace . . . He objected that it was unsafe. Two other operators told the foreman it was not mechanically safe, nor had it been properly purged (of gas). The foreman called the department manager at home and then told Henderson that they decided it was safe and to light it off. All employees have been told what will happen if they refuse. (They will be walked to the gate.) All employees have been told that under such circumstances they will not be allowed union representation until after the work is performed.

"Mr. Henderson struck the torch and was burned to death."

Testimony before the National Labor Relations Board about the death of a worker at the Shell Oil refinery in Martinez, California, 1970.

Every year 100,000 workers die because of unhealthy or unsafe conditions on the job.* Miners and textile workers face Black Lung and Brown Lung disease; steel workers breath cancer causing coal tar pitch; farmworkers pick crops sprayed with poisonous pesticides; auto workers face compulsory 50 hour weeks in speeded up assembly lines. Oil and chemical workers handle deadly gases and are forced to work with unsafe machinery.

Twenty five million workers are injured on the job every year: one out of every three working people (according to an unpublished study by the Department of Labor).

Industry has always fought workers demands to have a say in determining their working conditions. This has been particularly true for the giant oil corporations. Shell, Standard Oil, Texaco, Gulf and the rest claim that they and they alone should control conditions on the job.

The more crude oil the monopolies bring in, the faster it is refined and shipped out, the more profit they make. Preventive maintenance, testing new chemicals, and keeping production at a safe rate, all cut into profits. While the yearly profits of each of the major oil companies are in the hundreds of millions of dollars, oil workers have to pay with their lives.

* First Annual Report to Congress of the Occupational, Safety and Health Administration, 1970.

2 Oil workers know that refineries can be run safely.

"It doesn't have to be that way. But it costs money to do anything in a plant like this. They are in the business of making money. Every dime they can save is a dime they can put into a pot and pay out to stockholders. It is a business, and money is what they are there for. If they can accomplish the objective of making money at somebody else's expense, this is what they do.

"Let's face it, the guys who are running the plant are never down in the plant, they are up in the main office in Houston, or somewhere. They don't have to smell this stuff and they don't have to get it on them."

Workers in many industries are fighting for better working conditions.** In January, 1973, 4000 oil workers went out on a five month strike against Shell Oil. They demanded that the new contract contain specific steps to protect the health and safety of workers on the job.

This was the first national strike for contract coverage of health and safety conditions on the job. (See appendix for text of the Union's demands.)

Through the strike, oil and chemical workers were able to force Shell to accept important health and safety provisions in the new contract.

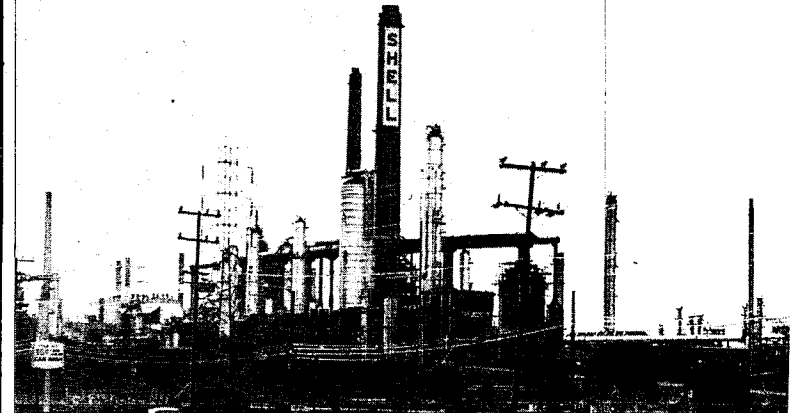
Their success is an example to workers in other industries that no matter how big the company, organized and determined strikes can win concessions on health and safety conditions.

** UAW autoworkers are demanding an end to exhausting compulsory overtime as a major contract demand in 1973.



Striker at Martinez, California, refinery blocking Shell truck.

WHAT THEY WERE FIGHTING FOR



1. Establishment of a joint Union-Management health and safety committee in every plant.
2. Workers should be paid by the company for time spent in committee work, such as plant inspection walk arounds.
3. The right to call in independent health and safety inspectors, approved by the Union.
4. Access to all company information on death and disease rates of workers, and chemicals used in production.
5. Medical examinations provided annually at company expense.

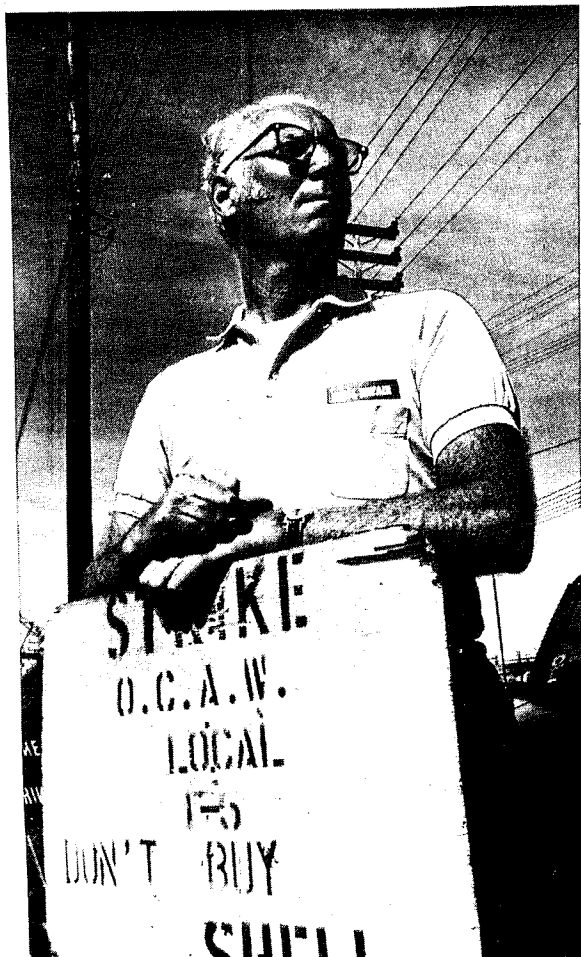
OIL WORKERS TAKE ON SHELL

Contract negotiations between the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers Union and the oil companies began in the fall of 1972. By January, all the companies had settled, except Shell and Standard Oil of California.

On the key issue, Shell's position was that health and safety was none of the oil workers' business: "We are legally responsible for the health and safety of Shell employees in the workplace . . . this responsibility cannot be shared."

On January 23, the Union called a strike against Shell — where the union was better organized. 4000 men and women walked out of five refineries and three chemical plants, mostly on the West and Gulf coasts. They are located at Anacortes, Washington; Martinez and Wilmington, California; Deer Park, Texas; Norco, Louisiana; and Denver, Colorado. (Two other Shell refineries are non-union and a third is organized by the Operating Engineers which did not honor the strike.)

The oil and chemical workers were up against the second largest oil company and the fourth largest corporation in the



"We recognize that all the things that we have gained in the way of wages, and everything else, if you die getting them, they are not going to do you any good.

"If you go out and work in the plant for 20 years and get a pension and you die in the 21st year, the pension is not going to do you any good."



Women join picket lines in front of Deer Park, Texas, refinery.

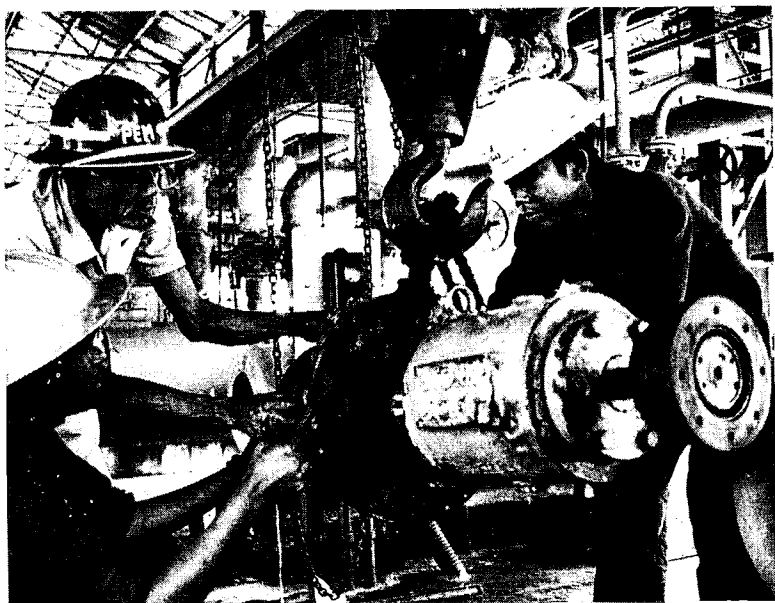


Strikers slow deliveries at Norco, Louisiana, refinery.

6 world. Shell operates through some 500 different subsidiaries in almost all of the non-socialist countries of the world.

In the United States, Shell is the largest marketer of aviation fuel and the second largest marketer of gasoline. Shell pushes not only gasoline but hundreds of other products.

Shell's vast wealth comes from its long history of exploiting workers not only in this country, but even more so the working people and resources of the Middle East, Asia, Africa, and Latin America.



Oil workers in Indonesia, traditional source of low-paid labor for Shell.

On the island of Curacao, just off Venezuela, Shell runs one of the biggest refineries in the world. When refinery workers in the Curacao Petroleum Federation went on strike in June 1969 for better conditions and liveable wages (most skilled workers earned less than \$1 an hour), the Dutch marines were called in.

They fired on a peaceful demonstration of oil workers, killing four and wounding hundreds. The workers responded by arming themselves, setting fires in the refinery, and seizing a local radio station, where they broadcast their strike demands.

Shell and the local authorities then called in more marines from Holland. Today, 3000 marines enforce Shell's rule over the largely black population of the island.

Always looking for new sources of profit, Shell signed a contract in July 1973 with the corrupt Thieu regime of south Vietnam to explore for offshore oil.

SHELL PROFITS SINK

7

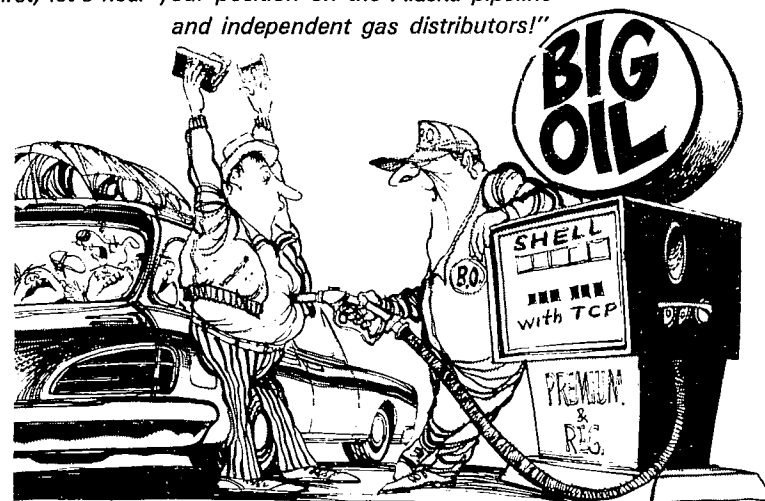
In 1972 alone, Shell made over one-half billion dollars. But Shell's rate of profit has been steadily falling in recent years. This doesn't mean that Shell is losing money, but that they are making less money as a percentage of what they invest. This "profit squeeze" is the main reason that Shell refused to bargain on health and safety issues.

In 1972, Shell suffered an earnings dip of 24%. This has put Shell at the bottom of the seven major oil companies in the world in terms of the rate of profit (see box). One example of how Shell is falling behind the other oil companies is that from 1968 through 1972, Shell's share of the gasoline market in the United States dropped from 8.3% to 7.1%. In a \$30 billion market, one percent is a lot of money.

The biggest cut in Shell's rate of profit has come from the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), an organization of the largest Third World oil producing countries, formed in 1960 to fight the large US and British oil monopolies. Growing nationalism, particularly in the Middle East and North Africa, has cost the oil monopolies a lot of money in increased taxes. In the last decade taxes paid to oil producing countries by the companies has almost tripled, while income has climbed only 89%.

At home, Shell, Standard Oil and the other oil monopolies have always been able to operate with little or no regulation. Avoiding the costs to correct unsafe and unhealthy conditions for workers inside the plants, and to curb pollution poured on surrounding communities, have meant increased profits.

"first, let's hear your position on the Alaska pipeline and independent gas distributors!"



But in recent years the oil companies have come under increasing attack. Even though what they now spend on health and safety or pollution control is peanuts, they realize that there is widespread support for much stronger action against them.

Their first response has been to pour millions into public relations campaigns about the latest technology they've developed to clean up oil spills and "beautify the environment." They've also launched a big scare campaign around the so-called gasoline shortage and energy crisis.

For the oil monopolies, the "gas shortage" serves to silence critics, drive out smaller competitors and raise gasoline prices—all to relieve the squeeze on their profits. In addition, they've used the "energy crisis" to justify avoiding costly anti-pollution measures (like the Alaska pipeline).

Shell also decided to hold the line on costs to improve health and safety conditions in the refineries. The main obstacle has been the OCAW, which has made its major demands on this issue. In 1973, Shell moved to weaken the Union by forcing a long strike over health and safety.

This was not just a test for Shell, but for all the other oil companies. Even though they had signed contracts, they helped Shell in many ways, from buying Shell gasoline to blacklisting strikers. A victory for Shell against the Union would leave all the companies free to ignore the contracts they had signed.

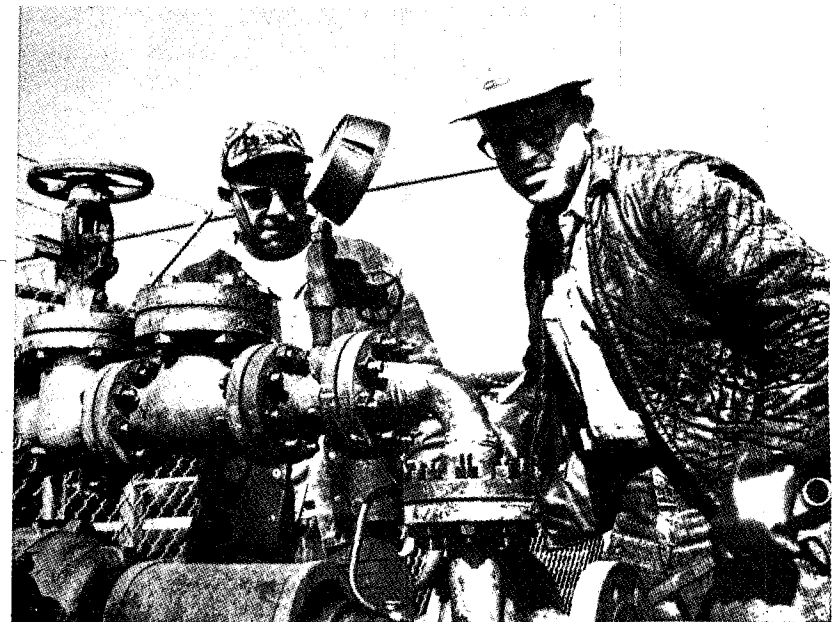


HEALTH HAZARDS SPUR STRUGGLE

Inside a refinery's 100 foot towers, crude oil is separated into its chemical fractions. After the oil enters the tower at the bottom, it is heated to high temperatures and rises to the top in the form of vapor. Products with higher boiling points remain at the bottom, such as asphalt and coke. Others, like gasoline and liquified natural gas, are taken out nearer the top of the column. Some 6000 products come from petroleum and petrochemicals—from fuels and lubricants to explosives and paints.

From a distance, an oil refinery looks safe enough. For the men and women who work inside it is another story. Acids, poisonous gases, and skin searing steam are forced through a vast jungle of pipes and valves, under hundreds of pounds of pressure. Great containers boil thousands of gallons of deadly chemicals. Fractioning towers belch fire and smoke. These refineries are run non stop, twenty four hours a day, three hundred and sixty five days a year.

Poor maintenance, speedups, the failure to test dangerous chemicals and keep medical records all take a deadly toll from oil workers.



Dangerous gases and chemicals are forced through miles of pipes.

One oil worker described the conditions in the Deer Park, Texas plant:

"We've had a case of blood cancer, and the man passed away. A man in another section of the plant had cancer of the bladder. It was removed and now he carries a bag on his side. We have two men right now whose blood vessels have been eaten away due to the chemicals they work with. One has a plastic tube for veins and arteries on one side of his body. We had one man who was told by the doctor that if he didn't leave the laboratory (where he worked in the refinery) that he would also die of blood cancer."

The hazards to oil workers health affect both young and old. Another worker in Texas explained,

"Many of our young people are really concerned about the effect of our work conditions on health. They know that they are being exposed to hazardous atmospheres and they are alarmed. Already some of them say they do not feel as good as they did when they came here. These are people my age, 26, and maybe a year or two older."



Arms of rubber worker burned by chemicals.

DEADLY CHEMICALS

Some of the 1600 chemicals used in a refinery, and how they affect oil and chemical workers:

TETRAETHYL LEAD: A gasoline additive which acts as an anti knock agent. Over-exposure interferes with the production of red blood cells. Accumulations of lead may lead to brain damage. Social Security Administration figures indicate that the incidence of Encephalopathy (brain malfunction) is four times greater in refinery workers than in the general population.

BENZENE: An aromatic by-product in high octane gasoline. Continued exposure to it will lead to benzene poisoning, irritating the mucous lining of the ears and throat, damage to the kidney, or diseases of the blood such as anemia or leukemia.

HYDROGEN SULPHIDE GAS: This gas works as a nerve poison. High exposure can cause immediate death. Long term exposure will cause emphysema or chronic bronchitis. The burning of this gas is the most serious hazard involved in major oil pollution disasters.

THE STAR-LEDGER, 13
Wednesday, Sept. 17, 1969

Two Killed by Gas in Plant

10 Other Workers Injured in Newport

NEWPORT, Tenn., April 5 (UPI)—Investigation continued at the Chemetron Corp. plant here today to determine what caused a broken pipe that Friday night spread deadly hydrogen sulfide gas over the working area and overcame 12 persons, two of whom died.

Those dead on arrival at a local hospital Friday night were Larry Henry, 26, of Newport, and Claude Dalton, 53, of Sevierville.

The break apparently occurred about 8 p.m., and Chemetron officials said its effects were apparent within a "couple of minutes."

"People just started collapsing all over the place," said Cocke County Sheriff Tom O'Dell. "It didn't take but a few minutes for the stuff to spread all over."

Gas kills chemical worker
Cancer Link To Chem

ical Exposed by

1) —Theers from long exposure
ic Work, etc. cause

Cancerous chemicals

Drastic action needed at or

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Oil, Chemical and Workers Union and Ralph Nader-backed Research Group asked for Department Safety take on

rtment requested

ergency action

to chemicals

Chemicals

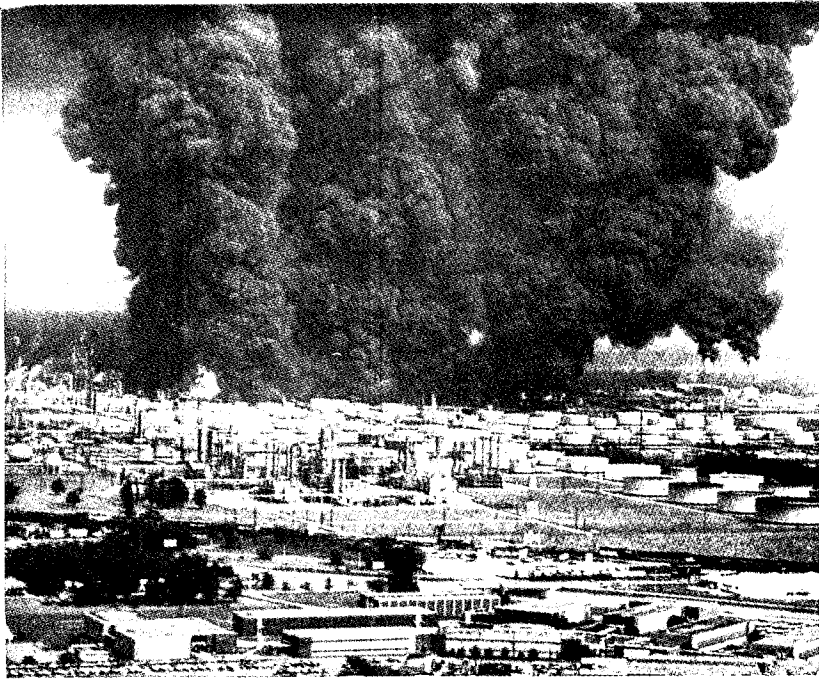
Called

Killers

WASHINGTON (UPI) — Oil, Chemical and Workers Union and the

Chemical Union
Cancer Safeguar

The Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union and the Ralph Nader-backed Health



Explosion at Mobil's Beaumont, Texas, refinery in 1970 killed two workers.

Shell's own oil additive, the much-advertised TCP, is extremely toxic. Exposure to small amounts of one of its ingredients can cause a worker to lose control of his or her limbs. In severe cases, death can result. Shell, nevertheless, continues to produce TCP.

There are over 1600 different chemicals present in most of the 260 refineries across the country. Most of these chemicals have never been tested for their medical effects on the men and women who work with them, let alone limits set as to safe exposure levels (called Threshold Safety Limits). Only 450 chemicals have Threshold Safety Limits, or about one out of every 1000 in use.

SAFETY SACRIFICED FOR PROFITS

The short and long range effects of exposure to deadly chemicals is one part of the story. The other is the dangerous safety conditions. In February, 1973, an explosion occurred in the world's largest liquified natural gas storage tank on Staten Island, New Jersey. Forty-four men were killed inside.

That same year, in Tucson, Arizona, a tank car exploded. In Richmond, California, a chemical plant exploded. Accidents, explosions, injuries of various kinds happen all the time.

"THEY RUN THE PLANT UNTIL IT FALLS APART"

There are explanations for these "accidents." In the case of Mr. Henderson, who was burned to death in the Martinez refinery, Shell simply short-manned the unit to cut costs. Henderson paid with his life. Often, as one oil worker described it,

"They run the plant until it falls apart. They operate on the theory of running the calculated risk. By calculated risk they mean that they will run a unit until its falls apart, then repair it fast. This is cheaper to do every six months or three months than preventative maintenance.

They also run the risk of shortmanning units. Not having enough men on a unit to operate it properly, but just enough so that they can correct an upset conditions without going off specification (production schedules). They feel they can run with fewer people."

"PIPE AS THIN AS BEER CAN"

Another reason for what happens in these plants is the lack of preventative maintenance. In January, 1968, an explosion occurred in the Shell chemical plant in Padadena, Texas. Two men died from heart attacks during the fire and two men were seriously injured. An investigation later revealed that the pipe carrying sulfuric acid and popylene under 450 pounds of pressure per square inch had been allowed to corrode to the point that its walls were as thin as beer cans.

CHILDREN DIE OFF THE JOB

The effects of these hazards do not stop at the refinery gates. The families of the men and women working in these plants are often victims. In a plant near New Orleans, one worker was accidentally sprayed with a small amount of acrylonitrile. Some

SHELL'S CANARIES

You can't say Shell has completely ignored hazards to its workers' health. From 1963-69 Shell used a canary in a cage as a safety device² at its Houston chemical plant. The canary's job was to detect the presence of carbon monoxide, which is invisible, odorless, and deadly. When the canary died, thought Shell, it was time for the chemical workers to leave.

Shell went through a lot of canaries. Eventually, the canary was replaced by a machine. Shell informed the workers that the machine would detect the gas sooner than the canary. In fact, by the time the canaries died, the workers already would have been affected.

of the material dried on his shirt. When the man got home, he went with his wife to the market, carrying their 13 month old daughter. The little girl snuggled up to her father. The child got convulsions. The doctor at the time did not know what caused the convulsions. Later he told the parents, "I'm pretty sure it was the acrylonitrile."

Similar stories are told by many workers, cases in which children become sick, or the entire family is affected for several days by chemicals brought home on clothing, lunchpails, or equipment.

In Houston, Texas, three children of workers in one refinery contracted leukemia. A physician told the parents of one of the children that they probably got the leukemia from contact with chemicals brought home from the refinery on their father's clothing.

COMMUNITIES BECOME CANCER WARDS

Refineries are often the single largest stationary source of pollutants in a community. Insurance rates for families of a refinery community are considerably higher than normal.

Still unpublished research, conducted by physicians in Los Angeles, reported that the cancer rate in the immediate community surrounding the refineries was 30-40% greater than normal. Here, just as inside the refinery, very little research has been done.



Shell pours pollution on Martinez, California, community.

The oil companies take no more responsibility for the health and safety of the community than they do for their workers. There is not profit in either.

HAZARDOUS CONDITIONS THREATEN ALL WORKERS

Conditions are deadly in the oil industry, but millions of other working people take the same risks every day when they walk into unsafe plants.

The 10,000 members of the United Steelworkers (now shackled with a no-strike contract) who work in coke ovens have a 10 times greater chance of getting lung cancer than the average American, due to breathing in coal tar pitch and hydrogen sulfide gases in the ovens.

BLACK LUNG - BROWN LUNG . . .

A strong rank and file movement in the Appalachian coal fields has brought miners' Black Lung disease to wide public attention. Less known is "Brown Lung" disease, that nearly 100,000 workers suffer from in the cotton textile industry. The disease is caused by breathing in tiny particles of cotton fibers on the job, and results in difficulty in breathing, disability, and eventually death.

While creating more profits for the companies, the use of continuous mining machines and high-speed cotton textile machines have resulted in the early deaths of thousands of workers.

PESTICIDES . . .

For decades, largely Mexican, Black and Asian farmworkers have had to tend and pick crops sprayed with poisonous pesticides. Only under the United Farmworkers Union contracts have farmworkers gained protection from deadly chemicals such as DDT.

AUTO SPEED UP . . .

Thousands of auto workers at General Motors put in 9 hours a day, 6 days a week. This compulsory overtime, on assembly lines speeded up to 60-100 cars per hour, has sent GM's production and profits to all time highs. For workers who put their hands under giant stamping machines thousands of times a day or stand under the never ending line of cars tightening bolts, it means bone crushing fatigue that has greatly increased safety hazards. It's no surprise that GM's assembly plants in Detroit, Ohio, New Jersey, and California have been hit by dozens of wildcat strikes in the last few years.



Ford workers in Milpitas, California, strike against unsafe plant conditions—1972.

“After ten years your loyalty is rewarded with a golden pin shaped in the Shell emblem. After 15 years you receive one with a ruby inserted, after 20, one with an emerald, and at 25 years you get one with diamonds.

“I am surprised it hasn't been brought to the ultimate conclusion, a tombstone in the shape of a Shell emblem. But maybe in death he could still serve Shell and have his body processed so they could recover their chemicals which he has breathed and absorbed.”

Daniel F. Keaveny
Shell Chemical, Martinez, California

ASBESTOS — THE DEATH TOLL

In this study conducted by Dr. Irving Selikoff and his co-workers at the Mt. Sinai Medical School, 199 out of 689 workers at the Manville asbestos plant in New Jersey (largest in the world) died between 1959 and 1972. Of these 199, at least 96 died from diseases related to asbestos.

	Deaths	
	No.	%
Lung Cancer	27	14%
Mesothelioma	15	8%
Cancer of Gastrointestinal Tract	13	7%
Cancer All Other Sites	17	9%
Abestosis	24	12%
All Other Causes	103	52%
Total Deaths	199	102%

ASBESTOS . . .

Asbestos—used in roofing material, floor tiles, and ironing board covers—is a deadly killer. One out of every four asbestos workers in New York City dies of lung cancer, and workers using asbestos in the construction trades and shipyards are also subject to the disease.

The list could go on and on. The dangers workers face on the job are not new, but what has changed is that workers all over the country are beginning to fight back, led by coal miners and the oil and chemical workers. A growing number of workers and unions are now fighting for contracts with strong health and safety provisions, contracts which the workers can force the companies to abide by.

This is all the more important when you take a look at the present Federal laws covering workers health and safety.

FEDERAL LAW NOT ENOUGH

The unions, particularly the OCAW, fought hard against the big corporations to get the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970 through Congress. The law states that standards will be set by the Department of Labor for exposure to harmful substances and citations will be issued for violations of recognized health and safety hazards. The maximum penalty for violation of a standard is \$1000. If a man or woman is killed on the job, a maximum \$10,000 fine can be levied against the company. The law technically covers only 57 of the 80 million working people.

OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ACT

"Sec. 654(a). Each Employer (1) shall furnish to each of his employees employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards that are causing or are likely to cause death or serious physical harm to his employees; (2) shall comply with occupational safety and health standards promulgated under this Act . . ."

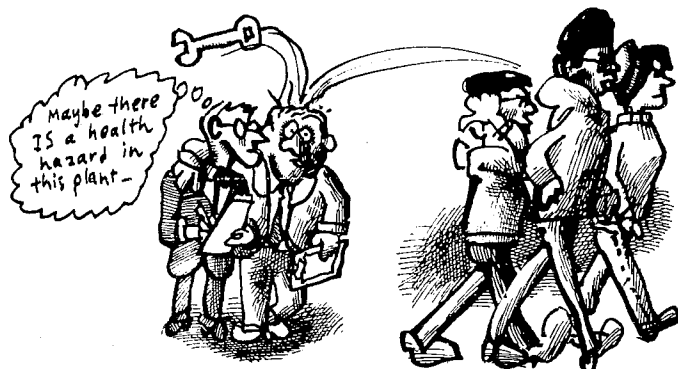
SHELL OIL COMPANY IN NEGOTIATIONS

"There may be some laws with which we don't wish to comply."

But workers have found that the law is riddled with so many weaknesses and loopholes that without a strong effort by the union to force compliance, it is of no use at all. The forms are so long and complicated that they discourage workers from filing complaints. The U.S. government employs only 50 industrial hygienists to enforce the law—a ratio of less than one to every million workers covered. There are more game wardens in the country.

Most of the compliance officers who tour plants and issue citations are unable to conduct the tests required to accurately assess hazards. Workers often have to take time off the job to file complaints and follow them up. Frequently it costs workers more in lost wages to file a complaint than the company is fined for violations. What it comes down to is that the unions must fight to enforce OSHA for it to be of any use to workers on the job.

On top of this, three out of every four workers today do not belong to unions. For them, largely because of the harassment from employers that is likely to follow the filing of a complaint with OSHA, the law is of no use at all.



Even with OSHA, health and safety hazards on the job have gotten worse in recent years. Many oil workers say conditions in the refineries really started to deteriorate in the mid 1960's, when the U.S. escalated the war in Vietnam. The 500,000 ground troops and the massive air war required huge amounts of fuels, herbicides, and other products and this resulted in speedups and increased hazards in the refineries.

By late 1972, health and safety had become an important part of the bargaining package of the OCAW. Shell refused to bargain, and the oil workers were ready.

**AN INJURY TO ONE
★ IS ★
AN INJURY TO ALL**

LOCAL 1-128
OCAW



THE STRIKE

When the strike was called on January 23, 1973, pickets were set up in front of the refinery gates from Anacortes, Washington to Norco, Louisiana. Oil workers set out immediately to gain the support of other working people and the entire community. In Washington and Texas oil workers traveled hundreds of miles to tell people about the strike and enlist support.

At the same time as pickets manned the refinery gates a nationwide consumer boycott was initiated. Strikers began to picket Shell service stations near the refineries. On a call from the Union, thousands of Shell credit cards were returned.

For the first time, many environmental, health and community groups supported the strike. The Sierra Club, the largest environmental organization in the country, endorsed the strike. Environmental Action, who planned the original Earth Days, worked hard on the strike.

SUPPORT BUILDS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

In a half dozen cities across the country Shell Strike Support Groups sprang up. Working together with the local unions, supporters walked the picket lines with strikers in front of the refineries, regularly boycotted Shell service stations and worked in many ways to direct public attention to the strike and boycott. In Seattle, San Francisco, Denver, Houston, New Orleans, Washington, Boston and other cities, support demonstrations were held to coincide with the Shell stockholders meeting.

Around the country, the slogan "their fight is our fight" began to spread. The Berkeley City Council cancelled its contract for Shell fuel, taxi drivers in New York refused to buy Shell gasoline and unions began to cancel Shell contracts and return Shell credit cards.

Rank and file Longshoremen in San Francisco held a work stoppage on the docks and refused to unload a ship carrying Shell cargo. In the East Bay, the Unemployed Workers Organizing Committee demonstrated with Martinez strikers in front of C. Norman Peterson, a company that contracted scabs to break the strike.



Bay Area strike supporters join Shell pickets to block scabs.

SHELL, FARAH, FARMWORKERS – ON STRIKE!

In California, Shell strikers jointly boycotted with striking members of the United Farmworkers Union, moving between Shell stations and Safeway stores. In both California and Wash-

ington, Shell strikers supported the struggle of 4,000 Chicano workers to unionize the giant Farah Pants Company in Texas and New Mexico. In Martinez, California, two Farah strikers spoke at the Union Hall and received a very warm welcome. Termutez Gonzales, speaking to the Shell strikers, said, "It doesn't matter if it takes a month, a year, two years – just stick together."

FARAH STRIKERS SPEAKING TO SHELL STRIKERS AND WIVES – Martinez, California Union Hall, May 1973.

"Brothers and sisters, I'm here to let you all know that your struggle is our struggle. On the 9th of this month, we will have been on strike for a year . . . I want to let you know that no matter how long it takes, never lose your courage to struggle. Because you, like us, are fighting for your rights.

"The reason we are on strike is because we don't have security on our jobs, because of the low wages. I know this lady that worked for Farah for 45 years, and she got paid \$2.30 an hour. We don't have any maternity benefits, any seniority either. . . .

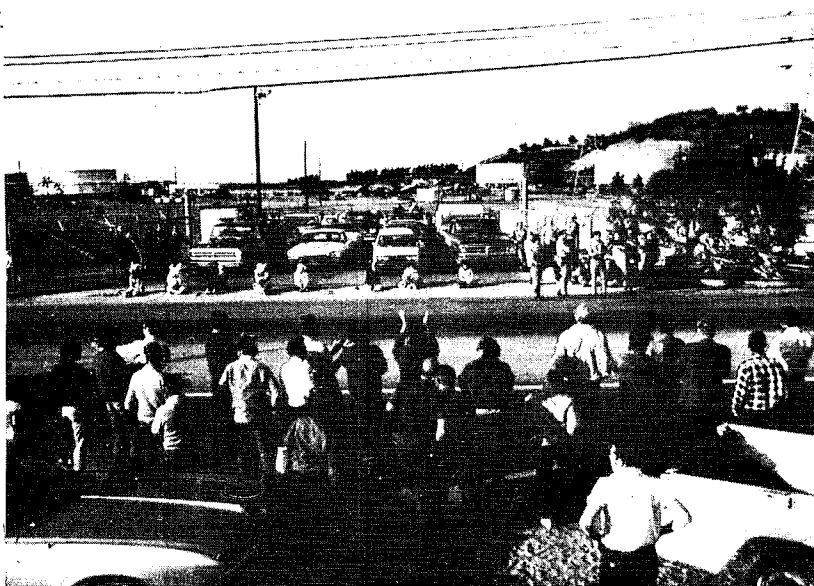
"You people are fighting for health and safety, and I know because they don't care what happens to you or to us. So don't let 'em, don't let 'em tell you what to do. You do what *you* think is right. Because if you guys ever die in an accident down there, they're just going to go out and get somebody else in your place. . . .

"So the thing is for you guys to stick together, not to say, 'I'm getting tired of this, it's two months already. I'm tired, I'm getting out.' Don't say that, show 'em you can do it!"

(Shell striker): "You're a great inspiration to our people, because what you make when you work is less than what we get when we're on strike. So you've been a great inspiration to us. We appreciate having you here . . . Viva la Huelga!"

boycott..





Shell wives sit down in front of gates to Martinez refinery—April 12, 1973. Thirty minutes later six squad cars of police arrest fourteen women.

SHELL ATTACKS UNION

Shell's position from the outset was to test the strength of the oil workers. "You'll be back on your hands and knees in less than thirty days," the Martinez refinery manager stated. Shell filed an "unfair labor practices" suit against the OCAW with the National Labor Relations Board at the beginning of the strike, claiming that health and safety issues were not legitimate strike issues. But Shell's case was so weak that the NLRB ruled in favor of the union.

To intimidate strikers, Shell hired hundreds of Burns Guards and enlisted the help of the local Sheriffs departments to try and break the determination of the strikers. In Norco, Louisiana, sheriffs cars were stationed on refinery gates 24 hours a day. Shell's management continually photographed strikers and their supporters. But all this only increased the determination of the strikers.

The manager of the Martinez refinery made no bones about Shell's goal. Pointing over to the EXXON refinery in Benicia, across the bay, he said, "See that refinery over there, pretty soon it will be just like that here."

Exxon has always had small, company controlled unions, which John D. Rockefeller forced on oil workers in the early days of the industry. Shell, the second largest oil company behind Exxon, was also stepping up its efforts to weaken the OCAW.

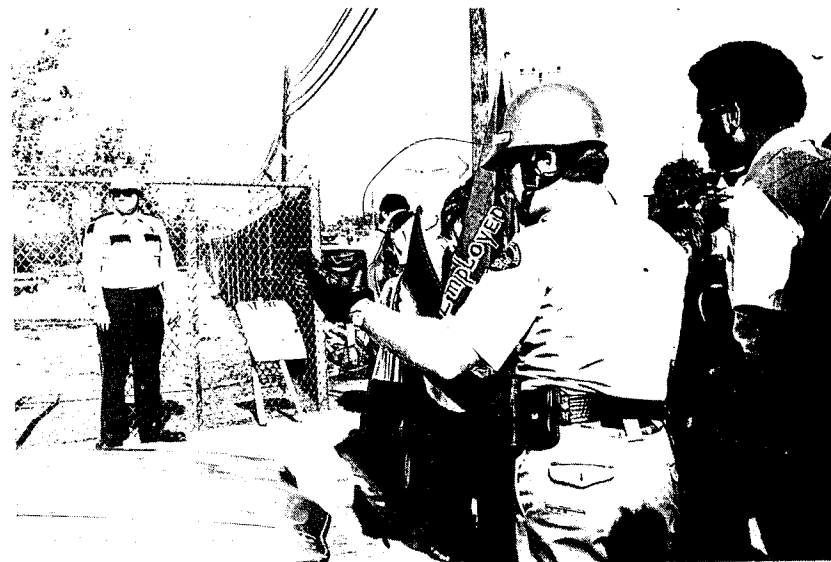
OIL, CHEMICAL AND ATOMIC WORKERS INTERNATIONAL UNION, AFL-CIO, CLC

The OCAW is the largest Union of oil and chemical workers in North America, with nearly 200,000 members; 70,000 chemical workers, 65,000 oil workers, the rest are men and women who work in atomic plants and various related fields.

The present Union is the result of a merger of two separate unions in 1955, the Oil Workers International Union and the United Gas, Coke and Chemical Workers. The OCAW's roots go as far back as WW I, when the first organizing of oil workers occurred in Texas and California.

Since that time, unionization in the oil industry has been brutally fought by all the large oil monopolies, particularly Standard Oil (EXXON), who to this day has maintained company unions and has hardly been penetrated by the OCAW. The struggle to build a unified national union amongst oil and chemical workers has been a difficult fight, and today over one-third of all chemical and oil workers are not represented by any union at all.

In the face of Shell's hard line position, oil workers had several ideas about what needed to be done to win. The Union worked hard to build the boycott and obtain endorsements from environmental and community groups. In Anacortes, Martinez and Norco, oil workers began to focus attention on the scabs brought in to break the strike. A striker in Martinez explained, "If our Union is to be strong, we have to make the scabs respect our picket lines."



Sheriffs from Martinez area escorting scabs through picket lines.

WOMEN STAND UP TO SHELL

The wives of many strikers understood that in order to win the strike the plant had to be shut down. They saw the importance of keeping the scabs out, and many wives were arrested in front of the refinery gates blocking the exit of the scabs.

In Norco and Martinez, women held demonstrations in front of the Sheriff's office, protesting the harassment of strikers.

They boycotted service stations, leafletted the community, and stood on the picket lines. In Houston, women marched up to the 45th floor to see the President of Shell Oil and present their demands.

STRIKING WOMEN AND WIVES PAY A VISIT TO SHELL HEADQUARTERS IN HOUSTON.

Interview with Dorothy Curlee, shop steward and 30 year employee at the Deer Park, Texas refinery. The interview picks up after the women have been told that Harry Bridges, president of Shell Oil, was in Europe on a trip. Then John Shehan (Vice President in charge of production), who used to work at the refinery in 1947, came out to talk to them.

"... But before we left he told one of the ladies that there wasn't anything out at the plant to worry about, that there wasn't anything out at the plant that could harm her husband. So I said, I beg your pardon, I don't believe I understand what you said, Mr. Shehan. (I don't think at that time he realized who I was.) What about benzene Mr. Shehan?

He said, that's right. He said benzene won't hurt you.

And I said, ladies, there is no point in talking with this man any more. He had been with Shell since 1947 and spent seven years out at that refinery and if he doesn't know enough about benzene then he doesn't know enough to even bother to talk with him. And then he said that benzene won't hurt you unless perhaps you drink some or take a bath.

Now we girls are pretty well brought up on what benzene will do to you. There is a lot of benzene in the plants. We cook it, we work it. Benzene is very fatal. I personally would like to see benzene taken off the market. It can produce death without someone even knowing what is happening. The girls knew this, because it is one of our more common materials.

A lot of people on the outside think that refineries only make gasoline and things like that. But we knew what benzene was. So we knew that Mr. Shehan either didn't know what he was talking about or else he was just flat lying."

One woman in Martinez described how the conditions men faced inside the plant affected the entire family.

Even though health and safety issues played an important role in drawing the women into the struggle, more was involved. They understood that Shell's refusal to bargain with the Union was an attack on all they and their husbands had worked and struggled for.

"You send your husband to work in the morning and all during the day in the back of your mind is one question, 'Am I going to get a call from Shell today? Is my husband going to get hurt? What's going to happen if my husband gets hurt? Where's that going to leave me?' When Robert Henderson got burned up, died, I'll never forget it."

At first, some men tried to discourage the women from participating in the strike. Though women had helped before, this time they were taking a much more active role. This lead Jackie Costa, chairwoman of the Wives Committee in Martinez, to get up in a strike meeting and say, "You ask me what right I have to be concerned about the strike? After you are dead, I'll still be here."



Women protest strike harassment in front of Sheriff's office in Martinez.

This is how Dorothy Curlee, a thirty year employee of Shell in the Deer Park laboratory and a shop steward, felt about the strike:

“Health and safety is a matter of life and death, it’s a matter of survival as far as we are concerned. If we don’t have protection, a lot of us will die. It’s pretty obvious that I’m not going to be at the plant for another thirty years, so I feel real strong about getting this for the younger people coming in, the men and women who will be working in the plant after I am gone, and after my brothers are gone. That’s really what unionism is all about. The conditions are getting more advanced and more dangerous. We must win this. Our lives are at stake. That’s what we are fighting for. And that’s what we will win!”

SHELL FORCED TO SETTLE

Though the support of other workers, unions, and community groups was important, the strike was won by the strikers together with their wives.

One of the big lies that all the oil companies use is that the plants are so highly automated, that oil workers are not as important as they used to be. Automation has eliminated a lot of jobs, but over 100,000 workers are still required to keep the oil refineries running.

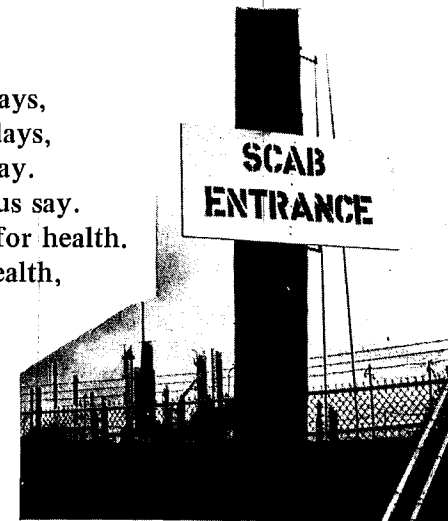
When the oil workers walked out, Shell was forced to bring in over a thousand scabs to keep the plants running. As the months added up, production schedules in the refineries and chemical



Strikers picket Shell gasoline station in San Francisco. In five months the Boycott cut sharply into Shell’s sales.

ODE TO A SCAB

Forgive not their scabby ways,
We stood out for many a days,
Wind and rain, night and day.
As we walked, you’d hear us say.
We fight for life. We fight for health.
The scabs fight for only wealth,
They choose their bed and
so they lay.
Unwanted, scorned, and
every day we shun them
one, we shun them all.
We who came from the
Union Hall.



— by a Shell Chemical Worker

Anacortes, Washington refinery.

plants fell to a fraction of normal. Contracts to supply other companies with Shell gasoline additives could not be met. The maintenance inside the plant deteriorated to the point that some scabs refused to work because of the danger. Fights broke out inside the refineries between scabs and management.

The secretarial staff inside the plants began to circulate petitions calling for the strike to be settled, rather than continue to face the angry strikers at the plant gates. In the end, Shell had to settle with the oil workers in order to keep the plant running at all.

In the first days of the strike some people tried to explain Shell’s refusal to settle by the fact that Shell was a “foreign owned” company. (Shell is 69% owned by Royal-Dutch Shell). This proved not to be the case.

The other oil companies were helping Shell as much as they could, buying and selling gasoline for Shell. In Los Angeles, other companies tried to enforce a blacklist against striking workers who sought other jobs. It became very clear that oil workers have no more in common with the management of an “American” company than they do with Shell. A boss is a boss.

After five months of striking, Shell was forced to settle with the oil workers. They had turned completely around, from “nothing to bargain about” to settling with the Union and establishing Union-Management health and safety committees.

DEFINITION OF A SCAB

After God had finished the rattlesnake, the toad and the vampire, he had some awful substance left with which he made a SCAB. A SCAB is a two-legged animal with a cork-screw soul, a water-logged brain, and a combination backbone made of jelly and glue. Where others have hearts, he carries a tumor of rotten principles. . . .

A strikebreaker is a traitor to himself, a traitor to his God, a traitor to his country, a traitor to his family and a traitor to his class.

There is nothing lower than a SCAB.

— Jack London



Strikers force scabs to put in "overtime" in Martinez refinery parking lot.

SETTLEMENT SEEN AS VICTORY, BUT . . .

In a last move to try and divide the workers, Shell got the Houston local to settle with the company before the other locals settled. Many strikers in other parts of the country felt strongly that "no one should go back until we all go back together." The settlement did demoralize many people, and weakened the position of the other locals still on strike.

In other parts of the country, where a more militant fight was waged, Shell demanded that several men be terminated and suspended for their strike activities. This was bitterly fought by many workers in Norco, Anacortes, and Martinez. The voting was close, but the locals finally voted to return to work and accept arbitration over the firings and suspensions.

When the strikers returned to work they immediately saw the effectiveness of their strike. Equipment had not been repaired in weeks. Inadequate maintenance had pushed operations well beyond the safety limits. Production was below normal.



BACK TO WORK

Because the OCAW has not won nationwide bargaining with Shell, each local is forced to bargain separately with the company. This strike demonstrated how important nationwide bargaining is to the unity of oil workers.

The separate settlements in each refinery make it difficult to get a clear idea of the nature of the contracts. A joint Union-Management health and safety committee has been established in each plant, and the Union will now have access to company records on death and disease rates of workers in the plants. But, the powers of the committees are less than the oil workers fought for. Decisions of the committees are not binding on the companies.

The first few days back at work Shell tried to butter up workers with hot lunches and free cigarettes because the refineries required extra work to get them running again. But the honeymoon ended quickly. Within days the new management committee began to harass people who took a leading role in the strike. Shell was more arrogant than ever. Reports began to pour in from other companies that management had taken Shell's lead and refused to budge an inch on health and safety matters.

"For everything we've won we've had to knock them down and take it away." — Chairman of the Strike Committee in Martinez, California.

HISTORY OF OIL WORKERS' STRUGGLE

The Shell strike of 1973 is part of oil workers' long and militant history. The big oil monopolies have fought the Union each step along the way. When oil workers have demanded the eight hour day, higher wages, and better working conditions, they've been met with repression.

In *History of the Oil Workers International Union-CIO*, Harvey O'Connor describes the oil industry in 1915, "Wages were so low that the workers' children had to be fed into the child labor factories that flourished within the stench of the refinery fumes, so that there would be something to eat at home."

When oil workers at the Standard Oil refinery in Bayonne, New Jersey went on strike in 1915, Rockefeller's goons shot to death nine strikers and wounded fifty. Oil workers struck again next year, and Rockefeller's gunmen killed seven more oil workers.

As O'Connor puts it, oil workers have found over the years that "concessions have been won only through intense pressure . . . any let up in the pressure by the Union is taken as a signal to take away benefits or chisel on the contract. That means that the Union cannot afford to relax the pressure at any time."

This is even more true today, as the declining profits of all the oil monopolies force them to try and exact even greater profits from the men and women who actually produce the oil.

At a time when many labor leaders talk about how strikes are "outmoded," the Shell strikers have showed that the road to improving health and safety conditions on the job is through organized struggle. But it is only the first round. These contracts expire in December, 1974.

Weeks after the settlement, Shell and the other oil companies have already begun to avoid enforcement of the contracts. As a striker in Martinez put it,

"This contract is a minor victory. If we get it enforced it will be a major victory."



Health and Safety Clause From the Original OCAW Bargaining Package Presented to the Companies in 1972.

Section 1. The Company shall institute and maintain all necessary precautions for safeguarding the health and safety of its employees, and all employees are expected to cooperate in the implementation thereof. Both the Company and the Union recognize their mutual obligations to assist in the prevention, correction and elimination of all unhealthy and unsafe working conditions and practices.

Section 2. There shall be established a joint labor-management Health and Safety Committee, consisting of equal Union and Company representatives, but not less than two each nor more than four each. It shall hold meetings as often as necessary, but not less than once each month, at a regularly scheduled time and place, for the purpose of jointly considering, inspecting, investigating, and reviewing health and safety conditions and practices and investigating accidents, and for the purpose of jointly and effectively making construction recommendations with respect thereto, including but not limited to the formulation of changes to eliminate unhealthy and unsafe conditions and practices and to improve existing health and safety conditions and practices. All matters considered and handled by the Committee shall be reduced to writing, and joint minutes of all meetings of the Committee shall be made and maintained. Time spent in connection with the work of the Committee by Union Representatives shall be considered and compensated for as their regularly assigned work.

Either party may, on its own or in cooperation with the other party, arrange for an inspection of facilities by appropriate inspectors of government, or the International Union and/or its designated agents; provided that such inspections shall be made in the company of representatives of both labor and management and that all reports, advice, recommendations, opinions, findings, and anything else of pertinence, whether verbal or documentary, shall be made equally to the Union and to the Company.

Section 3. The Company agrees to provide and maintain adequate health and safety facilities, personal protective devices and in-plant apparatus for detecting and recording potential and actual safety and health and environmental hazards, and the Company agrees further to provide a continuous training program to insure at all times that all employees are adequately trained in maintaining, handling and using such facilities and apparatus.

The Company agrees to fully disclose, in writing, to the Union, the full identity of all chemical and related substances and their threshold limit values. Such identification shall include, but not be restricted to, the chemical, drug, biological or pharmaceutical name and/or names, relevant health and safety hazards and precautions, the Maximum concentrations of exposures, health and safety precautions to be taken, health and safety symptoms, medical remedies and antidotes.

The Company shall submit to the Union annually all available information on the morbidity and mortality experience of all present and former employees.

Section 4. The Company shall pay for the appropriate physical examination and medical tests at a frequency and extent determined from time to time by the joint labor-management committee. A report of all medical findings and examinations shall be provided only to the affected employee and the Company.

The Company shall provide adequate medical emergency first aid facilities.

Accident and illness reports required by the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970, including OSHA Forms No. 100 and No. 101, shall be provided to the Union upon request.

Section 5. No employee shall be required to perform work that endangers his or any other employee's health or physical safety or under conditions which are in violation of the health and safety rules, or any local, state or federal health or safety laws. An employee's refusal to perform such work shall not warrant or justify any present or future disciplinary action.

Section 6. No employee shall lose pay, benefits or any other rights provided for under their collective bargaining agreement for fulfilling any obligation consistent with this Health and Safety article and/or for carrying out any function under the Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970.

Section 7. The Company agrees to contribute \$0.02 for each regularly scheduled hour worked by employees to a special Health and Safety Fund to be administered by a three member board consisting of one representative from industry, one from the International Union and the third to be selected by the Industry and Union representative from the medical or science profession.

The Fund shall be used but not limited to research and medical testing, laboratory facilities, education and training, employment of professional personnel and the hiring of appropriate consultants.

Section 8. Any dispute arising out of interpretation of this article shall be subject to the grievance procedure.

On Health and Safety . . .

We are working toward a comprehensive pamphlet on workers health and safety conditions, describing conditions in most major industries, why it is that way and how to fight back. We would appreciate any help you can give us in collecting case studies or personal accounts about hazards and efforts to fight them.

Please send material to United Front Press. In turn, if we can be of any help to you in publishing or distributing of related material, please contact us.

OF RELATED INTEREST FROM UNITED FRONT PRESS

INTERNATIONAL RUNAWAY SHOP: Why US Companies Are Moving Their Plants Abroad, by Mitch Zimmerman and the United Front Press Staff. 40¢

IN CHINA, MANAGERS WORK!: A lively description of factory life and worker participation in China today. Text by US-China Friendship Association. 25¢

SI SE PUEDE! (It Can Be Done!): The story of the present struggle of the United Farmworkers Union in the agricultural valleys of California and their history to Build the Union. By the Salinas Citizens Committee in Defense of Farmworkers. English and Spanish. 25¢

A UNIONISTS GUIDE TO THE OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND HEALTH ACT: A short but helpful guide to OSHA and how it works. Written by Urban Planning Aid. 20¢