



RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF STRIKING U.S. OIL WORKERS

February 9, 2015

Workers Uniting, representing over two million workers in Canada, Ireland, the United Kingdom and the United States, salutes the workers at eleven refining plants in the United States who launched a strike on February 1 to demand safe workplaces and fair treatment from multinational oil companies.

The multinational companies that dominate the U.S. and global refining industry are some of the world's most profitable corporations. Yet despite these high returns to shareholders and corporate chieftains, U.S. oil refineries continue to suffer an unacceptably high level of workplace deaths and injuries. In the past 8 years, there have been 349 reported refinery fires, causing explosions and many fatalities. Far too often, these deaths result from management's failure to follow established safety practices, fatigue due to mandatory overtime, and use of contract employees who lack necessary qualifications and skills.

The impact of corporate negligence in the refineries is not limited to refinery workers and their families, but also poses a health and environmental risk to surrounding communities.

As USW Vice-President for Oil Bargaining Gary Beevers stated: "This work stoppage is about onerous overtime; unsafe staffing levels; dangerous conditions the industry continues to ignore; the daily occurrences of fires, emissions, leaks and explosions that threaten local communities without the industry doing much about it; the industry's refusal to make opportunities for workers in the trade crafts; the flagrant contracting out that impacts health and safety on the job; and the erosion of our workplace, where qualified and experienced union workers are replaced by contractors when they leave or retire."

Workers Uniting commends the oil workers unions around the world that have expressed their solidarity with the USW strikers, and calls on them to redouble their efforts to confront the assault of global oil corporations on the rights of refinery workers. An injury to one is an injury to all.

The oil workers' strike for safe workplaces and safe communities underscores the global importance of the right to strike. In the UK, this right is now under attack by the Tory government which has proposed new restrictions on the right to strike, including increased strike vote thresholds and removal of the ban on bringing in agency workers to break strikes

In the International Labor Organization, multinational employers have launched an all-out assault on the right to strike, taking the untenable position that ILO Convention 87 on Freedom of Association gives workers the right to form unions and bargain collectively, but does not give them the right to use the economic weapon of the strike to enforce these commitments – a view recently and explicitly rejected by the Supreme Court of Canada.

The global trade union movement led by the ITUC has called for this dispute to be referred to the International Court of Justice Court as required by the ILO Constitution, but a number of governments, including the U.S., have not endorsed this referral. We call on the U.S. to support the referral, and we call on the Canadian, Irish and UK governments take all possible actions to ensure that it occurs.