

# What Will Cullen Say?

## Comment

Lord Cullen heard 10 million words submitted during the 178 days his enquiry sat. That's a little over one day and 59 thousand words, for each of the men who died. But for the survivors and the families of those killed, not another day will pass, and not another word will be spoken, that will not in some way be tainted by the disaster.

Every offshore worker will be listening when Lord Cullen makes his report and recommendations, possibly as early as this summer. Blowout hopes that he will lay the blame fairly and squarely on those who have had unchallenged authority on the North Sea oilfields over the past 25 years. We hope that his recommendations will provide the basis for the massive changes that have to take place before we can be confident that another disaster like Piper will never happen again. The signs however are not good.

Occidental, the operators of Piper, still believe themselves to be model employers. They shamelessly used the enquiry to try and lay the blame onto two contract engineers. In the glare of the Piper blaze, Armand Hammer, Oxy's boss, speculated that separate accommodation platforms might be necessary. Not a mention of this possibility as Occidental announced that a conventional successor to Piper Alpha was to be built. And all this before the Cullen enquiry had even finished taking evidence. They at least are confident that Cullen is not going to come up with anything that might upset their apple cart.

Since Piper, a succession of major incidents have occurred offshore. They have exposed an attitude to safety very different to that publicly held by the oil companies. Piper was still smouldering when the well Arco was drilling with the Ocean Odyssey blew out, killing one man, and forcing the rest of the crew to flee. Almost immediately accusations were made of unsafe drilling practices.

A year later Amoco openly lied about a serious incident on the NW Hutton that led to

a mass evacuation of the platform. Their assertion that no blow out had taken place was only exploded when Peter Morrison, the oil minister, gave the D of E version of events in a written answer to questions raised in Parliament.

The Department of Energy are also widely discredited in the eyes of the offshore workforce. Their 6 general and 3 diving inspectors are so obviously insufficient to police the N Sea that there is widespread belief that they collude with the oil companies. Why did they withdraw their recommendations made after the technical enquiry into Piper that the installation of sea bed ESVs be made mandatory? There must also be doubt about their handling of the Ocean Odyssey blowout. They sent the same inspector to investigate the blowout, who days before had inspected the rig and passed it fit.

The failure of the authorities to open an enquiry into the death of Timothy Williams, 17 months after his death onboard Ocean Odyssey, is unprecedented. It must also raise fears about a cover up on the question of safety on the North Sea. Could it be that exposing Arco's attitude to safety on the Odyssey would have forced Lord Cullen to examine Oxy's claims about their attitude to safety, in a completely different light?

The only people who have emerged from the post Piper period with dignity, have been the offshore workers themselves. The evidence of survivors and rescuers alike testify to their very great courage. And the relentless campaign being waged by the OILC on safety, underlines their determination that a repetition of Piper will be forestalled.

Lord Cullen's report will be read closely whenever it appears. Certainly there can be no settling for any less than the transferring of responsibility for safety on the North Sea away from the Department of Energy. But a word of warning to all those who believe that a transfer of responsibility to the Health and Safety Executive would solve all our problems. Fred Crayke of the Construction Safety Campaign warns that, ".....under their not too watchful eye, there have been 1500 deaths in the onshore construction industry over the past ten years."



**LARS A MYHRE**

Leader of the Norwegian oil workers union NOPEF. He was surprised when his invitation to give evidence at the Piper Enquiry was withdrawn.

**Management & Staff  
of the  
CRITERION BAR  
(Crossroads of  
the Oil Industry)  
wish  
Blowout & the OILC  
"every success  
for the future"  
Blowout is now available  
in the bar**

## OILC Meetings

Glasgow AEU Halls West Regent Street

Thursday	8th February	11am
Thursday	15th February	11am
Thursday	22nd February	11am
Thursday	1st March	11am

Hull

Tuesday	27th February	
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Liverpool AEU Halls Mount Pleasant

Wednesday	7th March	11am
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For times and venues of meetings in **Aberdeen, Tyne/Tees and Great Yarmouth**, contact OILC c/o the Offshore Information Centre, 52 Guild Street, Aberdeen. Phone 0224-210 118

# Goodbye OCA

The oil companies have relied on two completely different methods of policing the offshore construction workers. On new projects, the contractors, organised in the Offshore Contractors Council, have had an agreement with the unions called the Offshore Construction Agreement (OCA). In the Southern North sea the equivalent is the Southern Waters Agreement. These were fairly comprehensive agreements allowing for the negotiation of pay and conditions. They included grievance procedures and allowed for representation of the workforce by shop stewards.

But at the appearance of first oil these agreements ceased. No longer so vulnerable to disruptive action, the oil companies and their minions in the OCC, adopted a different strategy. In this post "hook-up" and maintenance phase, intimidation and NRB (not required back) were the employers industrial relations strategy.

Finally, on Wednesday January 24, the union signatories to this agreement, kicked this crutch from under the employers. They argued that they wanted the agreement extended to all construction work offshore from the 5%-10% of work that is covered at present. The employers said they were sorry; they

would have liked to go along with this, but the oil companies wouldn't let them.

On the union side, Tommy McLean, Secretary of the National Negotiating Committee stressed the importance of events by noting that, "Not many national groups would walk away from a national agreement." He thought that the likelihood was that a dispute would develop, but stressed that it would not be an official dispute. Various newspapers are already speculating about strike action across the North sea this summer.

Ronnie McDonald of the OILC, drew attention to the fact that an enormous amount of construction, and maintenance work was due to go ahead this summer and that without any agreement the oil companies were "relying on the goodwill of the engineering construction workforce" to minimise the disruption to production.

The OILC have called a series of open meetings throughout the country during February and March to allow the offshore workforce to discuss the situation and formulate a response. They have considered argued for a "Continued Agreement" that would give offshore workers a say in pay and production.

# FLARE OFF!

## YOUR LETTERS

### FIGHT FOR YOUR LIFE

One day while traveling on the train to Aberdeen I saw a man giving out a paper to oil rig workers. I asked him if I could have one. It was the first time I had heard of "Blowout". After reading it I thought I just had to write in to it. My husband Alex, a plater, was killed on the Piper Alpha. His body has never been recovered. During the past 17 months it has really opened my eyes to the conditions that the rig workers work under. During the 12 years that Alex worked in the North Sea I new that some things were getting worse, but not that safety was one of them, or that the oil companies had so much control out there. It seems to me that they control the government as well, and not the other way about.

Your fight for health and safety is right and I hope that every man out there is willing to fight for it. It could be your life you are fighting for. I would never like to think of any more families going through what the families of the men on Piper Alpha went through and are still going through, both bereaved and survivors. It must never be allowed to happen again. Like everything else, lessons have to be learned the hard way, and a high enough price has been paid for North Sea oil! Those men must not be allowed to have died for nothing. That would be the worst thing of all. I know it must be hard for some of you with the action you may have to take to get safer conditions, those who have families and mortgages. So did our husbands, and I can assure you I would rather have Alex here along with all the problems no job would bring, than the emptiness that is now in my life and in my home. I think if you ask your families they will think the same way. I would also like to thank the rig worker who wrote the poem in the last "Blowout". It brought tears to my

eyes but it said all the things that I felt. I intend to keep it always. Again I wish you all well in your safety campaign. I am sure that all the families support you in your fight. With a show of strength I know you will win. I also hope 'Blowout' will continue, as I feel you all need somewhere to write to where you are free to say what you want without any repercussions. To all who will be out in the North Sea over Christmas and New Year, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

A. McE.

(This letter was received just too late to be included in our December issue. Ed.)

## TEXACO & OXY

As an outsider now, having been paid off in August 1989, I feel that the only way I can air some of my grievances is by writing a letter.

I am concerned about the reports of the sinking of the Interocean II last November. I was a roustabout on the I.O.II in 1981 and up until March 1982. We were drilling for the Argentine Government in and around the Magellan Straits. We were asked to leave and escorted from the country after the Falklands invasion.

While I was on the I.O.II we were moving location about twice every 28 days, and so we got quite accustomed to the move procedures, which were not easy.

Whenever we were towed to a new location, we had three supply boats towing, so that if one towline parted there was at least two ships to continue with the tow while repairs were made to the third vessel/towline. When the I.O.II sank in the North sea, there had only been two supply boats towing her. Why?

My second question is, with all the technology of weather reporting available, why was the rig undertow with storm brewing? In Argentina she was not allowed to "jack down" if there was any more than a six feet swell, or move if it was thought that the seas were going to be that bad by the time she reached location. So someone has to have made the decision to get on with the tow, the consequence of which was a lost rig and more importantly a possible loss of life - which thankfully was averted.

Texaco should answer these questions. I would also be very interested to hear the views of any of the men on board. I am a survivor of the Piper A which of course doesn't make me an expert in all offshore departments. I recognise my limited knowledge of "jack-ups", but I think that these are valid questions which need answers.

Another concern of mine is the recent announcement by Occidental, that they are going to redevelop the Piper field and open up the Saltire field nearby. These announcements were made even before the Cullen enquiry was completed. It appears that the jacket and modules for the Piper B are to be almost exactly the same as were on Piper A. Occidental have announced the jobs that will come with the award of the contracts, (How many £millions is it going to cost). They have yet to pay out a lot of the widows who agreed damages/compensation, in the middle of last year. What's the hold up?

The Piper Association are trying to raise funds for a monument to every man lost/killed in the North Sea, on platforms/rigs. Occidental have yet to donate anything, although they lost a lot of men. Score UK whose men were blamed by Occidental for the disaster, have donated the

# EDITORIAL

## LET US KNOW

If you read a paper regularly, say the Record or the Glasgow Herald or the Sun, you might begin to get annoyed with it. Maybe because of its attitude to things or the way it is written. So you stop buying it. That's fair enough. They shouldn't write crap. But anyway, they'll survive. They're so big that they can nearly always pick some replacement readers somewhere; by being sensational and inventing some news, or even by digging up dirt.

It's not like that with Blowout. You will no doubt stop reading and financing it if you decide we're talking rubbish. But if the first we learn about it is when we realise you're not reading or paying for the paper then it's goodbye.

If that was to happen it would be fair enough. But it would remove we believe the only platform from which the offshore

worker can give his side of the story. We think that that would be a great loss. We hope you do too.

There is a solution to this problem. Don't sit silent. If you have criticisms of the way Blowout is written or what it says, please write and tell us so that we can take your ideas on board and make changes where necessary. Equally if you like something we do tell us, not just that you like the paper but what you like about it. This is a workers paper and has no purpose and no future unless it is what you the readers want it to be.

### CONTACT BLOW OUT

at  
OFFSHORE INFORMATION CENTRE  
52 Guild Street  
Aberdeen  
Tel: 0224 210118

granite plinth, a surveyor for the site, and have pledged their workshops for any use by the group. This isn't a request for funds but I feel it needed to be said. There are a lot of firms that have donated but I haven't a full list

It falls to the "Bears" and the "North Sea Tigers" to make sure that what goes on offshore is known to everybody. It's very easy to write a letter, and it will be made known through Blowout. The drill crews have always been estranged from the unionised "Bears" so you must stick together and use these safety committees to your advantage, (i.e. no more tripping in weather that shuts everybody else down).

I've written more than I intended to so I'll sign off with this motto

"DON'T LET THE B...S GRIND YOU DOWN"

Vince Swales

## CHINOOK APPEAL

An oilman, who wishes to remain anonymous, has contacted me to say that he and a number of his colleagues are greatly distressed that the families of those who died in the Chinook Disaster on November 6th 1986, have spent their third Christmas without compensation. The fund set up by the Lord Provost. (of Aberdeen Ed.), following the accident provided some relief for the families which was greatly appreciated, but the fund was very much smaller than subsequent disaster funds, and there was no Government payment into the fund.

These oilmen felt very strongly that in the absence of realistic compensation proposals from Boeing, the manufacturer of the helicopter which caused the deaths, some financial assistance should be given to the bereaved families. They have asked the Chinook Disaster Legal Group to make arrangements for a bank account to be opened into which monies which are at present being collected offshore, will be paid. This account has been opened with the Royal Bank of Scotland plc. Queens Cross Branch, 40 Albyn Place, Aberdeen. Account number 00120686, and it may be that other persons, whether connected with the oil industry or not, would like to make a donation direct to that account.

I shall be happy to make arrangements for the funds to be distributed to the bereaved families without any administrative charge being made.

DAVID BURNSIDE

(Press Officer of the Chinook Disaster Legal Group)

## Tolerating Morons

Congratulations on a well produced and informative paper which promises to efficiently fill a void in the offshore workers cause. It is good to read whole-hearted but balanced support for the O.I.C. However, before we get carried away with self congratulation and celebration, it might be constructive to examine some recurring themes which appear in "Blowout".

The offshore industry has been established in Britain for something like 25 years, and yet the O.I.C. is the first concerted attempt to organise proper recognition for the "bears". To publicise the O.I.C. by adopting the symbol of the Polish Solidarity freedom fighters, who risked home, family and life for their cause, is more than a little presumptuous.

The "big bad oil companies" that we keep complaining about, are only the same companies that employ us when we work on a beach installation, and with whom we thrash out our conditions and agreements, and they're the same companies that provide far superior pay and conditions in the Norwegian sector, to those which we enjoy on the British sector. The difference is the Norwegian workers will accept nothing less.

And why do we tolerate a moron because he is called a boss? How often have you heard a discussion about a deranged social misfit, whose only claim to fame, is a foul mouth and a boast about how many men he's NRB'd? He's almost been turned into a folk hero. Whether this grudgingly admiring attitude stems from the American "cowboy" roots of the industry or from the ship-yards is unclear. But what is clear is that the same clown would not last 10 minutes on a site ashore before the "bears" hit the gates. So why do they get away with it offshore?

It's no use looking to the unions for support, because to them we're only a marine branch of the contracting industry. And we all know their attitude to that! How long does it take to get a union representative involved in a dispute on the beach? And where is his first port of call when he eventually does arrive? That's right, the office. So what chance is there of getting them interested in us offshore. (Headquarters that is). Besides, any union is only as strong as its members.

The most telling comment I have ever heard on this topic was the remark, "If the first oil had been found in Liverpool Bay, it would be a different industry now" (Remember the IRO)

The solution to our problems is in our own hands. But one thing is certain - We'll get what we deserve, and we'll deserve what we get.

GEOFF CRANSHAW

## Statement

PO Box 13-056  
Johnsonville  
Wellington 4  
New Zealand / Aotearoa

Dear Friends,

STATEMENT is a fully autonomous anarchist entity with the aim of spreading the message of libertarian liberation across the Aotearoa and elsewhere.

STATEMENT has been made aware of your paper's strong stand regarding oil workers rights and we would like to express its firm support to you in this endeavour. Though shortage of funds excludes the possibility of donating to Blowout, comrades here would be willing to distribute any material you have, to interested New Zealand workers. Hope this is OK. Best wishes.

In Solidarity

STATEMENT

AN INJURY TO ONE IS AN INJURY TO ALL!

# THIS IS YOUR PAGE

The most important pages by far in Blowout are the letters pages. Frankly without them there is little need for a paper at all. If the North Sea is to be safe, and we are to achieve any dignity, then the monopoly that the oil and contracting companies have kept on information has to be broken. The only people who can do that is the offshore workforce, and that is what the letters pages are for.

The editor will not alter the content of letters. But in order that attention is not distracted from the content, he does check spelling and grammar. Not with overwhelming success, (as regular readers will have noticed), but we will get better. Please include your name and address and if possible a phone number. They will be withheld if you ask

## FOR A SINGLE UNION

The round of strikes offshore early last year sparked off a serious discussion about setting up a specialist single union for offshore workers. This was not just a fanciful idea but came from a genuine frustration with the attitude of the traditional unions, and their record offshore, as well as the very different problems we face compared to factory or other jobs on the beach.

The OILC is the biggest step forward for the organization of oil workers in the North Sea. It has drawn together in action, many more than ever before. But even though the OILC is drawn from rank and file delegates, it knows its own difficulties and is trying to tackle them. In the first instance this means trying to put together a set of demands that will not only satisfy construction workers but also reach out to the drilling rigs and the production workers.

What is certainly not happening, is a positive attitude from the unions to which we belong. A delegation of OILC members met with full time officers from various unions at the TUC conference in Blackpool. That was positive and so was the interest that was expressed in supporting the OILC. But the sticking point was the fact that the union leaders are only interested in their own numbers, and seem to do this at the expense of abandoning the idea of effective organization in Britain's most profitable industry.

The fact is that unions like the AEU, GMB, or MSF are very large with hundreds of thousands of members spread through traditional industries with traditional skills and well known management practices. So it's a bit much to expect them to do much for a few thousand workers who are difficult to keep in touch with and have a host of problems not seen ashore and a "cowboy" mentality amongst management.

The OILC already co-ordinates oil workers in Britain. It is the most democratic body of workers in Britain and could be the foundation stone for a powerful new trade union as part of the trade union movement as a whole. It would not be taking any significant number of members away from the other unions. Certainly not any that were getting a useful service from being members. It would be run by oil workers whose life has been dealing with the problems of working and living offshore. As many of us work ashore from time to time, we would want some deal whereby we could retain membership of shoreside unions. And I am sure we would bring many new recruits to the trade union movement from those that have been scunnered by the fact that no union has really put any resources into fighting for oil workers. It would also pull the rug out from under those who use the excuse that there is no single union, for not joining any.

Springtime will see us again organising around the demands yet still unresolved by the oil companies the government and the contractors. We have to sort our demands out with the eventual aim of having the same conditions not only on every installation in the UK sector, but also Norway, Denmark, Ireland and Holland.

Part of the process will be to discuss what sort of organization is necessary to carry that out. I think there is still a good case for one single union offshore. I think we need to do it ourselves, but the unions of which we are members should be convinced to help - it is in the long term interest of the whole workers movement, to have the oil industry strongly unionised from exploration right through to distribution.

NORMAN LOCKHART.



## JARGON

I enjoyed the third edition of Blowout, but I feel that I must express some reservations about the article, "The Truth about North West Hutton". I'm not the only one. I've heard others expressing similar concern.

You seem to assume that all offshore workers understand the technical jargon about drilling that you seem so keen to spout. Just what do you think it means to most of us out here when we read, "It was programmed to be set at 150 feet into the Cretaceous formation." or "A cement bond log was not run." etc? "Very little," is the answer. And who cares?

Perhaps you're unaware that the average construction, maintenance or catering worker is given no instruction or training in the drilling side of the industry. The exact opposite is in fact true. Over the years it would appear that there has been a deliberate policy to isolate drill crews from the rest of the offshore workers, and keep the bears ignorant of what's happening, and what the dangers are in drilling.

Maybe now that the new safety legislation allows for our reps to do inspections on the platform, and gives them access to technical information, then we'll begin to learn a bit about what's going on up on the drill floor and at the bottom of the well. Until then could you stop trying to bore us to death with jargon. If what went on on the North West Hutton is as important to us as you seem to think, then you had better find a way of explaining it properly.

That apart, I think that the paper is excellent. Keep up the good work.

JIM FLEMING.

# "Revolutionary & Long Overdue"

Having spent some thirty years connected with all types of engineering, mostly in the marine field, the recent tragedy aboard Piper Alpha platform caused me to consider the hazards involved in working offshore. As a result of these deliberations, I patented a safety system for a mass evacuation of personnel in the event of explosion or uncontrollable fires.

Assuming a worker does an eight hour shift, then sixteen hours, or the greater part of his day will be "off duty". If that time is spent at his evacuation post, then his chances of survival must be increased. This is achieved by mounting accommodation modules on buoyant pontoons, particularly sleeping quarters and ablution areas where workers are least prepared for emergency.

These modules are usually housed at working deck level and form part of the superstructure. In the event of a crisis and the decision to abandon the rig is made, the module is lowered away from the working deck, after allowing sufficient time for "on duty" workers to reach the modules.

As the module begins its controlled descent, access and watertight doors automatically close and all services are disconnected, bringing into operation emergency lights on the module. Just above the water-line, a clutch will disengage, allowing the support cradle to fall/sink so that the locating cones break cleanly away.

The accommodation module is now floating freely; instantly-flooding ballast tanks give the module stability and a heavy fender belting protects the module from the platform. In the event of heavy weather, this can be supplemented with air bags inflated from compressed air reservoirs. Impellers in hull ducts can now be used to drive the

module away from the danger area. In the event of surface fires, the same power unit can be used to pump water through nozzles on the roof to keep the module cool. Sufficient steering can be affected by increasing/decreasing or reversing the power to individually control impellers.

When the emergency is over, the modules are repositioned over their respective cradles and hoisted back to deck level when all services and doors are automatically reconnected, the system can be periodically tested by lowering to a position above the free fall point and then re-hoisted back to working level.

Most aspects of the system are based on well proven engineering techniques, therefore should not require lengthy trials. The advantages of the system are as follows:-

- 1 There is no immediate need to don protective clothing.
- 2 There is no need to muster at some specific point unless actually on duty at the time of the emergency.
- 3 The escape route will be familiar to those on duty if visibility is obscured by smoke.
- 4 Reducing the number of personnel moving to evacuation stations, reduces bottle-necks and crushes.
- 5 Workers in their most vulnerable state ie sleeping or at ablutions, will be evacuated without their personal effort.

The system has been discussed in depth with engineers and offshore personnel, and the general consensus is that it's revolutionary and long overdue. Unfortunately, in keeping with most inventions, I find it difficult to find the right people to develop the concept. What I require is publicity. Can Blowout assist in this respect.

DAVE MORRIS

## A REPLY

I think that your letter will be of interest to many offshore workers. First, it raises the possibility of a safer oilfield. And second; your ideas seem to be getting little attention from the oil companies, who never tire of telling us that safety is their first concern. You may not want to put too much pressure on oil companies who you hope will look favourably at your ideas. You must look at commercial considerations. On the other hand it doesn't matter to us who stands to gain or lose commercially. Our interest is a safer North Sea and an end to the deaths of our colleagues. If we feel that a potentially life saving system is being suppressed for economic or any other reason we would have no hesitation in pointing the finger at oil companies, the government or anybody else. I am flattered that you have come to us for help. I believe it shows a growing confidence that the opinions of the workers in the offshore industry are going to become more important when it comes to the question of safety. We should be the people who decide whether ideas like your own are treated seriously or not.

There are a couple of points that arise from your letter. Most North sea workers work 12 not 8 hour shifts. This doesn't mean your invention is less important but it does put a question mark over the quality of advice that you've been offered by the "offshore personnel" with whom you've discussed. And despite my lack of engineering expertise, I think your letter underplays the difficulty with which these accommodation/escape modules could be "repositioned over their respective cradles and hoisted back to deck level". It isn't very easy to get lifeboats back onboard. That I do know. Again from my point of view it wouldn't be a problem if you could never get the accommodation modules back on board in the event of a false alarm. Just so long as the OIMs thought that you could. Otherwise our cost conscious colleagues might be a bit reluctant ever to use them. I'd like to wish you the best of luck. I look forward to hear more about your ideas. If it proves to be what you claim you will earn the respect and thanks of many offshore oil workers

GARRY FORBES (EDITOR)



# I enjoy my job (AMBULANCE)

Just before Christmas the O.I.L.C. meeting in Glasgow invited two ambulance shop stewards to address a meeting, and donated £500 to their hardship fund. The committee also asked all O.I.L.C. representatives to hold regular collections on every installation for the duration of the dispute.

Blowout takes this opportunity to hear what the crews have to say about the dispute, their work, and how it affects their lives. Offshore workers leave their families at home in the knowledge that they have access to a fast and efficient ambulance service, should an emergency arise. We interviewed one Accident & Emergency crew (A&E) and one Patient Transport Services crew (PTS) at their depot in Gartnavel, Glasgow.

**MARIE HANSEN** is 37 years old. She's married with an 18 year old daughter. She has been in the ambulance service 10 years, and works on an A & E crew with **DAVID MITCHELL**. David, 34, is married with 3 children aged 7, 12 and 14, and he's been an ambulance attendant driver for 13 years.

**MARIE:** Twice in 2 weeks we've had to recover men who had fallen down a 40 foot embankment and were lying on an edge overhanging the river. We had to climb down a treacherous bank, give what aid we could, strap him to a special stretcher and with the help of the fire brigade, get him to ground level for transfer to hospital.

**DAVID:** Six weeks ago a man decided to end it by jumping from an 18 storey window. His brains and skull were over a wide area and Marie and I had to put on rubber gloves and collect the remains in a polythene bag next to the deceased. Mr Clarke (Health Minister) does not realise the work we do in the field.

**MARIE:** We've been into the holds of

ships, building sites, excavation works, buildings that are literally falling down and smoke filled closes at house fires, to bring out patients without any Oxygen equipment ourselves. Our shifts have eight different starting times and you can get four different shifts in the same week and in a 10 week roster you only get 3 weekends off. Practically ruins your social life. My take home pay is £600 a month for a 39 hour week. It's the same pay however much experience or length of service you've got. But to get full pay you first have to complete a year of operational duties. This might take up to 4 years to complete.

**DAVID:** Last week I got into the house at 3 p.m. and my youngest son aged 7 asked his mum 'who is that strange man?' It had been ten days since I had seen him between my shifts and the times the young chap had to go to bed. I don't mind shifts, I wouldn't be ambulance crew if I did. I enjoy the job but I'd be a lot happier if there was some uniformity in the way management worked out the rotas. My brother is a fireman and works sensible shifts so that he can even do a second job to supplement his income. He gets £13,500. I've another brother who is a police sergeant. He's on £16,500 a year. We get £10,033.

**PETER ROBINSON** is 29 and is married with a 2 year old son. He has been 4 years in the ambulance service. I used to be an operating theatre attendant before I started in the ambulance service. It seemed worth taking a cut in wages as I was promised that I could do my A&E training within 6 months. They promise everybody but it is not automatic, so I'm still working in PTS with Michael. Mr Clarke calls us van drivers but we were called to the post office in Victoria Rd and found the woman was already dead. We also have to do what we can when we come on Road

Traffic Accidents etc until the A&E crews turn up. We have virtually no equipment except carrying chair, a stretcher and our personal first aid bag. My monthly take home is £501, and as my wife is not working there's not a lot left after mortgage food etc. We work shifts -8am to 4.30, 10.30am to 7pm and one weekend in six. My wife goes swimming once a week, and the highlight of my week is getting out on the bicycle. We don't get time to do things together as a family. Last time we had a holiday was 3 years ago, possibly that's why we have a son now. It was the last time we enjoyed ourselves!

**MICHAEL GRACE 27.** The PTS crews ferry patients for out patients appointments to clinics such as radio therapy and renal dialysis, but everyone needs different attention. A fracture, a cancer patient, the terminally ill, or depending on conditions, patients transferring between hospitals have to be cared for in different ways. I'm married to a policewoman who has 5 years experience and she takes home twice as much as me. Admittedly she works longer hours, but there should be some comparison between A&E crews and police and fire. But if we work holidays or overtime we just get the plain rate. My wife got £100 for working Christmas. Anyway you don't see the overtime pay in your hand until about six weeks later. I'm better off than my colleagues, but even so we only eat out or go to the pictures about once a month. But we could not manage on just my pay or we'd be struggling like Peter with his wee fellah.

**MARIE:** I play bowls, and swim and cycle in the summer, but we don't get out a lot because of shifts. If you're early you feel you've got to be in your bed early at night, and if you're late by the time you get home you're tired, and of course night shift you sleep most of the day. And you can't go out for a drink before you go to

work. I don't see my husband very often as he also works shifts in a brewery, and they don't coincide with mine.

Mainly I'd like to see an agreement where we'd get a pay formula for a definite wage rise each year without having to take industrial action. Three years ago when we first went onto a salary pay structure, they promised we'd be kept on parity with the fire brigade. That was never kept to, and now we are adrift £3,000 or more a year. The Whitley Council which decides our wages and conditions is going to be disbanded in October this year. That is when the government's 9% over 18 months would be up, as this dispute is about the pay rise we were due in April '89! When the council has gone, management could hand us 2% and we'd have no say in the matter. By the way, when I joined the service my wages were half of what I'd been earning as a bus driver.

**PETER:** There's just two PTS crews per station handling things like renal dialysis and patients and children under 14. The rest of us are out collecting to try to make up the wages. It is very degrading standing out there rattling a bucket under peoples noses but they've been very generous. The supports been tremendous. For every bit of abuse there's 200 who give us support.

**DAVID:** We're not paramedics. That extra £500 offer, only applies to 24 people in Scotland, and they're more like controllers, officers who don't attend to the public but train us in our skills. I think it is coming to an all out strike - the doctors have been abusing the TUC guide-lines.

**MARIE:** We had a call today and went flying out, blue lights flashing horn blaring, and when we got there they said, "We're not ready for you yet." If Northern Ireland went for an all out strike it would sway the dispute, because the police and army could not go for patients the same way as in Britain for fear of attacks.

**DAVID:** Hopefully an all out strike would only last 6 or at most twelve hours. If it happened in the whole of Britain at the same time it would be interesting to see the army and police try to cope.

**MICHAEL:** The feeling of the crews is that if it was to go to arbitration we'd back at work right away, because the government knows that the arbitrators would make us a much higher offer. But it is determined not to listen to public opinion.

But there is no weakening of resolve amongst the crews. The opposite in fact. The dispute has united the A&E with the PTS crews in a lot of stations.

## Shell Diary

### February: A Good Month For It

There is a theory that the entire year to come, flashes before your eyes as you sit with your family round the festive dinner table. I spent Christmas offshore Norway (that's another story) so I missed out on that particular insight. Reports however suggest we're in for some heavy fighting from about now until December. There are, however, a more reputable ways of forecasting what the new year holds in store for us. And the most reliable way is to have a look back over the year that's just passed. It's almost certain that Deauesceu could have predicted his fate if only he'd taken time to look back over Shell Explo's 1989. In fact, even a glance back through Shell's diary now indicates to us the ideal month in which he could have shot himself and saved the Rumanian people the bother.

January Management Hogmanay party on Brent Delta goes with a bang

### February

March Put a new engine in your Astral Buy formula Shell Crane jib on Cormorant Alpha goes

for a swim. Rumours that Shell had shares in the Exxon Valdez scotched. Who are this Exxon outfit anyway?

April Cormorant Alpha quote of the year. "It's only three valves and a piece of pipe" By the way lads, the swimming pools down the legs are now open.

May Contractors strike. Production up 200% Kelvin Catering strike

June An ex queen visits some practicing ones up at Tullos. While some of Shell's management were trying to clean up their act by playing with soap in the showers, Bob Reid stuck to the same old rubbish.

July A "minor incident" occurs on Brent Alpha. It caused superficial damage said Pinnocchio the Shell spokesman.

August 1140 barrels of oil based mud are lost overboard from the cormorant Alpha. Shell stress its environmentally safe nature. Think of the dermatitis that was avoided. The hydrogen sulphide damage that caused the St Fergus shutdown isn't

the only thing that smells bad about this incident. Then again I suppose any serious problem at a Shell installation could be described as having been discovered "routinely".

September A couple of best sellers for Shell. Double publishing triumph. A book, "A Guide to British Birds". A record, "Oil slick cross the Mersey"

October Old turkey retires as chairman of Shell and takes his expertise to British Rail. They wanted to keep the standards up after Kings Cross and Clapham Junction.

November Brent Bravo catches DNV disease. Water injection plant condemned.

December Shell enters tourist market. "FSU Cruises - Book now!"

We'd like to thank our correspondent from the Cormorant Alpha for this very entertaining diary. We'd just like to assure him that when the writs start flying, he's on his own. We apologise in advance to those other thousands whose experiences of Shell screw ups are not reported in this article. We're only an eight page paper.

## CALLING ALL T&GWU MEMBERS OFFSHORE

The executive of the Transport and General Workers Union has now sanctioned the setting up of an "offshore section" within the "Chemical, Oil and Rubber Trade Group".

We will be setting up four branches for offshore members.

Catering members Automatically transferred.

Drilling members Automatically transferred. All other members should write to the Aberdeen Branch of the T&GWU King Street Aberdeen. Please include your name and address and the name and address of your employer. Members will be placed in one of the two following branches

Construction branch: To include, painters, labourers, hell deck crew, etc.

Oil Company Personnel: To include direct oil company employees and all ACTS membership.

Loggers are to remain in their own trade group, but they will be serviced by the Aberdeen Office as offshore members.

## NEW FEATURE

# A VIEW FROM HOME

You'd better keep your eye on this space, (and a hand protecting your groin wouldn't go amiss) This is the first article in our new regular column written by a team of the wives and girl friends of offshore workers. This column is going to tell it like it really is when we're away, and not how most of us out here would like to believe it is.

These women are no shrinking violets. As we were told in no uncertain terms, "We're 100% behind the men out there, but we're not here to wipe fevered brows. We've enough of that with the kids. We're going to let them know that the problems don't start the minute you step off the chopper, they're with us here at home too. But if you've got a battle to fight, we're your biggest ally."

The women point out that it's not all doom and gloom and that they're going to tell us about some of the "nice moments" too. (That could mean things up a bit - Ed)

We will of course protect the identity of our columnists. Mind you this lot don't seem to be fearful of much. If you want to join the team we'd be glad to hear from you. Phone Lorna at the Offshore Information Centre on 0224 210118.

This month's columnist would just like it to be known that she thought that seeing this was the first one that she'd take it easy with us.

### THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

This year the rota dictated that my husband would be offshore for both Christmas and New Year. However, the children (who are grown up now anyway) and I, decided to make the best of it. The run up to Christmas was more horrendous

than usual - trying to work the present buying, card sending, and extra food shopping round a full time job. But by Christmas Eve it all seemed to be under control, even if I was a physical wreck!!

That's when the oil filled radiator gave up with a bang and a blue flash. It was a major catastrophe. It's our only radiator and it's used a lot for drying and airing washing. I had a look at and decided to have a go at fixing it myself. All the time I needed was to remove the part of the wiring that had blown and re-wire. Having had a similar problem with an iron some months previously, I was fairly confident, and felt very pleased with myself when I had finished the job and the radiator was back in action. Apologies to all you electricians out there - but I don't think you would have been too keen on a Christmas Eve call out.

Hogmanay duly arrived, and I thought I'd seen the last of 1989's hassles. Right in front of my eyes the washing machine, (fully loaded of course) started performing what can only be compared to, a laser light show, across the kitchen floor. In time to the machine's rhythmic action, blue and white flashes were dancing underneath. I watched mesmerised, wondering whether it was going to blow up, or whether I should risk leaving it to see if it would finish the wash. I decided on the latter course. Unfortunately, just before the rinse and spin cycle the machine gave up the ghost. I then realised the limitations of my electrical knowledge and decided this was definitely beyond me. So I spent the rest of the holiday up to my elbow in suds.

So remember while you're out there fighting the elements - back home you've got a few problems with the elements too.

## WHO'S KIDDIN' WHO

by Wullie Weir

Billy Fraser was an ordinary kind of punter, just one of the lads really. The only unusual or eccentric thing about him was his enthusiasm for Partick Thistle, but as we know, it takes all kinds. Billy, it must be said, was very fond of a drink. To tell the truth, the only time Billy was ever sober was when he was on the platform. Even then, it was hard to tell for at least the first four days of the trip. Six packets of Polo and a pair of sun glasses, summer or winter, that was how Billy staggered through the check in at Dyce. "Say nothing", that was his watchword, and that's exactly what he was capable of saying - nothing.

I used to wonder sometimes what the bevvie actually did for Billy. I mean two or three pints in the Crit, especially after a trip on nights, and he was just a disaster area. OK you could handle that maybe, but it was the cheek he used to dish out to people on the train. He could clear a carriage in ten seconds flat. Sometimes though he'd come up against another headache, and that would be it until one of them fell asleep with the drink.

When you're cabined up with somebody, you've got one simple choice, you can speak to them, or you don't speak to them. Me, I'll speak to anybody, but I must say, striking up a conversation with Billy Fraser was a tough job to start with. But once you got Billy talking, you began to see a different side of him. As I've mentioned, he didn't know a lot about fitba', but he thought he did and his crack was good all the same.

Anyway, to cut a long story short, it turned out that Billy wasn't always a "waster", as he himself put it. He was never exactly a steady church goer either, if you know what I mean. Once upon a time, in fact before he got into the offshore game, he'd worked as a foreman in some daft wee fab shop over in Paisley. A few pints on Friday and that was it. Maybe a couple before a home game on a Saturday. But the myth of the big money offshore got him thinking, you know the story. Three years out there, buy a house, a decent motor and then pack it in. Seven years later and yer man was still trying to scrape the price of the deposit on a house together. That is, when he remembered why he first went offshore. Or his wife reminded him - poor woman.

To get on with the story. One night we were standing talking, waiting for the riggers to come and lift a valve for us, it was the last shift of the trip and I was looking forward to getting away from it, like everybody else. We'd managed to get an early check-in because we were on nights, and the only thing that could spoil it would be the fog. Out of the blue, Billy turns round and says, "Oh by the way", trying to be casual, "when I get to Aberdeen I think I'll phone the office and tell them to stuff it." Who hasn't said or thought that out here? But it was the way he said it that bothered me. There was something in his voice that I couldn't ignore.

I knew he wanted to speak about it, so I let him rabbit on. He more or less told me that his bottle had collapsed. He'd been to see his doctor, who didn't know what the f... he was talking about. He got a prescription but lost it when he was drunk somewhere. What it boiled down to was that Billy couldn't handle the idea of getting on to a chopper if he was sober - he was terrified of flying. Meanwhile the bevvie had taken control of him. So he felt he had to keep going offshore to get the money for it. But it wasn't only the flying. Back home his missus was threatening to walk, and take the weans. They just thought he was a bampot. He hadn't spoken to them sober for seven years. He'd missed seeing them growing up.

You didn't need to be a headshrinker or a genius to get the picture. Yer man was under a lot of pressure, and the poor bastard couldn't unload it. He couldn't speak to anybody offshore about it for fear of being laughed at, or getting the bullet. And as he said, his doctor could only come up with tablets. What could I say, all I could do was feel embarrassed and shake my head. Billy needed the job to buy the bevvie, and he needed the bevvie to handle the job. That's a vicious circle and a halt.

What happened next was that Billy got too drunk to phone the office and rap it. The next trip they sent me up to the Brent for a shut-down, and it was a couple of months before me and Fraser bumped into each other again. It was at Dyce at half past six on a Monday morning. There was Billy with the tinted bins, sitting holding the Record - steamin'. I couldn't get a word of sense out of him, he was looking terrible. One of his mates had to give him the wire when his flight was called. You could've told or sold him anything that morning. But no messin', up yer man got, straightened the jacket, hitched up the bag and headed in a more or less straight line for the body search. He'd done it again.

The reason Billy sticks in my mind, is because if I was to be honest I'm not too happy flying choppers either.

## T.V. Dispatches Channel Wed Feb 14 8.30

There's an excellent documentary on safety in the North Sea coming on our screens in February. That at least is the opinion of many of the workers who spoke to the crew while they were up filming in Aberdeen. Traditionally TV has treated us to the same tired old shots of mud covered roughnecks on the drill floor, voiced over with a sanitised report read from oil company headed notepaper. But this time it seems, things are going to be different.

Abraxas Productions has been commissioned by Channel 4 to make a programme about the safety regime in the North Sea, for the hard hitting Dispatches series. Director David Hebditch and researcher Nick Anning made four trips to the city late last year. Another researcher has been working full time in London.

Although reluctant to reveal too much about the programme's contents, Hebditch told Blowout that they'd be asking whether there had really been any major changes in safety management since Piper Alpha. "Other programmes have looked at evacuation procedures," he said, "but it seems to me that it's all a bit too late if you have to step into a lifeboat or jump over the side. Abraxas will be asking why there's so many 'close calls' in the first place."

The Programme, which will also question the safety record of contractors, will be broadcast on Wednesday February 14 at 8.30pm, on Channel 4.

Keep an eye open for this programme. If you're going to be offshore, try and get someone to video it for you. If it's only half as good as reports suggest it'll still be a big step forward for offshore workers. It will, as they say, take more than one swallow to make a summer. But to stay with the bird analogy, maybe the journalistic profession are about to break a duck with this one.



DOWN BUT NOT OUT

Former British and European Heavyweight Champion, Richard Dunn spoke to Blowout from hospital, where he's recovering from a fall

offshore. Richard, a chargehand with Cape Scaffolding, was working on the Arbroath hook up on the 4th of December. He fell 35 feet when a scaffolding he had just climbed collapsed.

Richard was badly injured. He suffered a compound fracture in one leg, two broken ankles, a fractured pelvis, a broken wrist and a badly bruised spine. He maintains that only his exceptional fitness, retained from his boxing days, saved his life. "A smaller man might have died" he says. He reckons that it'll be at least six months before he's up and about, and that's the estimate of a man who by his own words, "isn't used to being on his back."

When asked if he any message for offshore workers he said that he just wanted to wish them all a Happy New Year. And to his colleagues with Cape he said that he'd, "bounce back soon."

Blowout wishes a very courageous Richard Dunn the speediest of recoveries. And we hope that his predicament will cast a light on all the less well known offshore workers who are injured each year.

### OILC TO HOST "CITY OF CULTURE" EVENT

We had intended to host a week of Mozart by the Berlin Philharmonic in Glasgow's new concert hall, but the authorities haven't got it built yet. Pavarotti has already been invited over to do his thing. So we proudly announce:

**Dance & Buffet**  
in the  
**Central Hotel Central Station**  
**Glasgow**  
on  
**Friday 16th March**  
**7.30pm licenced till 1.00am**  
**Price £15.00 per head**

The Buffet will be open between 8.00 and 9.00pm, and Gill Todd and the Tikis will provide the music. Tickets can be obtained from The Offshore Information Centre, 52 Guild Street Aberdeen. Tickets will be sent out on receipt of cheque or postal order. Accommodation at reduced rates can be negotiated, so if you want a room include make sure you contact 0224 210118 in good time.

In fact the last two days of my leave are f... miserable, just thinking about it before I go up to Aberdeen. She gets a hard time. I snap at the weans, kick the dog, in fact I'm just a plain pain in the arse. Trip in trip out I go through with it though - we've got to eat.

It struck me as I saw Billy that morning, that there's a few of us like him in the offshore game. It's just that some can handle it better than others, or kid themselves on better. Billy stands out like a sore thumb because he gets bevvied and noises people up on the train. He's an obvious disaster. And, if the truth be told, there's no way he should be offshore. He's just not safe anymore. What's been worrying me lately is how many Billys am I working with out here? I mean the fly ones who can hide the effects of the pressure, and as I say, kid themselves and everybody else on. How many people like Billy are holding down important positions and calling the shots? Some of the ideas they come up with sometimes, it really makes you wonder. When I think back, I've been on plenty of jobs that were run by punters with piercing eyes and high pitched voices. But I'd never really thought much about what it was that made them nuts in the first place.

It seems to me that the oil companies haven't given much thought to it either. They just want bodies and don't give a damn what happens to Billy or any of the rest of us.

# Safety Legislation Onshore & Offshore

BY RONNIE MCDONALD

As a consequence of Piper, the offshore industry's safety record is under severe scrutiny, and not just at Lord Cullen's inquisition. The previously disinterested great British press is showing some interest too. Although to chip wrappers like the Daily Record, the events of the last year and a half might as well have happened on the dark side of the moon.

We have known for years that the safety set-up offshore stinks; no independent safety inspectorate; exemption from vital aspects of health and safety legislation; cowboy contractors management; the NRB syndrome; need I go on? The obscenity is, it took the death of all these men that July night before anyone listened.

Will it change? Occidental still insist that no fundamental problem exists. The Piper Alpha platform, they say was well managed, in great nick, and had 20 years of profitable life ahead of it. But for the carelessness of two contractors employees, they say, they would not be in the dock. but in the dock they are, and standing beside them is the entire offshore oil industry.

It seems inconceivable that this industry has been able to operate offshore exempt from the full rigour of all the UK health and safety legislation. What has been the motive of successive governments in allowing this special regulatory regime to develop? This is the first in a series of articles in Blowout which will examine in detail those aspects of the offshore safety regime which make it different from onshore.

## Safety Law

The history of government involvement in the regulation of conditions at work goes back to the 19th century at the height of the industrial revolution. Spurred to action by the exploitation of child labour, the Factories Act 1833 was placed on the statute book. It acknowledged that those few employers who would voluntarily alleviate the lot of children in their employ, were reluctant to do so simply because it gave competitors a commercial edge. Regulation across the board established the "level playing field" principle. Minimum standards would apply to all. Four factory inspectors were appointed

for enforcement. Statute law has since expanded and evolved in proportion to the requirements of a complex industrial society.

Industrialisation has imposed changes in the common law too. In the 1850s two important precedents were established in court which laid down duties of care on employers for the health and safety of their employees. By the late 1960s a vast array of law, both statute and judge made, sought to bring order to the profit/safety conflict.

## Roben's Report

The Roben's Committee was appointed in 1970 to review the legal and other aspects of industrial safety in a comprehensive way. Reporting in 1972, it found that the responsibility for industrial safety was far too fragmented. A number of authorities with ill-defined areas of responsibility under a number of different ministries or departments, had the burden of enforcing a tangled web of legislation. This was couched in language so incomprehensible to the common man that a lawyer was generally required to interpret it. much of it was obsolete and referred to processes and conditions of fifty or more years ago.

## Health and Safety at work act 1974 (HASAWA)

Lord Roben laid out certain cardinal principles as guidance for the formation of future safety policy. "No department", he said, "should be responsible for enforcing safety in the industry that it sponsored" An independent Inspectorate under a single government agency was required. Furthermore, the primary responsibility for improving health and safety lay with those who create the risks and not those who work with them.

The outcome of the Roben's Report was the health and safety at work act 1974 (HASAWA). This in turn created the Health and Safety Commission/Executive, which took over from the fragmented official authorities which had previously existed. The Health and Safety Executive derives its authority from HASAWA, and is answerable to the Employment Secretary.

Safety legislation which pre-dates HASAWA can be, and often is, improved or repealed where necessary, to maintain or improve standards. It and subsequent legislation, is subordinate to HASAWA. In fact the '61 Factories Act is largely

repealed.

## Mineral Workings Act '71

The main instrument of legislative control in the North sea however is the Mineral Workings (Offshore Installations) Act '71. As the title suggests, its purpose is to legitimise the exploitation of oil and gas in what is essentially international waters. The Act imposes UK law aboard, and 500 metres around installations. Regulations and codes of practice made under the Act are administered by the Department of Energy.

From the point of view of successive governments, vesting control of the oil wealth in the hands of one department has proved a highly satisfactory arrangement. During the early part of the nation's bankruptcy in the mid '70s, offshore development was progressed with amazing speed. Some would say undue haste.

UK economic policy from 1976 onward was based on the assumption of oil self-sufficiency by 1978. Nothing was to be allowed to impede this development, least of all any nonsense about bringing the offshore safety regime into line with Roben's recommendations. Equally, the Thatcher economic experiment was totally based on maximum oil flow.

One of the most revealing lines of questioning pursued at the Piper Inquiry, has highlighted a serious anomaly regarding these two Acts. With the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Energy having separate policy areas and separate Acts of Parliament to administer, separate and divergent developments in safety enforcement have evolved. We have been allowed to believe over the years that although the Department of Energy's

polices safety offshore, it does so by proxy for the Health and Safety Executive. This is known as the Agency Agreement. This appears to be something of a sham. Officials from both departments, questioned on why certain key elements of safety legislation have never been extended offshore, have failed to provide credible reasons.

## C.O.S.H.H.

On October 1st 1989, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health regulations came into effect. Yes you guessed it - but not offshore! Mr Petrie, Director of Safety at the Department of Energy, was asked why. He asserted that his, "...understanding is .....that the existing (offshore) safety regime adequately covered the objectives of those (COSHH) regulations."

"Which part of the existing offshore safety regime" asked the QC

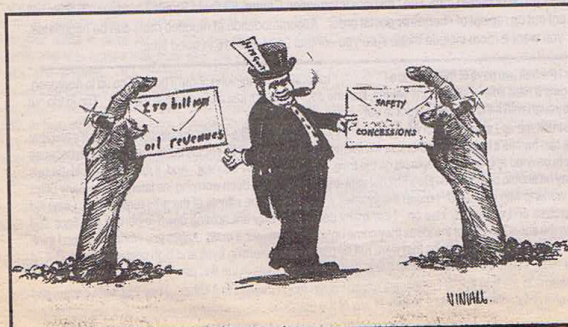
"Regulation 4 - I think", came Petrie's answer, "...there may well be other areas....." he ventured when pressed further.

What a load of evasive nonsense from the Department of Energy's top safety man.

Mr John Rimington, the Director General of the Health and Safety Executive, wasn't taken in by all this talk of an Agency Agreement. He was asked about his department's role in overseeing the Department of Energy. In the tortured language of the bureaucrat being forced to tell the truth, he said that, ".....the view and attitude taken by the Department of Energy, has been to the effect that, what is covered by the Health and Safety at Work Act, (offshore), in practice is very limited."

One of the main objects of our sit-ins last summer was to highlight the safety issue. That we were deprived of the full protection of the Health and Safety at Work Act. The oil industry rolled out the public relations circus to assure the public our claims were inaccurate.

Until all UK Health and Safety legislation is applied offshore, without reservation the safety campaign will continue.



**STUC**  
SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONGRESS

## TRAINING FOR SAFETY REPRESENTATIVES

"Training arrangements are the responsibility of the safety committees, not of the oil companies, and In House courses are **just not on.**" (Ronnie McDonald)

The trade unions have, ".....considerable experience in training.....particularly in the representational role" (Paragraph 77 of the Guidance Notes)

The STUC will be running a series of three day courses specially designed for the offshore safety representatives. in their TREESBANK HOUSE residential college in Kilmarnock

8 April	module 1	"The Legal Framework"
11 April	module 2	"Improving Safety Offshore"
28 May	module 3	"Safety Reps in Action"

For further information contact Ian Miller, STUC Education Officer, 16 Woodlands Terrace, Glasgow G3. Phone 332-4946

# A Look Round The North Sea

## EIDER AND SAFE GOTHIA EVACUATIONS

If there's one thing we're learning from the Northern sector of the North Sea these days it's how essential we are, or not, as the case may be. For Shell's men 1990 began much as 1989 ended, with evacuations.

December 29 saw 42 "non essential" men flown off the Eider to take refuge on N Cormorant in what the OIM described as a "copy book evacuation". What doesn't seem to have been copy book was the operation that resulted in the 10 barrel crude spill and put the platform onto red alert. Safety reps on board also felt that the time taken by Shell to get a report of the incident out was a little less than copy book.

Barely a fortnight later Shell used a fleet of fourteen helicopters to ferry 393 men off the accommodation vessel Safe Gothia. It should be stressed that as far as Shell were concerned this was not an evacuation, it was a downmanning.

Apparently two of the vessel's 8 anchor cables failed. It looks like it was some performance. 136 men were transferred to the Safe Supporter, which was sitting off Cormorant A. 257 went to Sumburgh and of them then 142 carried on to Aberdeen, (via variously Glasgow and Peterhead it seems). Shell's Public Affairs department in Aberdeen was assuring us all that, "The downmanning exercise was carried out routinely" and that, "the vessel is in no danger." In that case the Coastguard helicopter which was used in the evacuation, should perhaps have been kept in case of a real evacuation. I wonder if the unions could hire it for a day to do a recruitment campaign?

All things considered it was a busy day for the public Affairs office. They'd been up early, explaining that no personnel had been in danger when earlier that morning, the telescopic bridge linking the Safe Gothia to Brent Charlie, had automatically lifted.

## SAFETY COMMITTEES

How was the safety committee set up on your installation? Fairly? Copies of the regulations and guidance notes should be available to you on board. Contact the Offshore Information Centre if you've got a problem about the way it's being done.

## HEAPS OF JUNK

Like the platforms, the semis on the North Sea are getting older. Why do the D of E continue to let some of these heaps operate? What is the useful life span of these rigs? Is it time for stricter legislation? Would they put up with this in Norway? Talking about heaps of junk, is there any news from the Ocean Victory or the Srdneth 701 these days? Drop Blowout a line if you've got any ideas on these or other subjects.

## NUS & TGWU

The NUS and T&G are about to launch a joint campaign amongst drilling personnel. Wage increases of 15% to 20%, have put smiles on faces in some quarters lately. Does this mean that we don't need the unions? Before we get complacent, what are the realities?

The companies setting the pace on wages are invariably those who honour union agreements and who maintained "reasonable" conditions during the '86 slump. So just how secure is your pay rise if you have no union? We're only just clearing our way back from the 20% to 25% cuts of a few years back.

If we took our eyes off our pay packets for a moment we'd be able to look over to the Norwegian Sector. A two on three off would be a big step forward for us. It would give us time to do the training courses we need, and still have adequate leave. And what about overtime payments for Christmas and New Year, holiday credits, wages for time spent on courses, fair grievance procedures, annual wage negotiations and effective protection for safety reps? All these and more are standard on the Norwegian sector.

Look out for the NUS, TGWU campaign. Study their "Draft Agreement" proposals. Get to the meetings ashore and tell the union what you want them to fight for. Better join first though.

See the advert on page 1 for the upcoming OILC meetings. More participation from drilling and catering would be great. If you need a friend in a fight, you won't find better than the "bears".

## COWBOYS?

What do you know about Lasalle, Macnamee, Channel and Rigblast? Seems like there's quite a bit of interest about these four. If you do have any information that you think we should have, drop us a line soon. We believe that they deserve a bit

of publicity. Lets give them it.

## BLOWOUT

Could it possibly be true that the Amara-Dee company man on the Sedco 707 ordered stewards to bin copies of the "Odyssey-How Much Longer" issue of Blowout. What a Phillistine.

The whole world and his aunt Fanny are applauding the restoration of 'free speech' in Eastern Europe. God forbid that the same right should be extended to the UK sector of the North Sea. Glasnost? My arse!!

## INTEROCEAN II

Texaco confirm that their reports of the sinking of I.O.2 missed the fact that a container broke loose on deck prior to the sinking. They are however adamant that eye witness reports that it damaged an engine room supply cowling, (a goose neck air vent), are false. Our information is that as a result the compressors and therefore the air activated bilge pumps were put out of action. Might this have had some bearing on the parting of the tow rope from the Ann Viking and the power failure that triggered the complete evacuation of the rig. Texaco have as yet offered no explanation for these events. (See Vince Swales letter on page 2)

## THICK AND FAST

Phillips, "due to commercial considerations" refuse to confirm or deny that the kick taken by the Glomar Moray Firth on Christmas day was in the region of 350 barrels. Our information suggests that it was taken when the bit was 100ft from surface on a trip out from 14500 ft, and was "bull-nosed" back into the formation. What has been confirmed is that the crew were at boat stations for nearly 3 hours but that the coastguard was not informed. The incident took place about 40 miles from Ekofisk on the British side. Even if the D of E have little interest, the Norwegian authorities and unions will. Phillips and Global Marine are not of course a new combination. Maybe somebody out there would like to do some reminiscing about events out in block 30/7 back in the Summer of '85. Between the Glomar Arctics 1 and 2 there was an incident that killed two men and 2 separate blowouts as far as I can remember.

Meanwhile Keith Bolland, Arco's Drilling Superintendent confirmed that their rig the Zapata Scotia took a "salt water kick" while drilling 48/5-1. They couldn't weight up and kill it conventionally because they didn't have the strength at the shoe. The well was cemented and casing was set above the kick zone. However he denied reports received by Blowout that subsequently they spent 12 days fighting a big kick at around 9,500 ft.

Please keep us informed. Oil companies are not a reliable source of information.

That Christmas Day in the British sector is just like any other day, is a fact that any of us unfortunate enough to be out here at the time will readily confirm. On the Ocean Alliance, however, they decided to emphasise the fact, by having an emergency drill that afternoon.

As they stood braving the elements at their muster stations, the Ben-Odeco employees could be seen stomping up and down, flapping their arms and gazing wistfully at the horizon. You might think that they were yearning to be with their loved ones on this Festive occasion and I'm sure they were. However the wistful gaze had more to do with the trepidation with which they were awaiting the long overdue delivery of winter's issue of thermal clothing. Apparently last year's merely adequate garments cost in the region of £19. This year, it is to be replaced by a set costing the princely sum of £12. The men are not able to picture a set of quilted thermals at this price bracket, and a vision of Damart cotton long-johns has unsettled them somewhat.

By the way the thermals arrived and were O.K. somebody has an eye for a bargain.

Despite the drill, Christmas on the Alliance was a qualified success mainly due to the first class fare served up by the magicians from Caterae. Heaven knows how they do it? Pity their employers, (not a member of COTA), don't properly recompense them for their expertise.

## AIRPORT BAR

For goodness sake, if you're going offshore from Aberdeen Airport, don't under any conditions, slip into the bar. No! Not even if it has the only toilets open in the whole complex. That's not an excuse. Shell, it seems, have a man watching the door. I hope he doesn't inadvertently net one of their executives getting ready to pour himself onto a "free drinks flight" to wherever.

# VIDEO Cocktail My left foot

**Cocktail:** Directed by Roger Donaldson. Starring Tom Cruise, Bryan Brown, Elisabeth Shue

**My Left Foot:** Directed by Jim Sheridan. Starring Daniel Day Lewis, Ray McAnally, Brenda Frick, Fiona Shaw.

## REVIEWED BY GEORGE WHITTAKER

Of the films released in the past couple of months there can hardly be two more contrasting than those. Cocktail stars one of the top male attractions of the moment, deals with fashionable fixations (sex, booze, money) and was a big deal at the box office. My Left Foot is a low budget affair by a first time director, and concerns itself with much that is unlikely to appeal to a mass audience.

First to Cocktail. Tom Cruise and Bryan Brown play a couple of Manhattan bartenders with a talent for juggling bottles and swiveling their crotches at potentially screwable female customers. Doug Coughlin (Brown) is cynical, worldly-wise and middle-aged. He takes on up-and-coming youthful opportunist Brian Flanagan (Cruise), for no apparent reason other than he sports a flawless hair-do, and has a head fully fitted with perfect ice-white teeth. He's just out of the army and keen as hell to make a mint as fast as he can. Initially Flanagan sees the job in front of the optics as little more than a handy way of financing his college course, but once he learns the ropes the two of them begin to pull in the punters. Before long the ebullient Flanagan is urging his mentor to form a partnership; the happy-go-lucky pair plan to strut their stuff in a bar of their own in tax free Jamaica, where they can get rich, get drunk and get laid, to their empty heart's content.

A quarrel arises, however, over a girl (what else?) so Cruise high tails it off to Jamaica alone. There he falls for, then cheats on, a curvaceous, doe-eyed beauty with whom he frolics and fucks at unconscionable length, among the turquoise waves of the Caribbean. Inevitably, Coughlin has by this time reappeared, now married to money and advising his old friend to do likewise.

Having established the truly uplifting principle that love is for losers and money'n fun are the only loadstars worth following, the film then makes a wild stab at a complete moral about-face. It attempts to show that Flanagan is made of far nobler stuff after all, and ends up collapsing into mawkish melodrama.

Substituting flash for style, wisecracks for wit and Cruise's permanently cheezy grin for anything remotely resembling solid

acting, Cocktail never-the-less has enough late 80s chart hitz on its soundtrack to keep your toes tapping. There are a sufficient number of beautiful people and locations to keep you misty-eyed with lazy dreams of a better life, but it'll only satisfy anyone prepared to button up their brain for an hour and a half.

My Left Foot, however, is not one to miss. It tells the story of Christy Brown, the Irishman born with cerebral palsy into an impoverished family but who, using the only properly working part of his body - his left foot - managed to achieve considerable success as a painter and writer.

It's a remarkable story, and in the hands of writer-director Jim Sheridan, makes for a film of quite extraordinarily emotional power. Daniel Day Lewis's performance as Brown is outstanding. Archetypally good looking, Day Lewis nevertheless manages to contort his frame and features so convincingly as to achieve complete credibility as the appallingly afflicted Irishman - an uncanny piece of metamorphosis that will do no harm to Lewis's growing reputation as one of the most versatile actors around. (Just think of his contrasting impersonations in My Beautiful Laundrette, The Incredible Lightness of Being and Room With A View)

The small victories, major disappointments and ultimate triumph of Brown's physically and emotionally agonising struggle to overcome the crippling constrictions of his wrecked body make for compelling and, it must be said, at times heart-rending viewing, from his early desperate attempts to communicate with the family who had given up on him, through the tragic-comedy of his explosive adolescence, to his final acceptance as a gifted artist and writer.

The rest of the cast are fine too. Ray McAnally and Brenda Fricker turn in solid performances as Brown's parents, struggling to feed their large family and to understand the needs of their talented and temperamental son, while Hugh O'Conor's portrayal of the young Brown is positively inspired. The mean streets and cramped conditions of post-war Dublin, the back drop to the human drama, are authentically created by Sheridan.

But the film remains Day Lewis'. He conveys everything - love, hate, frustration, exhilaration - through the eyes. Informed by the therapist who has turned his mumbly into comprehensible speech and with whom he has fallen in love, that she is to marry the whimsical gallery owner who has just exhibited Brown's first collection of painting, Lewis builds up a crescendo of manic anger that is positively awesome in its proportions. While at the other extreme his witty, mischievous wooing of the nurse who was to become his wife, is marvellously warm and light.

In the hands of the wrong director the story of the crippled underdog, fighting and winning against the odds, could easily have been turned into sentimental schlock, but in every department My Left Foot is a model of subtlety and restraint. On no account miss it; it will make you want to leap up and punch the air with sheer joy.

## NEXT

### ARTICLES TO LOOK OUT FOR

Due to pressure on space, our regular record reviewer and our celebrity book reviewer have both agreed to forego this month's hugely inflated payment, and hold over their contributions till the next issue.

**John Rowlinson** will be back next month with a review of a Danny Wilson album on Virgin, Bee Bop Mop Top. He reckons that it's well worth a listen

**Red Adair An American Hero** gets a going over from our guest reviewer. Our resident mountaineer takes an educated look at the practice of **Abselling** on offshore installations

We've butchered an article sent to us by **Greenpeace**. Why don't they let the crazy ones write?

**Search and Rescue** in the Brent field comes under the microscope. It raises some questions about the relationship between safety and finance

And much much more. If your installation isn't getting a regular delivery of Blowout, make sure that it does, by contacting us at the **Offshore Information Centre, 52 Guild Street, Aberdeen Tel 0224-210 118**

**IMPORTANT** Keep the articles and letters and poems coming in. Absolutely final deadline for inclusion in the next issue is Friday February 23. Feature articles should be submitted to arrive by February 16.

# Where The Money Goes

Thanks to all those who have contributed to OILC funds

Of the £37,000 that had been contributed by the year's end, £25,500 had come directly from the platforms, while £11,500 had come from various sources, including the 108 mass meetings held throughout the country.

A detailed account is available for scrutiny at the Offshore Information Centre. Below is a brief resume of how your money is being used.

Last summer's dispute took by far the biggest single amount. Newspaper advertising in Scotland, Tyneside, Teeside and Great Yarmouth cost over £4000 alone. Next came the setting up of the Information Centre. This included acquiring the lease and the usual associated costs, legal fees etc. Second hand office furniture was bought and phones and a photocopier were installed.

Three computers were bought costing over £4,500. Two of these are installed in the Information Centre. One is used for general administrative work, while the more powerful PC is linked to Telecom Gold and Geonet allowing fast access to a vast array of information. This computer also provides full world wide telex facilities. £780 has also been spent on a fax machine.



The third computer, with desk top publishing facility is used by Blowout, giving it the capacity to produce a monthly paper of high technical quality. The OILC is committed to financing the paper for an initial period, to the tune of £2000 a month. This will cover publishing, printing and distribution costs. The current print run is a healthy 8000 copies and will appear monthly as of this edition. Much of the finance required should be raised by the football card scheme, any shortfall being made up from OILC funds.

A fully itemised statement of account is freely available for scrutiny at the Offshore Information Centre, 52 Guild Street. The above outline does not detail every item. For instance, a modest profit was made on our OILC T-Shirts, and a few of them are still available, "Above the Crit".

## Round The Yards

Rab Wilson the convener of shop stewards at Highland Fabricators' yard at Nigg was reminiscing the other day when Blowout spoke to him on the phone. He'd seen a copy of our paper and it had brought back memories of "The Shop Floor" a paper that a welder at the yard, John Monroe, had edited some years ago.

We're flattered and we hope that Blowout stirs more than memories. Maybe the tradition of writing for a workers paper will be resurrected at the yard and spread throughout the onshore side of the oil industry. We're certainly going to be keeping an eye on what's happening at "Davy" in Dundee, "McDermott" at Ardesier, "Hi Fab" at Nigg, "RGC" at Methil in Fife and at the "Press Houden" yard on Tyneside. As a matter of interest we may be looking at another couple as well soon. There's word that the receivers for the old Howard Dorris yard at Kishorn are talking to two prospective buyers. And with the massive expansion in construction work either under way or planned in the near future, there's no way that we can rule out the re-opening of the old Hereema yard at Arnish Point on Lewis. Certainly there's a lot of work about. Already the order books at Ardesier are so full that McDermott are declining to tender for any new work at present. They were recently awarded the contract for Occidental's new Saltire field.

But that's not all. We'll be trying to keep you up to date with what's going on at the oil and gas terminals at St. Fergus in Buchan, Mossmorran in Fife, Flotta in Orkney, Sullom Voe in Shetland and at Nigg Bay. We'll also keep an eye on Grangemouth, where amongst other things, they're busily rebuilding the bits that blew up.

All that remains is to wish the workers on these sites the same Happy new Year that we wish our regular readers offshore, and urge them to keep in touch with what's going on. We have a common cause. Use the letters page if you want to speak to your colleagues whether on or offshore. That's what we're here for.

By the way, if there are any copies of "The Shop Floor" kicking about, please send one off to us.



## RON BROWN

Well! Well! It all seems to be happening to Ron Brown these days. One month he's appearing in Blowout, - thanked for making a donation, (a very welcome £10 as it happens). The next month he's up in court accused of all sorts of shenanigans. This time his donation was £1000 and it went straight to Her Majesty's Government. And I think we can safely assume that a further hefty donation ended up going to that other worthy cause, the legal profession.

In no way are we complaining about his donation to Blowout. It showed a concern for our welfare shared by only a tiny group of other MPs, and was of the same magnitude as their donations. But there's got to be a lesson in this debacle somewhere. Maybe it is that if Mr Brown had played his cards differently, Blowout could have had the £1000 and we'd have gladly passed on our £10 to the government.

Anyway if we had any problems about our attitude to Ron Brown, they were dealt with when we made a recent trip to Edinburgh. I asked a couple of young unemployed workers just what the local angle was on the whole affair.

"I think he's a @\*^%\$\* idiot", came the reply, "but that doesn't make him any less qualified than the rest o' them round here to be an MP."

What can you say to that?

## Journalists On The March In Aberdeen

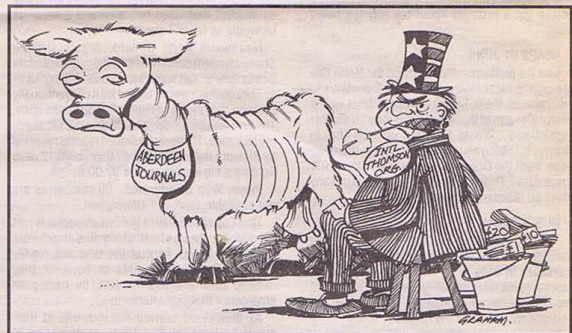
Sacked Scots journalists are planning a massive march and rally in Aberdeen on Saturday February 24.

Journalists on the Press and Journal and Evening Express were sacked on October 3 last year after taking strike action in support of colleagues victimised for taking part in an earlier strike. The first three week strike was over union recognition and 137 staff took part in action.

Now four months into the dispute, the journalists have won support from politicians throughout Scotland and 40 scots local authorities have withdrawn advertising from the two titles in protest at the treatment of staff.

A petition deploring the conduct of management at Aberdeen Journals amassed 30,000 signatures. Copies have been presented to local management and to the company's headquarters in London and international bosses at Thompson Corporation in New York.

The journalists are anxious for the support of oil workers at the rally on **February 24**. Marchers should assemble at Rubislaw Terrace Gardens at 10.45 am for a march down Union Street and rally at 12 noon at Mitchell Hall, Marischall College in Broad Street, Aberdeen.



### ADVERTISEMENT

#### GET OUT OF SERPS BY APRIL

You are not going to get the pension that you're entitled to. Not if you stay in the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS). If you are a man under 45, or a woman under 40 years of age, it's likely that you'll benefit by "contracting out"

If you don't do this before April you could lose as much as £293 a year for the next three years, and at the end of the day have a pension that is less than you expect.

Opting out is likely to benefit you in a number of ways. You should end up with a bigger pension at no extra cost. You'll get a government subsidy, (as an incentive), till 1993. and if you change your employer your pension's not frozen.

This needn't cost you extra. The government will redirect part of your existing National Insurance contributions from the state scheme to your own Personal Pension Scheme. You can however add your own money to boost your pension.

But you must apply to transfer from SERPS. If you want further information, details of an application form, contact John Dixon or Alex Irwin on 041-332-7799 or c/o the Offshore Information Centre 52 Guild Street, Aberdeen.