

BLOW OUT

a voice for the offshore worker

50p

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A DAY OF REMEMBRANCE

REMEMBER OUR DEAD

At a meeting in Glasgow on the 13th of June, the Offshore Industry Liaison Ctte issued a call to all offshore workers, to take 24 hour strike action on July 6th.

The call was made in response to an appeal by Bob Ballentine, a Piper survivor and member of the Piper Alpha Support Group. He urged offshore workers to make the 6th of July a "day of remembrance", not only for the men who died a year ago on Piper but for all those workers who have lost their lives in the industry over the past 25 years. It was proposed that the stoppage become an annual event in memory of our dead colleagues.

Delegates at the meeting pointed out that it was entirely appropriate that North Sea workers should stop work on the 6th as a mark of respect. Indeed the Piper Enquiry is itself expected to stop work on that day.

Reports were heard of the anger of construction workers throughout the North Sea, and their determination to put an end to the unacceptable situation that exists throughout the industry and that came to a head with the death of 167 men on that day a year ago.

Caterers, who have already shown considerable support for construction workers during the recent strikes on the platforms, are being asked to "feed the men" during the day of action. And a special plea was made to workers on the drilling and production sides of the industry. They were called on to join construction workers in action. Delegates stressed that the ultimate aim must be for a "Continental Shelf Agreement", that would protect all offshore workers with acceptable safety standards as well as decent wages and conditions, and protection from gangster employers. The point was also made that when safety fails you can die whatever your job classification.

That "safety is the first priority on the North Sea", is an often repeated lie. Only we, who stand to lose our lives in the industry, have safety as a first priority. On July 6th workers throughout the industry will remember our colleagues who have died. Government and oil companies will be told that their regime is unacceptable

If you're going offshore on July 6th, refuse to fly till the memorial service for the victims of Piper Alpha is over.

The O.I.L. Ctte, call on all exploration workers on the semis, to join the action on July 6th "day of remembrance".

Deutag drill crews and Amod deck crews supported the stoppage on Brent Bravo on June 5th.



FORTIES

North Sea Strikes

by a shop steward on "Forties"

The recent strike action that started on "Forties" platforms, sparked off a series of support strikes that eventually saw a total of 19 platforms and the workforce at St. Fergus involved. This was followed on the 5th of June by a 24 hour stoppage, during which contractor's employees on 25 platforms downed tools. So far, strike action has been confined to the northern sector of the North Sea, but indications are that disruption could soon spread to the southern sector.

But why are these strikes taking place? What has brought construction workers together to fight on such a scale? There are two reasons.

The men are demanding that the "Health and Safety at Work" legislation, is extended in full offshore. And that the oil companies honour section 1.2 of the "Offshore Construction Agreement". This states that any work designated as "construction work" on an offshore installation, whether pre or post oil, (before or after the installation goes into production), should be covered by the agreement. The oil companies have made, but never honoured, this agreement, though the unions have pursued the issue for several years. The oil companies have always relied on the fragmented organisation offshore, and communication problems faced by workers and unions. They assumed that any dissension would remain vocal and would come from the trade union officials ashore. All this has now changed.

Meetings for offshore workers have been held regularly in Aberdeen, Glasgow, and Middlesburgh, organised by the Offshore Industry Liaison Ctte. Workers have at last been able to meet together to exchange views, voice opinions and decide on action. Widespread stoppages throughout the North Sea have resulted, and the oil companies now know that they will not have things all their own way. Offshore workers have shown that they can, and will, down tools on a large scale. Up to now the oil companies claim that production hasn't been affected. They know however, that if workers decide otherwise, it could be.

Our claims are not excessive, only what we are entitled to; the honouring of the O.C.A. and the implementation of the full "Health and Safety" legislation offshore. Perhaps now is the time for the oil companies to start listening.

MONARCH BLAST

On Saturday June 10th, an explosion occurred on board the semi-submersible exploration rig, "Santa Fe Monarch", while she was testing a high pressure, high temperature well (29/5B-6) for Ultramar.

A week after the blast, and just three weeks before the Piper Alpha anniversary we were still waiting for the first statement from either the oil company or the Department of Energy.

The explosion destroyed a "steam exchanger" when a choke failed and a flange blew apart. This caused the well to be closed in and resulted in a rapid build up of pressure

One man was hospitalised briefly after being blown 15 feet across the deck during the blast. Testing equipment was blown overboard, and the rig was engulfed by gas which did not ignite. (The Monarch is a new rig and you would expect light fittings, and switches etc. to be well insulated and generally spark free.)

The Department of Energy had O.K'd Ultramar's test design, but had failed to find a design fault in the system. Safety systems did work but not quickly enough to stop the blast.

The conspiracy of silence and lies that shrouds the North Sea is it seems still intact even as the Piper Alpha enquiry sits in Aberdeen. It's not just Ultramar and the D. of E. that are involved. Every oil company in Aberdeen knows the details of this incident. Meanwhile oil workers, their families and the public, are told nothing.

It's inconceivable that the £1000 a day legal figures picking over the bones of Piper Alpha know nothing. Can it possibly be that national and local politicians with an interest in the industry remain ignorant of the incident?

As usual the most basic safety precautions were ignored. There was no pre test safety meeting for the crew. And the most basic rights of oilfield workers were again flouted. Men were stopped from phoning the beach for a couple of hours after the incident and were "advised" not to talk to the press.

Piper:

who's to blame?

Who do you "blame" for the Piper Alpha disaster? Occidental, who designed, built and operated the platform, have lodged a "Notice of Blame", against two workers.

One of these was Mr. Terry Sutton, an engineer for a company called SCORE, who removed valve PSV 504 for refurbishment. Terry Sutton died on that night a year ago.

The other worker named in the "Notice of Blame", is Mr. Alex Rankin from Peterhead, who was Terry Sutton's supervisor and workmate. He survived and now has to live with this accusation as well as his memories of that terrible night, and of his lost friends and workmates.

Not one worker I've spoken to blames Alex Rankin or Terry Sutton. Many workers blame Oxy in particular and the oil companies and government in general.

Who do you "blame" for the Piper Alpha disaster?

Respect

One early July day last year, Aberdeen ground to a halt. Shopkeepers shut up shop. Bank clerks locked their tills. They stopped serving drink in local pubs. People from throughout the city, and from many other parts of the country converged on St. Nicholas Kirk to pay their respects to those who died on Piper Alpha.

Where were you? I was on the 'Beryl B'. We worked through the whole event. No service. No minutes silence. Not even a statement from Mobil to mark the event. Nothing. The Beryl field manager, a Mr Smith, when it was raised with him said, "Mobil are not insensitive to the fate of these men." I wonder what Mobil are like when they are being insensitive?

The attitude of Mobil, and I suspect a lot of other oil companies, won't come as a surprise to many offshore workers. Drilling their precious holes in the ground and producing the oil and gas takes precedence over everything. It certainly took precedence that day over the human need to remember and come to terms with the death of our colleagues. For them it was just business as usual.

Workers in the industry, who for 25 years have been denied any independent role in matters of safety, welfare or wages, were not able to shake this off on that day. Given the atmosphere of intimidation that has existed all these years, and the stunned disbelief that had fallen on the men, this was not surprising.

Many North Sea workers have yet to pay their respects to the victims of Piper. On the day that they do the oil companies will be forced to do so too.



The Story Breaks



New lease of life for rumour about Piper letters

Occidental have a secret report on the Piper Alpha disaster. They do not want anyone to see it. When Mr. Alan Johnston Q.C. representing the "contractors" at the Piper Enquiry got wind of it he asked that it be made available to the enquiry. A reasonable enough request one would have thought. Not however in Oxy's opinion. Their Q.C. Mr. John Mitchell took immediate steps to stop the enquiry seeing this report. His argument was that it contained nothing that the enquiry had not -or would not-hear. Lord Cullen, the judge chairing the enquiry, eventually decided that another Q.C. Mr. Tom Dawson representing the Crown, should have a look at the report and decide if it contained anything that might be of interest to the enquiry. Mr. Dawson did just that and lo and behold! he agreed with Mr. Mitchell representing Oxy. Lord Cullen then ruled that the report need not be revealed to the public.

Mr. Johnston Q.C. did seem to get to the point when he remarked in a rather understated way that: "I remain confused as to why Occidental should have been concerned to protect the confidentiality of this report at all". Stripping away all the legalistic jargon, the realities are, Oxy have something to hide, and the authorities in the shape of the Crown Q.C. and Lord Cullen, agree that they should be allowed to hide it.

An unexpected result of this affair is that it has stirred up an almost dead rumour. One that circulated on the North Sea around the time that Oxy's secret report was written. At that time there was some speculation that, locked away in a filing cabinet inside the Department of Energy, there was a letter written by Occidental in the Spring of 1988, requesting permission for a production shutdown, so that long awaited and urgent maintenance and repair work could be done. This was rumoured to be mirrored by a letter from the D. of E. in Oxy's possession, stating that it was in the national interest that production levels on Piper Alpha be maintained in order to offset a rising balance of payments deficit.

It was certainly the hope of most oil workers, that the Cullen Enquiry into Piper Alpha, would expose all the facts that lay behind the death of 167 of our colleagues. That Oxy's secret report is to remain secret must have dashed many of these hopes. An enquiry seen to be completely fair and impartial would have completely squashed all unfounded speculation.

LETTERS

"Blowout" welcomes all letters from offshore workers and their families, on any subject. Please send your name and address and if possible a phone number where you can be contacted. Your name and address will not be published if you don't want it to be. We realise that many offshore workers have a very real and justifiable fear of being victimised, even for telling the truth. We won't change your letter in any significant way without your permission.

To All Offshore Oil and Gas Workers

Dear Brothers,

It will soon be the first anniversary of the "holocaust" that was Piper Alpha. My son Robert aged 33 years, and 166 of his workmates, (even if he did not know each one personally), died in that terrible tragedy. Evidence to date proves to me, and to many others, that Piper Alpha exploded because of gross neglect by the oil companies and government, and not applying high levels of safety on that platform. Up to date equipment, proper and adequate levels of safety, and new and totally separate living quarters, separate from the production side - are still sadly lacking nearly one year after Piper Alpha.

How can we force them to spend adequate monies on new safety equipment and better maintenance etc. which would bring about higher levels of safety on all installations? The action that some of you have taken to date is very commendable and must be extended to every installation, and built up to a crescendo for the anniversary of the tragedy of the 6th of July 1988. More people now recognise that the time has long come to stop the oil companies and the government treating oil and gas workers worse than Third World workers.

The trade unions and the Health and Safety executive must be allowed the same rights on board the installations as they have on shore. You are, (most of you) citizens of the U.K. You pay the same taxes as all the other citizens, so therefore you have a right to the same civil and democratic rights, and government protection.

Britain and Europe, if not the world, will be watching the North Sea on July the 6th 1989. We will have more and better M.E.Ps in the European Parliament after June 15th, who will be more actively in support of your very justified demands. Therefore I appeal to all offshore workers, (except those on safety duties), to withdraw their labour for a minimum of an hour on July 6th, as a salute to your brothers killed on Piper Alpha, and to all offshore workers who have been killed at work in the North Sea during the past 25 years. This will surely help bring tremendous public, parliamentary and European attention to your continued and justified campaign for higher safety standards, higher wages and better working conditions. Your action will also bring attention to the campaign to force Occidental and the Government to bring up the bodies of the men still lying under Piper Alpha, using the best safety equipment and procedures for the divers and surface workers. In the view of many people, both campaigns go hand in hand.

Yours Fraternally
Gavin Cleland

Gavin Cleland has led the campaign by the relatives of the Piper Alpha victims to have all the bodies of the men recovered from the wreckage. He was a miner for 16 years and has been a care officer in an old folks home for the last 15 years. For most of that time he has been a senior N.U.P.E. shop steward

EDITORIAL

A year ago, 167 men lost their lives on the Piper Alpha. These lives are irreplaceable. The pain and the horror will live on in the survivors, the relatives, and indeed, to some extent, in all of us who work offshore. Today we will all take the time to remember the victims: our relatives, our friends and our workmates.

The memorial planned by the oil companies will be welcomed by few. Even amongst those who have not yet recovered the bodies of their loved ones. They suffered the indignity of hearing the experts argue about the cost of something that could not for them be reduced to a question of money.

But the permanent memorial will not be built out of stone or bronze. It'll be built in the struggle to ensure that the lessons of Piper are learned in our community. Only one thing will begin to heal the damage done that day. The determined fight to ensure that these men did not die in vain. That will be the beginning of an end to the carnage on the North Sea.

Workers in this industry have been denied any voice. We have had no control over safety, yet we are the ones who have paid with our lives when safety failed. Neither have we had any say on the question of wages or working conditions. After Piper, North Sea workers were hailed as heroes by government and oil company figures. The conditions that we endured before and still do, expose these words as deeply hypocritical.

"Blowout" lets us challenge the government and oil company view of our industry. You don't have to put up any longer, with the lies and distortions that pass for news about the North Sea. "Blowout" is open to all workers and their families in the industry, to tell their story, and give their point of view.

Oilworkers have now a way of talking to each other that can't be censored. Of course we will come under attack from all those who whose interest it is to maintain the status quo. Our strength will come from those offshore workers determined to build the real memorial to the victims of Piper Alpha and the many others that have been sacrificed to oil profits over the years.



Dear Friends,

In the immediate aftermath of the Piper Alpha explosion, in which 167 of your mates were killed, the feeling you have is one of guilt. Guilt because you survived and so many of the "Bears" were killed.

You cry a lot, you can not sleep, you are afraid to read the news or watch the tele as you know you will be confronted by the very vivid images of a blazing inferno called the Piper Alpha, and you break down and start crying because you have this feeling of guilt. You think maybe it would have been better if you could have died, changed places with someone else. And all for what? Because of the mad rush for profits

Up till Piper, only the oil companies' view was allowed to be expressed. Piper was a watershed. It prompts us to express our attitudes to health and safety, and demand changes. It is only us that can change it.

I refuse to be part of the conspiracy of silence that allows other tragedies to go unreported, and lets the oil companies off the hook.

Bob Ballentine

Bob Ballentine is a survivor of Piper Alpha. He fights in the Piper Alpha Support Group and in the Oil Industry Liaison Cttee. to ensure that there is never another disaster like Piper.

Parkinson and the Odyssey

There's been more news come out of the N Sea in the last year, than in the previous 24 put together. Government and oil companies are finding it more difficult to suppress the news. So they're trying that bit harder to distort it.

When a trade union official, Roger Lyons, said that the survivors of the Ocean Odyssey blowout were lucky. Cecil Parkinson accused him of being irresponsible, and said, "There was no luck about it. The procedures were followed and they worked with the sad exception of one man....." It's hard to know where to begin with this statement. It's so insensitive and so ignorant.

The "sad exception" of course, was Timothy Williams. I wonder how his parents feel about the procedures that worked for everybody else but their son. Timothy was in the lifeboat with the rest of his colleagues when he was ordered back to the radio room. Some procedure.

Is Mr Parkinson suggesting that some blowouts are inevitable? The Department of Energy have never warned offshore workers of this. We are led to believe that if correct procedures are followed while drilling, and after taking a "kick", that these kicks can be controlled. Maybe he's hinting at an act of God or a catastrophic equipment failure. Certainly the Department of Energy downrated a number of rigs with flexible hoses on their BOP stacks from a 15,000 to 10,000 p.s.i. capability, soon after the blowout. It'll certainly be interesting to see how the flexible hose manufacturers react to any suggestion that their product was to blame in this case. Especially in the light of eye witness reports of the initial blast blowing out the shaker room door. The D. of E. have indeed stopped short of making this assertion. No doubt the long overdue fatal accident enquiry will discuss this issue amongst others. Certainly it will have to look into the drilling practices and well control procedures being followed by Arco, prior to and during the disaster.

But whatever the outcome of the enquiry, Mr Parkinson's ill informed comments should be treated with contempt. I wonder whether the men who jumped into the sea from the blazing rig thought like Mr Parkinson that they were, "following procedures"

Liz, Bob, Henry, and Steve

Well Well! Will the oilfield ever be the same again? That nice old lady, the Queen Mum has been up to see these other nice people at Shell in Aberdeen. It was to inaugurate Shell's latest fields, the Tern and the Eider.

Aberdeen Press and Journal's energy correspondent, Henry Milne was there to record the event. He was assisted by Steve Fairweather. They did very well.

Henry told us about the race against time. He wasn't talking about mankind's race to save the ozone layer, while the Brent flares fill the atmosphere with whatever filthy black shit it is that they spew out. Henry was talking about the race to get Her Majesty's words recorded and sent out on a video to the men working on the new platforms. According to him, "They will see and hear her say: "To all I would like to say: 'Well done!'" I hope you didn't all get too excited out there.

Elizabeth (That's her real name. It was on a cake she received that day) didn't come up with this brilliant one liner straight from a cold start. The temperature of the whole event in Tullis had already been raised by Shell U.K.'s chairman and chief executive, Mr Bob Reid. He'd already had them, "chuckling" (nice turn of phrase Henry).

No fucking wonder he had them chuckling. He'd just told them that Shell's first idea had been to invite her to visit the Tern and Eider platforms. But was Bob being entirely truthful when he added, "But, even without the vagaries and uncertainties of the weather, a round trip would have taken 12 hours. So we concluded reluctantly that obviously we could not subject you, despite your indomitable spirit, to the considerable discomfort of such a long aircraft and helicopter trip - even though we suspected that if we had asked you, you would have gone!"

Fuck off! Who's going to visit a Shell installation unless they have to? If you owned the Castle of Mey would you go? If I could only get the flat paid off it'd be the last time I'd set foot on one of your platforms. And here's why.

On July 5th last year, just one day before Piper Alpha blew up, there was a blast on Brent Alpha that caused considerable damage. You lot said damage was minor. On December 13th, 70 men were evacuated from Brent Charlie after a pipe broke. A storage tanker, (without power or steering naturally) broke loose on the Fulmar field and, no thanks to you, narrowly missed the Auk.

The D of E recently shut down the Stadfrill, operated by Shell, because its gas detection equipment hadn't been repaired despite a warning.

A holed lifeboat on the semi Sedneth 701, also under contract to Shell, was only replaced after an article appeared in the press.

Since then an explosion on Cormorant Alpha shut down a quarter of all North Sea production.

And Shell Esso's part of the St. Fergus gas terminal has had to be shut down after cracks were discovered.

And there's more.

Maybe it's a little insensitive mentioning such things at this time. After all it was a big day for Shell and no doubt for Her Highness as well. Best leave the last word to Henry's sidekick Steve, who sensitively captures the charm of the whole occasion in his description of that wonderful woman. She was he says, 'Resplendant in lilac overcoat and hat with bandana over a floral-pattern dress.' A woman with such taste would surely have more sense than to go anywhere near a Shell installation

this man I thought, than Velvet Underground. Then there was the near fatal world tour of the "Rock and Roll Animal" show, which produced two live albums of uneven quality, reworking old Velvet songs-Sweet Jane, and Heroin- with the best raw-meat guitarist I've heard in years. After that, nothing. Another casualty, I thought, too burned out for any revival. Too many of his contemporaries around to bolster fading egos and/or bank accounts. I was wrong. Was I wrong.

"New York" is simply the best album I've heard in years. So many of the diverse elements of "Transformer" re-emerge, but this time they blend together to offer an integrated view on the quality of contemporary city life. It's set in New York but it could be anywhere where human life is insulted by poverty, violence and degradation. From the immense "Dirty Boulevard" Reed intones:

"Bring me your hungry, your tired, your poor
I'll piss on them.
That's what the Statue of Bigotry says.
Your poor huddled masses
Let's club 'em to death
And get it over with."

No messing there. Or in the haunting, "Last Great American Whale", where the American penchant for genocide (the Red Indian) is paralleled with its rape of the environment.

"Americans don't care much for beauty
They shit in the rivers,
Pour battery acid in the streams,
Watch dead rats wash up on the shore,
Then complain they can't swim."

A real foot tapper so far, you think. Don't be put off. Even at their most bitter, the songs are informed by a long-suffering humour every bit as striking as the disgust Reed so often registers. From "Sick of You":

"The ozone layer ain't got no ozone any more
And you're gonna leave me for the boy next door
And I'm sick of you."

Lines like that don't come around every day.

Reed himself says the album, all 53 minutes of it, should be listened to in one sitting, like watching a sequence of images in a movie. So you can, or you can dabble, the songs are strong enough to stand on their own. If it's good old kick-in-the-groin rock "n" roll you're after, there's "This Aint No Tune" or "Bus Load of Faith". There's good ol' boy foot stompers like "Sick of You" or there's "Halloween Parade" which takes you back to "Blonde on Blonde" Dylan days, of weird images and sharp lines. The album bubbles with music and words which repay so many listenings.

I said before, this is the best album I've heard in years. So if you listen to no other album this year, listen to this one.



A Record Review

New York — Lou Reed reviewed by John Rowlinson

Lou Reed was always a shadowy figure for me. I remember the really hip in the late sixties, drooling over import copies of Velvet Underground and feeling inadequate when all I could hear was the odd good tune, a wierd lady called Nico, and lousy production. He resurfaced for me round about 1972 with "Transformer", a curious but enduring mixture of street-wise cynicism and touchingly lyrical love songs. More to

this man I thought, than Velvet Underground. Then there was the near fatal world tour of the "Rock and Roll Animal" show, which produced two live albums of uneven quality, reworking old Velvet songs-Sweet Jane, and Heroin- with the best raw-meat guitarist I've heard in years. After that, nothing. Another casualty, I thought, too burned out for any revival. Too many of his contemporaries around to bolster fading egos and/or bank accounts. I was wrong. Was I wrong.

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Vaughan Mitchell

Most workers will have seen the Department of Energy's letter to offshore workers. The one where they offered us anonymity if we phoned them with complaints about safety offshore. It's an admission that they know that oil workers are being intimidated into silence on the question of safety.

Cecil Parkinson, Energy Secretary, and nominal head of safety on the North Sea should have resigned over this admission, made just weeks after the worlds worst oil disaster. In fact, his department continues to encourage the intimidation of those workers who speak out.

Mr. Vaughan Mitchell, a rig welder, refused to be pressured into unsafe working practices. He was sacked by Dan Smedvig. In a statement, Mr. Mitchell details the harassment he received, while trying to carry out his job in a safe and responsible manner. Here is an extract from the statement dated 30th. September, 3 days after his departure from Unical's Heather Alpha.

"On Monday I started shift to find the line had been pressured up and no x-ray had been carried out. I could not believe this. People were walking around in there. I then received a call to go to the pusher's office. When I got there Mr. Cluness was sitting alone. when I entered he sat back in his chair and said, and I quote: "Do you think I'm a cunt?" I asked him what he meant. He then said, "Do you think Russ is a cunt?" (night pusher) I again asked what he was implying. He told me, I had been fucking around for three days - "the job last night should not have taken the whole shift". I explained that there was much more involved than he appreciated. I asked him if he had any intention of having the butts bombed or reporting the welds had taken place, to Unical's Inspection Department. He informed me he had been in the game ten years, and not to bullshit him! When the night pusher arrived I asked him what he had been saying. The day pusher (Mr. Cluness) continued to slag me. I myself did not want to get involved. I felt it was not safe to work for this man any longer. I told him if he wasn't happy he could send me onshore, to which he replied, "Right, that's O.K. - don't bother working. Tomorrow you can go off, and don't think you'll go to another rig; you'll never work for Smedvig again." At this point I walked out of the office."

Peter Morrison from the D of E says that, "— our investigations have found that there is no substance to these allegations." (of intimidation).

Safety is not an issue that can be left in the hands of the D of E, or any other government body for that matter. We are the ones who stand to lose our lives when safety fails. We should have control of safety. Vaughan Mitchell has exposed the hypocrites. His action has made the North Sea that bit safer.

If you want more information, or to send messages of support contact,
Norrie McVicar
National Union of Seamen
3 Commerce St. Aberdeen
0224 582688

Working for the love of the job

Who worked 149 days offshore last year? Aye! loads of us. But how many of us then worked 95 days in the workshop on top of that? One very pissed off solids control engineer that I met. And what he got for it is a disgrace. £13,500 a year and £30 a day offshore bonus. That took him up to £17,970. It would be great money if he worked an 8 hour day, and was back home with his wife and kids every night.

Last year wasn't his busiest. But I reckon he spent 49.5% of it away at work. A worker ashore who spent 8 hours a day at his work, every day of the year including Saturdays and Sundays, would only have used up 33.3% of his year.

He had 44 days holiday, and that included local holidays. Apart from that he had 77 days off, 26 of them on the sick. There's not many weekends in 51 days. "A lot of the days off you get, are when you're told not to bother coming in tomorrow" Not a lot you can plan to do then, eh? You go where and when you're told in this job. Even a few hours isn't too short notice.

Shifts offshore can last way past 12 hours a day. And I suppose if he ends up on the Brent, he'll have to work as many hours as are necessary, and then fill in a time sheet that'll prove that he's not worked for more than 12 hours at a stretch.

There's no overtime paid in this job. Not if you work more than 8 or even 12 hours a day. Not if you work Christmas, New Year or any other public holiday. Of course if you're working less than equal time then you have less than an evens chance of having Christmas or New Year at home.

I worked out that if he worked a 12 hour shift every day he was offshore, and 8 hours every day he was in the workshop, then his hourly rate was £7.05. But if he'd worked 200 days offshore his hourly rate would have been £6.17. For 250 days his rate would have been £5.58 an hour. Thank God there's only 365 days in a year!

But it's not all that bad. This year he got a rise, after 3 or was it 4 years of wage freeze. A majestic 3.5% on his basic and a £500 bonus. (I wonder if he'll ever see that again). It all adds up to £972.50. I make that 5.48%. That's even less than this year's inflation, never mind the last three.

Drop us a line if there's anything you think we should know about your wages or conditions. In the best traditions of the D of E, we'll preserve your anonymity. The difference being that we really will. Don't be shy and don't let the bastards grind you down.



NATIONAL UNION OF SEAMEN

ABERDEEN BRANCH

Welcomes this first edition of **Blowout**
and
urges all offshore workers
to
"join their appropriate union"

Drinking Offshore

An alleged incident on the Brent Delta recently raised the issue of drinking offshore. The story got a lot of publicity. All sorts of politicians and even trade union leaders were calling on the government to introduce legislation that would ban alcohol offshore. It was the big lie in the making. We don't get alcohol offshore. Seemingly some companies provide small amounts on Christmas and New Year's day. But to all intents and purposes it's dry offshore. The politicians and the press would have been more usefully employed investigating the quality and integrity of offshore management.

The issue is a red herring. It makes the authorities look concerned and responsible, but leaves the main causes of death and injury offshore unmentioned and untreated. What was Mobil's first safety circular sent offshore after Piper Alpha? It was a threat to breathalise any worker who turned up at the heliport, and who they suspected of having had a drink. This is a company which at this point, had made no comment on the explosion which had just killed 167 of our people. It had offered no reassurances to its workers. It had instituted no new safety procedures. Had had no meetings with the men offshore to discuss the new situation. They raised an issue virtually out of the blue. An issue which points the finger for failed safety at the men themselves.

The no drink issue does however raise some important questions for the offshore worker. Firstly, what kind of industry is it which is too dangerous to allow its workers the same rights as even the most dangerous industries onshore. Can you imagine them breathalysing miners or building workers as they clock on in the morning? Even steeplejacks are not banned from having a drink when they are off duty. And as far as I know, the guy who drives your kid's bus to school in the morning, has access to alcohol when he's off duty.

What about the people who have imposed this rule? When the oil executive heads for the corporate headquarters in New York, he is not told it is too dangerous to fly with a hangover or with residual alcohol in his body from the night before. He flies first class and can if he chooses, pour the stuff down his neck for the duration of the flight, free, gratis and for nothing.

It seems to me that there is a good deal of hypocrisy when it comes to the question of drink and safety offshore. Of course one of the reasons that it is allowed to persist is that we, who spend half our lives and more out here, are denied any control over our own environment. It's more than possible that most workers are in favour of the complete ban on alcohol offshore. But it would never occur to the oil companies and drilling contractors in a million years to try and find out. You can however air your views through the pages of this paper.

Majestic

Five crew members of the Fraserburgh fishing boat "Majestic" were lost when she went down in the North Sea on June 13th. Oilfield workers will understand what these men's families and workmates are going through.

OFFSHORE INDUSTRY LIAISON COMMITTEE

Invites all offshore workers to attend their local meetings

in Aberdeen

at Trades Council Club Adelphi

Tues	20th	June	@	11.00 a. m.
"	27th	"	"	"
"	4th	July	"	"
"	11th	"	"	"
"	18th	"	"	"
"	25th	"	"	"

in Glasgow

at A.E.U. Halls West Regent St.

Thur	22nd	June	@	11.00 a.m.
"	29th	"	"	"
"	6th	July	"	"
"	13th	"	"	"
"	20th	"	"	"
"	27th	"	"	"

in Middlesburgh

at A.E.U. Halls Borough Rd.

Fri	23rd	June	@	11.00 a.m.
"	30th	"	"	"
"	7th	July	"	"
"	14th	"	"	"
"	21st	"	"	"
"	28th	"	"	"

For the complete Health and Safety at Work Legislation to be extended offshore.

**For the implementation of the Offshore Construction Agreement
The first step towards a "Continental Shelf Agreement" protecting all offshore workers.**

Readers Wives

That caught your attention didn't it? But it's not what you thought. The only thing we want to strip is all that bullshit that the companies hide behind.

But what do the wives, girlfriends, lovers and children left on the beach think about it all. They must have their say too. Take the paper home and show it to family and friends. Maybe you'll think that the language is a bit rough for kids, but that's part of the reality of offshore life too. Send us a story or a poem. Children might want to send us a drawing.

There are a small band of women working on the North Sea. Tell us what it's like for you. The special problems or benefits that you face. What do men think about women working offshore?



We hope you have enjoyed this edition of "Blowout". There will be more but only if workers on the North Sea want the paper.

Before another edition appears we require support. If you're interested in helping to produce the paper read on.

We need regular correspondents from throughout the North Sea.

We need photographs.

We need contacts on every installation who will be prepared to carry the paper offshore and distribute it.

We need money. If you enjoyed this issue and you think there is a need for a paper that reports on events offshore, yet is completely independent of the oil companies then send us a donation.

We need articles on all aspects of life offshore. Write and tell us about wages, accommodation, working conditions, leisure facilities, hobbies, personalities. If you're interested enough to write about it, we'll be interested enough to print it.

Interest in O.D.E.C.O.

O.D.E.C.O. the drilling contractor, have come in for some attention lately. They owned and crewed the Ocean Odyssey which was written off last year when a well it was drilling for A.R.C.O. blew out. One man died. They are well known on the north sea. Maybe notorious would be a better description. They own the infamous Ocean Victory. Ocean Odyssey it seems however was quite different. It was fit for human habitation throughout its short life.

It is confidently asserted by those in the know that under no circumstances should you stop to tie a shoelace or anything like that if you find yourself in the vicinity of their Aberdeen office. Passers by who mistakenly linger, can find themselves offshore within the hour, suitably attired in a newly washed pair of third hand coveralls and leaky boots. Odeco's modern-day version of the press gang does however have its more serious side regarding offshore safety.

The Odyssey itself it seems was badly afflicted by manpower shortage. There are reports of two nineteen year olds, badly injured on their first trip offshore while working with casing, and it is thought that Timothy Williams the radio operator who died and who was on his first trip offshore, had been sent out without an Offshore Survival Certificate.

Even the normally docile D. of E. must be ready to take some notice of the situation, interested as they are in the accident rate offshore. Throughout the North Sea, young men, unused to, and untrained for heavy and dangerous work, are being hurt because of a lack of suitably experienced leadership. This is directly related to inadequate wage levels and intolerable living and working conditions, and an intimidatory atmosphere. This is created by the oil companies and policed by the drilling contractors, specially in the exploration side of the industry. Press ganged youngsters are being instructed by men with little more experience than themselves.

Contact "Blowout" at 1 Blaeloch Terrace G45 Glasgow