

# Ballot Ready?

## Our OCA members have now been joined by their COTA colleagues

in rejecting employer's proposals to the respective agreements and in doing so have made it clear - now is the time to stand up for the future. The OCG unions are working hard to make that happen. Further telephone conferences have been held with OCA offshore workplace reps, to brief them on strike ballot process and the OCG unions have been on the road engaging with and explaining the process to members, see page 3.

The paperwork for an independent legal Strike Ballot with the OCA has been finalised and scrutinised by the legal department in Unite, while the other Trade Unions are preparing. This is essential because of anti-union laws in the UK and the ever-present threat of court action by the employers to challenge our union member's democratic right to take industrial action. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that members advise if their employment details have changed recently - for example, a changed job title, a new employer, different installation, a new address, or a name change.

Regular teleconferences will be held with Trade Union Offshore Workplace Reps, and their positive contribution and support for their union members is second to none. This will be done with the OCA and the COTA reps, as well as staging meetings and webinars for reps and members to provide all the information they will need.

After successful industrial action last year within Woodgroup/Shell operations, the Unite, RMT and GMB members are all too familiar with the timescale a ballot takes. Once the paperwork has been approved by our legal teams we are aiming for the strike ballot notices to be served on the OCA employers in the last week of April, and the strike ballot to run for two months to ensure that we get a high turnout. We MUST meet a 50% threshold because of the new anti-union laws introduced on 1 March 2017 by the Conservative UK Government. The strike ballot process will take a few months to be completed. We are still at the planning stage with the COTA process but we anticipate more information on this being available in the coming days. Assuming COTA members move to an industrial action ballot we plan to coordinate this to run concurrently with the OCA for maximum impact.

It is vital that Trade Union Reps and union members keep us informed with specific dates of any planned offshore shutdowns or increased activity on their installations. If we are to make maximum impact and exert maximum influence on the real

paymasters - the oil companies - we must ensure the action you take hits their operations. We cannot achieve this without your input so we need as much intelligence as you can gather about forthcoming operations. We also need you to explain to your colleagues that this action is not about the 'here and now'

*This could be the future for all of us if we do not make a stand.*

it is about the future of this industry.

The fact is; if we are not organised and cannot show any resistance, then the future is bleak!

Our seafaring colleagues know only too well what happens with social dumping as foreign nationals are exploited at your cost! It is already happening across the supply chain in the maritime sector, supply vessels, construction vessels, decommissioning vessels, all of them working with exploited workers earning less than half the National Minimum Wage! This could be the future for all of us if we do not make a stand.

All the Offshore Trade Unions are now working very closely which is vital during this OCA and the potential COTA pay dispute. The solidarity and unity of the offshore workers will give strength to the determination of your trade unions to secure a decent pay increase and halt the race to the bottom, thereby protecting workers from future cuts in pay or terms and conditions or the loss of employment opportunities.

## Now is the time to stand up, now is the time to get BALLOT READY!

Email:

Unite - AberdeenStaff@unitemailings.org or telephone 01224 645271

RMT - oilc.rmt.secretary@gmail.com or telephone 01224 210118

GMB - Maureen.lyons@gmb.org or telephone 01324 670676



## OCG – behind the scenes!

When asked by the Scottish Government recently to set out where we felt the industry has responded poorly to current challenges on workforce issues the following list of behaviours identified by our member unions was submitted to the Education and Skills Committee. We should also point out this list is in no way exhaustive as to what the OCG unions have complained about when it comes to the treatment of our members across the sector.

- ❖ Operators (oil companies) terminating long term contracts with Tier 1 and 2 contractors and awarding them to 'body shops'. No application of TUPE and workers forced into sham self-employment status to retain work;
- ❖ Operators refusing to fund long established payments associated with delays forcing Tier 1 and 2 contractors to increase the use of short term/zero hour terms. This is a first for the industry;
- ❖ Contractors issuing "assignment" details stating the trip will be "1 to 21 days" to be determined by the operator. Workers don't know how long they will be away and how long they will be paid for;
- ❖ Employers (contractors) saying they will charge workers anything between £500 and £1,000 for missing a check-in/flight;
- ❖ Many hundreds of workers being offered "ad-hoc" contracts as an alternative to redundancy. Subsequently they sit at home for months waiting for work with no income. When they request redundancy they are told they aren't in a redundancy situation. They are effectively being duped out of any redundancy payments;
- ❖ More and more workers being threatened with charges for any training they have been provided should they leave the employment of the company;
- ❖ More and more workers being denied any holiday entitlement, indeed the OCA recently suggested it was necessary for production and safety operations that workers take

holidays during existing field breaks (rest periods);

- ❖ Disproportionate disciplinary sanctions applied to avoid redundancy payment liabilities with spurious charges applied such as: failure to uphold company values; potentially bringing the company into disrepute; failure to stop the job (despite having raised with supervisors and told to proceed).
- ❖ Extremely subjective elements in redundancy selection processes;
- ❖ Operators 'not requesting back' (NRB) workers, with contractors subsequently raising false disciplinary charges in justification;
- ❖ Companies ignoring TUPE requirements;
- ❖ Spurious redundancy 'consultation' processes, where decisions have already been made.
- ❖ Specifically in relation to skills, the industry has not sought to engage with the unions in a strategic way to ensure that, should the price start to climb, skills will be available to sustain an upturn in production. The industry does not seem capable of appreciating that the loss of staff and skills today will inevitably constrain capacity in the future.

### **Is there really an alternative to decommissioning?**

A great deal has been written recently about decommissioning and different opinions expressed. It is without question a debate which is warming up and you can rest assured that OCG members will participate fully in that debate as it is critical for our members who are desperate to see employment opportunities sustained as and when any decommissioning projects arise. To date that sadly has not been the case, as seen with the CNR Murchison and now the BP Miller. So how will we meet the UK Government objectives around "Maximising Economic Recovery" when it comes to the question of decommissioning?

Take a sharp intake of breath before you read on!

*...the tax-payer will foot at least half the bill which is estimated at anything between £30 and £60 Billion!*

What if the threat of Decom' cost liability was removed from any potential buyer of old assets? Could this be a feasible way to extend the field

life of aging assets and therefore the jobs of many workers? If you're reading this you'll now be asking, who picks up the tab for the removal then? That's a question which has recently generated another question - is there an alternative to removal? For the environmentalists there will be outrage to any suggestion that old platforms are left in place, and they have a point. But equally, when you dig into this subject there are arguments both ways and the OCG will be looking at every aspect of the various arguments.

But consider just one aspect for now; offshore workers employed for many years on these structures know only too well that many have effectively become artificial reefs, where large and diverse marine habitats have developed. In the summer months especially workers can regularly watch whales, dolphins, seals, huge shoals of fish, as well as migrating birds. **With this in mind, what would be the impact on that marine habitat with complete removal, if that can actually be achieved?**

Putting aside the marine habitats issue who will pay for complete removal currently? The fact is, the tax-payer (that's you) will foot at least half the bill which is estimated at anything between £30 and £60 Billion! It's entirely reasonable therefore that we should at least ensure that tax payers get a return on the £billions they will pay for the clean-up, by ensuring the creation of jobs, the development and retention of skills, and sustaining them. During the destruct phase of some installations there will be a need for several hundred skilled workers, but as seen with the recent destruction phase of the Murchison and Miller platforms, these jobs were taken up by foreign

nationals being exploited on pay rates well below the National Minimum wage. Workers from the Philippines, Malaysia and India shipped in to work for \$45 US a day doing months at a time. None of these workers is living in the UK, paying tax or NI in the UK and there is zero contribution to the state in return for taxpayers picking up at least half the tab. Not only that, as the “Renewables Sector” picks up in terms of wind farms we are seeing the same practice applied and few if any of the thousands made redundant from oil and gas securing employment in this sector.

This is happening at the same time as thousands of workers are made redundant across the industry! Where does all of this fit with “Maximising Economic Recovery”? Government must move to protect workers and moreover prevent exploitation at modern slavery rates of pay. We must ensure the corporations that have made countless £billions from our natural resources for decades are held to account in terms of jobs, as well as decent pay and conditions. Equally we must look at a strategy which delivers the best returns for the planet in terms of marine habitats and this may actually deliver benefits in these other areas. Daft? Maybe, but we’re exploring every avenue.

*Where does all of this fit with “Maximising Economic Recovery”?*

## OCG Roadshows start positively

### We started in Newcastle and finished in Aberdeen and here is a summary.

Full time officials from the OCG Trade Unions were in Newcastle, Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> of April, addressing open meetings where all offshore workers were invited to attend and share their views. [You don’t have to be a member to come along!] It has to be said we didn’t get huge turnouts, but this was just the start and those who did attend appreciated the opportunity to engage directly with the officials and to voice their opinions. The officials equally appreciated the often frank but constructive feedback received, all of which was captured and will be fed back to the respective executives of the OCG trade unions.

As we said goodbye to the last stop on our roadshow tour, we were filled with hope and optimism about the future. It was made abundantly clear that the workers want to fight, the workers want to work together and they want the OCG to work with them, and for them. These sentiments were however expressed with some reservations and obvious concerns, and those concerns surfaced at every venue. The main concern was around the declining numbers and the at times appalling treatment of our offshore workforce.



*“What do you think we should do?” “How should we do it?” “When should we do it?”* were just some of the questions asked at each event. The reaction was staggering. Almost in unison we were met with the same desire from all those attending ..... *“Together.”*

Vocal and passionate discussions took place arguing that separately and individually we are divided and weak, but together we can win this fight and many more. Additionally, we need to recruit more members to increase the membership density of the unions and give us a louder and stronger voice. The age of members was questioned as a concern but many argued this was not seen as an issue when there is a fight to be had, something which was proven when the Woodgroup dispute took place last year. We need to ENGAGE with them, not simply talk at them was the message, engage, educate and organise.

Various ideas were spoken about at length:

*We need to get more information out - pass your email to [ocg.project.coord@gmail.com](mailto:ocg.project.coord@gmail.com) to be kept up to date and share this with your colleagues offshore.*

*More union representatives or installation reps were needed to support members on the ground*

*Trust has to be developed – keep the roadshows going, start the webinars, engage (see page 4)*

*Show workers what you are fighting for, give them targets*

The travelling officials summarised to all attendees what the intentions were from this engagement; yes we need to explain the current process around industrial action with OCA and possibly COTA, yes we need to campaign about social dumping in the marine sector, the decommissioning and renewables sectors, but more than that, we have to start building for the future. Workers might feel battered and bruised from the attacks they have seen so far and many feel let down and despondent. But each and every worker must be made aware that the future could be worse! We may have lost a few battles, but there is a war coming your way and we need to organise and prepare to resist.

**Stay updated on all things OCG by registering your details with Nikki on [ocg.project.coord@gmail.com](mailto:ocg.project.coord@gmail.com)**



**SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS (STUC)  
120th Annual STUC Congress**

Macdonald Aviemore Resort, Aviemore  
Monday 24 - Wednesday 26 April 2017

**STUC Fringe Meeting ran by Offshore Co-ordinating  
Group**

**'Meeting the Offshore Challenge'**  
Giovanni's Restaurant, Morlich Hotel,  
Macdonald Aviemore Resort  
Monday 24th April 12.30 - 2.00pm



**OFFSHORE COORDINATING GROUP (OCG)  
Webinar  
9th May, 7pm**

Contact Nikki on [ocg.project.coord@gmail.com](mailto:ocg.project.coord@gmail.com) on how to register!

**Roadshow Events**

Round 1 was a success! (see page 3)

We want to kick off round 2 as soon as possible so the  
OCG are arriving in Liverpool on 8<sup>th</sup> May, 6pm at the  
*Liner Hotel, Lord Nelson St, Liverpool L3 5QB.*

But we still need your input.

We want to know where YOU want us to go next!

We want to meet with as many of you as possible in June so let us  
know where you want us to be.

Email your thoughts and ideas to Nikki on  
[ocg.project.coord@gmail.com](mailto:ocg.project.coord@gmail.com)

Don't delay, email today!

Deadline for cut-off 30<sup>th</sup> May 2017

Published by the Offshore Coordinating Group

**Join a trade union  
today - but "why"  
you may ask? Let  
us tell you a few  
reasons why...**

Do you insure your  
house? Of course!

Do you insure your car?  
Obviously!

Do you insure your job?  
No? Not sure? What is  
that? It's your trade  
union, that's who.

*Just think...*

Security  
+ Voice = **ONE**  
**HOUR** per trip

It's time to look to your  
future.  
Who will fight for you in 2  
years, 3 years when its  
10x worse?  
Join a trade union and they  
will fight for you, that's  
who!

*Sorry for the confusion  
on our name so it's...  
Goodbye CUE,  
Hello OCG News!*