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Solidarity Key to Winning New Oil Contracts

On June 23, Local 13-1 members at the Marathon Galveston Bay Refinery (GBR), the last local engaged in the 2015 National Oil Bargaining ULP strikes, ratified a new contract. This brought to a close a 143-day unfair labor practice strike.

Health and Safety Crucial Issue

Following months of hard bargaining, Local 13-1 negotiators got Marathon to agree to six full-time union health and safety representatives. The company originally insisted on only two.

More of these safety positions will also be added when there is an excessive workload or a complete shutdown for a turnaround.

In addition, Local 13-1 negotiators were successful in retaining the dependent care benefits that the company wanted to eliminate.

On April 8 Marathon gave the local its last, best and final offer. The local rejected this offer, and a federal mediator stepped in to broker a new offer with eight adjustments. Still, Local 13-1 members voted it down on May 18.

After union negotiators were able to bargain changes to five additional items, the two sides reached a tentative agreement.

Industry Takes Hard Line

This round of bargaining was difficult because Shell Oil Co., the lead bargainer for the oil sector, and other oil companies decided to

challenge long-held local union agreements.

USW oil workers, however, stood strong. They marched, rallied, picketed, held candlelight vigils and engaged in other creative actions.

Members and their families shared meals as one local would cook for another. Locals also held family nights and conducted activities for the children of ULP strikers. In Texas, ULP strikers, families and supporters gathered for worship one Sunday morning.

Members from other unions and USW locals not on strike contributed thousands of dollars to those walking the picket line and provided tons of canned goods and other household items.

Holding Firm in the Face of Adversity

If the oil companies thought they could divide and conquer the membership, they found out otherwise. Out of almost 7,000 ULP strikers at 15 facilities across the country, only a few hundred crossed the picket line. Most were newly hired and on probation.

USW members ignored the company letters sent to their homes and posted to company websites and Facebook pages that encouraged them to break the

strike. Instead, they continued to staff the 24-hour picket lines even in challenging weather conditions.

The collective actions and union meetings created even stronger bonds between members and in communities. This solidarity forced Royal Dutch Shell to finally bargain a fair national pattern agreement and other oil companies to settle the local issues that forced our members out to walk picket lines.

At the May oil meeting, President Gerard complimented the oil members for their solidarity and persistence in getting a pattern agreement.

“Did we get everything we wanted? No. Did we get enough to have a good deal? Yes. Be proud of yourselves,” he said.