AMOCO UNDER SCRUTINY

Amoco's North Sea operations have been under scrutiny for the last six months.

The first signs of serious mismanagement surfaced when offshore workers attended a mass meeting in Glasgow, last September.

They openly challenged Amoco's version of the events surrounding the evacuation of the Newton platform. In the incident 108 men were flown off when an underground blowout occurred.

On the 16th of February this year, Aberdeen MP Frank Doran revealed a catalogue of serious safety breaches on the nearly-completed Arthoum platform, and on the scheduled arrival of Mr. Mac. On the Arthoum, the permit to work system was exposed as having completely broken down. (Deficiencies in the permit system were identified by Lord Callan as a significant factor in the Piper disaster). At the same time a Department of Transport inspector onboard the Mr. Mac had identified 10 defects in safety equipment.

It was on the Arthoum's close neighbour the Montrose that the serious incident occurred. The February 23 edition of Obscure View Scotland brought together a lot of facts that were gathering in Aberdeen's Offshore Information Centre. On the 14th of February two production modules filled with gas when the platform was brought back on stream after rehabilitation. Over twenty alarms were set off. Work had recently been undertaken on a pressure safety valve. Incidents of this kind were not unprecedented. The fault blocks which normally seal off the conduits through which electrical cables pass from module to module, had been removed. This gave the gas open access to the switchroom in module nine, an area in which the risk of sparks is constant.

The parallels with the events that led to the Piper inferno are too obvious to be overlooked. Other comparisons between the Montrose and Piper are chilling. Both were installed in the summer of '75 making them amongst the oldest of the North Sea's platforms. They were both built by the French company 'Union Industrielle et d' Enterprise'. In conjunction with McDermott in the case of Piper.

The abuse of the permit to work system on the Arthoum took place in the rush to commission the platform and begin oil production. But production could not begin till a new pipeline to the Montrose had been completed. All the new Arthoum platform's oil is to go abroad round through the Montrose.

It is under these conditions that the Department of Energy had granted dispensation to Amoco to operate the Montrose despite the failure of its accommodation to meet even the industry's minimum standards. Even the ill-fated Piper accommodation module was rated A60, fit to withstand a fire for 90 minutes. The Montrose accommodation module has been condemned. It is years since the B-Vac system has worked. This is the system that pressurises the accommodation and protects it from being penetrated by gas. A new accommodation module is under construction and is due to be installed this summer.

Amoco deny that the transit blocks were missing during the Montrose gas leak and insist that the accommodation module has the necessary certification.

The Department of Energy for their part admit that the Montrose accommodation module does contain combustible materials as part of its structure. They insist that Amoco fulfil certain criteria. These include fitting new accommodation before April '91, and not using the gas compression system till then has been done.

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Who is in this and who the hell is he talking about?

Well, the answer to the first part is that in 1978 a Waterhouse, the energy minister, nominal head of safety on the North Sea. According to the Glasgow Herald, he's been talking to the Institute of Petroleum Engineers. After telling them what a bumper year they had ahead of them he moved to safety, on the subject of which he said that it was especially regrettable that a handful of people have continued to make screaming false allegations unsupported by the evidence, which have only occasioned further distress and anxiety.

Your guests is as is good as ours on the second part. May be he should have had the courage to name names and forget about smear tactics.
EDITORIAL

SHUT DOWN "MONTROSE"

Blowout fully endorses the call made by the OILC on the 25th February, that the Montrose platform be shut down.

This call was not made lightly. It was recognised that it might cause hardship to the families of workers on the Montrose who respect the opinion of the OILC, and who will now fear even more for the safety of their loved ones. It was also understood that this was likely to cause some alarm amongst men who earn their wages working on the platform.

However, as one OILC standing committee member put it, "Many of us had grave suspicions about Piper Alpha and remained silent because of ignorance and fear. We are no longer ignorant of what the oil companies are capable of, or afraid of them for that matter. Our only fear is that another Piper will happen because we did not speak out.

CONFIDENCE IN OURSELVES

It is significant that the full time union officials involved in the offshore industry have buried their differences. They have joined together and persuaded their own national committees that the only way to bring the entire offshore industry into line with the New Order's Workers' Charter and the contractors' agreements is to negotiate a new constitutional agreement that includes the Contractors Council and the Trade Unions. This would include a domestic market for the construction of offshore rigs, and the right of the trade union officials on the OILC. The reality of a single offshore agreement embracing all workers is not beyond us, if only we can start believing in ourselves. We must make the effort to see it through, place our trust in the trade unions and support the OILC.

Let us begin by being honest and asking ourselves if we are good and committed trade unionists. Is the union blinding us to the fact that many of our officers seem more concern with their own jobs than with the best interests of the trade union movement? How many officers can say that they have never done a three-weeker? How many of their officers can say they have the last year's dispute all the way through, without looking elsewhere for a job? How many of their officers can say they have not done a three-weeker? If so, how can we be trusted to be the voice of the workers?

A LONG WAY TO GO!

I hope that the OILC will have the foresight to think of offshore workers who have hundreds of miles to travel to and from home each trip. I hope we can bypass the foundations now, so that come time, and others like me, might just get home the same day that we leave the rig. As it is, my journey home can be another day and a half out of our two-week leaves.

The new OILC has always refused to make any allowances for those workers who have long distances to travel. I usually catch the 6.15 pm train from Aberdeen. This takes me as far as York, where I have to wait in the waiting room until 6.40 am the next morning to catch my connection to Newcastle and then on to Scarborough.

I made this journey seven times in the last year. Once I got an early check-in that allowed me to catch an earlier train, but for the rest I drove home. Driving home about 2.0 pm on the following morning. I have to risk life and limb for this, having to drive so far and at night through a foggy road.

Any regrets for me or my earlier check-in I have never had a run on dead cars. No one wants to know. We've heard it all before.

CONTACT BLOWOUT

If "Blowout" contact Blowout and give him his name and address if you have a phone number where he can be contacted, then we will be more than pleased to publish his excellent letter.

Likewise if "Born Again" could get in touch and give us permission to edit some of the more explicit obscenities then we will publish his letter too.

OFFSHORE Information Centre
Criterion Buildings
32 Guild Street
Aberdeen AB1 2NB
Or phone the newdesk:
041 423 0661
Fax:
041 555 5559

YOUR LETTERS

IT NEEDS TO BE SAID

Having read the South edition of Blowout and in particular Jim Fleming's letter, I felt that he had missed some of the point of the NW Bulletin Article. The fact that the oil companies are economical with the truth and that their "official" statements seem sometimes to make executives feel that they are on the wrong rig will surprise very few. However the extent of these incidents and the variations of interpretations should be aired. And particularly in this case.

Blowout seems to have been diligent and possibly fortunate in receiving detailed information about the incident. It should be applauded for informing its readers.

A deliberate policy of "isolation" that Mr Fleming mentions is not something I have ever experienced on any of the rigs I have worked on. I have often discussed my knowledge of drilling operations with anyone who asks to ask.

From Mr Fleming's "whistleblower" ammendments it would seem that he believes that what he doesn't know won't hurt him. I prefer not to bury my head in the sand. I hope Blowout will continue to print similar articles, the more informative the better.

Ian Cowie

"THREE-WEEKER"

I am writing to try and highlight the hypocrisy regarding safety that exists on the Ninian Field. A recommendation that 12 hours should be seen as a normal shift is being strictly adhered to by Chevron and it is causing a lot of whinging and moaning amongst the crew who have become well used to their 15 hour (normal compulsory) working day.

After months of trying I managed to work a 12 hour shift and create jobs for their fellow workers, the oil company did a turn for me, or so I thought, but it has only widened the situation. My brothers are now happily working three weeks on one week off, something only a few months ago would not have been tolerated. As numerous reminders from the construction super pointed out. These people are being exploited and not protected by their employers.

Across the board the whole area is being exploited, as was the case in 1979 and it is causing a lot of bitterness amongst the crew.

AGW would appear to be the worst of the lot as out of a crew of around 24 only 4 have not succumbed to the greed and given in to their management regarding extra time.

What makes things worse is that due to Chevron's down market over Christmas and New Year, the bulk of these men were paid off but given dates to start back again in January, and it was emphasised that they would have to work 3 weeks on to fit into a new crew change.

Two and two

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THOUGHTS OF A BORED BUTCHER

May 1, through your great North Sea newspaper, try and get the attention of the OILS onboard the floater Safe Supporter. I am also speaking to anybody else who is responsible for the pastime activities or the lack of them.

The two sets of darts we had are obviously sea sick, and have had to be medicated to shore. The Trivial Pursuits game is anything but aptly named. Trying to find it is far from a trivial pursuit. The gym! "Ha! Ha! Ha!" Sorry about the mad laughter, but what else can you do when faced with a table tennis table and a heap of scrap metal? Maybe it's a DIY gym. Build your own weights - Hours of fun! The cinema is great, but if the films start half an hour before you finish your shift it's a bit crap to say the least.

So whoever it is that goes to meetings to decide what you're going to let us do in our free time, read on. Why don't you ask the people who work out here what they want? And I don't mean the usual half dozen or so who are not even in touch with what we do in our work, let alone who we want to do as a pastime.

And while I'm at it, Don't forget about the catering staff because now is the winter of our discontent.

The Bored Butcher.

"RIGBLAST" ON MAGNUS

In your last issue you wrote about cowboy outfits, Rigglast, Channel, etc., and asked for stories. I was on a maintenance contract, painting on Magnus for a while, at £5 an hour. When Rigblast were awarded the jacket contract, all blasting and spraying and a lot more hard work, they reduced our rate to £6.60. They promised it would go back up to £5 when the jacket was complete. When I asked about the rate the contract manager said that we were staying on £4.60 and that we were lucky to be in a job.

Some months later they lost the contract which they had held for 4 years. Some people have speculated that this was because of the low moral of the painting squad that felt that Rigglast had ripped them off but were too scared to say anything. Now with the OILC on the go, we feel that we can go to them for action. Keep up the good work.

YOU - THE MEMBERSHIP WILL DECIDE-

Derek McGilvray

SEDCO SEMI

I recently received issue 3 of your excellent paper "Blowout". I would appreciate it if you could send a copy to my home address each month. Please find enclosed a subscription donation which I will renew in January 1991.

For your information I work as a radio operator on a Sedco semi-submersible. Blowout is certainly causing a stir offshore. Keep up the good work.

Name and address withheld.

A BREATHE OF FRESH AIR

I am a medic working on a jack up drilling rig in the southern part of the North Sea. During the early part of January I received by post, two copies of your paper Blowout. At first glance I thought it was a "left wing" scandal sheet, but on reading it I found it to be a breath of fresh air blowing through our industry.

I would like to enquire if you have a subscription system set up so I can receive the paper by post on a regular basis.

Name and address withheld.
MORECAMBE BAY OUTRAGE

IT IS 19.00 HOURS ON MONDAY 9TH OCTOBER, 1989 AND A SO CALLED CONTROLLED EXPLOSION OF A SUSPECTED BOMB HAS JUST TAKEN PLACE - IT INVOLVED 300 MEN'S LIVES - HOW COULD THIS BE ALLOWED IN THE WAKE OF PIPER ALPHA?

Dear Mr Marguerie,

I would appreciate 10 minutes of your important time to read these notes. I’ve made concerning a badly handled bomb scare onboard an Offshore Installation, owned by HGB, a subsidiary of British Gas.

Monday 9th October, 1989 - 8:30. A taped up package 6” x 7” with a wire and a timing device attached was found in the D2 cellar area on the CCP installation at 8:30 by HGB production personnel. It was 9:30 before a platform announcement was made. Not to this extent, it informed all personnel to muster lifeboat stations as an exercise only. No mention was made of the found package.

10:15 All lifeboat crews were told to remain together carrying their lifejackets and not to leave the two recreation lounges onboard, the AVI and a similar incident occurred onboard API. From 10.15 to 10.40 (4 hours), all the men were told to stay put in the two recreation lounges and amuse themselves watching videos or playing pool, while others chain smoked to calm their nerves, or tried to get some sleep to simply forget the whole stressful situation which was in hand. There was a warm stale stench in both the recreation lounges, from cigarette smoke and the smell of human fear — you could see very concerned and scared expressions etched on every man’s face and yet the next announcement was still hours away. All the men and myself could think and talk about was, was going back to the other badly handled bomb scare in the Morecambe Field last Xmas in 1989, on Tuesday 27th December, when again, all the men were right in the dark until the last minute.

10:30 Finally the OIM called everyone into the upstairs recreation lounge and told the men a “6” x “7” package was found in the D2 area of the CPP with wire and a timing device attached and was being insured by production personnel as a possible bomb. The OIM then said they had nixed the beach and asked for the bomb disposal experts to be sent out. They were due to arrive at approximately 16:00 (4 hours and 30 minutes later). Usually with all the police activity and bomb experts situated right there in Blackpool (15 minutes away), for the Conservative Party Conference. The OIM then said the Field Manager had agreed to fly off any man who wanted to leave to the mainland, but not wages and that they would be flown back out to finish their trip. Therefore creating a loss in some of the men’s cases, of a month’s income, or the other option was to stay onboard hoping the situation would improve.

The OIM then asked were there any questions — about 4 or 5 men asked concerned questions, of which 4 of these, the OIM answered with, “How would I know, I’m just a sailor boy”. At that time moment, we didn’t need some incompetent sailor — we needed a competent Offshore Installation Manager, who could have fully answered any questions. The 5th question that was asked, was answered by the OIM as follows, “How the fuck should I know, I’m just a sailor boy”. The question asked was, “How long will it take to get all the men off until the situation is made safe”.

About 16 men then went and checked in Hell admive to book their flights off. The next thing the OIM calls up the 16 men into his office and asks each of them if they insisted on flying off — more pressure put onto men at an already volatile and tense time. (It’s a known fact offshore, if you make too many waves, you lose your job — NRHR - Not Required Back). Of course, they wanted to get off. Every man wanted to get off until the situation was made safe, but most of us needed these two weeks income, to pay mortgages, rent and bills, or what. In fact, we were told in the OIM’s office, that we are going to go to the beach until the situation was made safe. We all had to accept the 2nd option and sit through, waiting for an update and hopefully an improved situation once the experts arrived and assessed the situation.

14:40 until 18:30 — still in recreation lounge waiting and more waiting. There is a real need for a serious or some sort of representative to preserve and protect the men’s safety in these all too common occurrences and to voice and rectify anything the men find or feel is unsafe. Safety representatives and officers must be from an independent body and totally disassociated from the owners of the platforms.

18:30 The OIM on the AVI calls all the men together for another meeting and make the following statement — “The experts have assessed the situation and have decided to blow the package up in a controlled explosion. AT THIS SECOND ANNOUNCEMENT EVERY PERSON CONCERNED SHOULD HAVE BEEN GIVEN A 2ND CHANCE TO STAY OR LEAVE THE PLATFORM.

The package is being flown off from one of the 25,000 tonne gas riser pipes and is stuck in behind an H beam. The riser is bracing across the gas from one of the producing satellite platforms, either the D1, D3, D4 or D9 - the risers all except one, have been depressurised, the one 26” riser not depressed, has been shut off flow and is only pressurised at what should be a safe depth below the sea surface in the event of this package exploding.”

When asked which riser was not fully depressurised, the OIM answered “Well… I don’t know — the experts will blow this package up in 15 minutes time from now and all the teams are on full standby — all personnel on the AVI will remain here in the celler deck recreation lounge with their lifejackets — we have shut all the air doors and locked all the water doors. If there is an explosion on the main CCP complex — I am sure that you will all be safe inside here.”

The above statement and judgement on an unknown substance and quantity believed to be a bomb onboard a Gas Rig was totally lacking. This is the main reason I have written this letter, because of the horrific danger to 300 men and once again because it was completely unnecessary. They could have easily flown all but a handful of essential personnel to safety while they did whatever it took to make this platform safe. Why did they not? Most of the 169 men who died on the Piper Alpha, died in the accommodation.

The AVI is only a jack up and it’s legs are only sitting on the seafloor, surrounded by sandbags - it has no permanent pile driven foundations. It would topple over, as all accommodation platforms are extremely top heavy.

WE WERE GIVEN NO OPTION to be transported away from the platform, during this dangerous exercise, putting all our lives on the line. The men were asking more serious and concerned questions, but getting no positive response or answers, just more of the “How should I know, I’m just a sailor boy”. Then the same question was asked again, “Can all of us please get a chopper off, before this controlled explosion takes place?”. The answer from the AVI OIM was “No chance, I’m sorry, they would take thirty minutes to get out here and it would take 4 hours to get everyone off”. It was swept under the carpet as though it had never been asked. No one argued the point, as it was obviously pointless and everybody was too tired and worried about other things (such as their families).

I will never forget those fifteen minutes as I thought about all my family while others were thinking about their wives and young children — some only weeks and months old. In these fifteen minutes, it really made me realise how little our lives really mean to these companies, when it comes down to the crunch! I was just too tired by now, after 10 hours of hanging onto my lifejacket and 10 hours of solid worry. I just prepared myself for the explosion, like the OIM told us to.

It wasn’t until days later, after lots of broken sleep, I recalled my thoughts, through the whole of that badly handled bomb scare and realised I never wanted this sort of thing to
This letter was composed by a worker on board British Gas' accommodation rig AVI. It was addressed to the head of Inspection and Operations Branch, Petroleum Engineering Division, Department of Energy.

From Robert Wigglesworth:

Happen again. This is when I addressed this letter to you, Mr. Marguerie, to see what you think.

In the wake of Piper Alpha and 169 burned and charred dead bodies, some never to be recovered and all those wives, girlfriends and all these fatherless children. But then, there was an enquiry and recommendations made to the Department of Energy, who said, "Men’s safety must be the first..." and various other things. Offshore, all installations were issued with Safety Notice 14/83, but has anything really changed? Did these people learn anything from the enquiry, or would they think another glimpse of a young mother and child crying for their loved ones?

Who do you think is giving the Jock Durnleys really a run? Does it think, a decision to have a controlled explosion, involving 300000 lives? I wonder what qualifications those who made that decision actually have - if any! They obviously don’t possess any common sense; they were probably less intelligent than the animal itself.

Mr. Marguerie, I would like to hear your opinion on whether you and your department think this whole bomb scare issue was badly handled and what your thoughts are on the unnecessary involvement of 100 lives in a so-called controlled explosion. If nothing justifies and you were badly handled, can you please outline the steps you plan to take, which are going to eliminate this dangerous situation ever occurring again? I would like to see something positive come out of this uncalled for lesson of incompetence and bad leadership.

This is the last week I will probably ever work offshore as I have a lot of work onshore that I will be getting back into on a full-time basis. I will write this letter for my work companions as a small voice and warning, saying "We are all concerned out there."

On the 15th of November 1989, there was yet another bomb scare in the Marconfield Field, yet no one except production personnel were told. We only found out through one of the production lads who was out for three hours the previous evening searching for a hidden bomb on the CPP platform. Apparently HOB received a call saying there was another bomb onboard. HOB had managed to keep quiet. But it is done they considered confronting this issue seriously and with the men’s welfare foremost in mind, before time ran out.

I expect your anonymity to be respected and thank you in anticipation of your prompt written reply.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Marguerie has died under bizarre circumstances, since receiving and answering the letter. He was struck by a piece of falling masonry during the January storms.

---

LAST CHANCE TO GET OUT OF SERPS BY APRIL

You could lose £1293 if you miss this chance

You are not getting the pension that you’re entitled to. Not of 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 by April you could lose as much as £1293 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, or an application form, contact John Dixon or Alex Irwin on 041-332-7799 or c/o the Offshore Information Centre 52 Guild Street, Aberdeen.

Advert:

GREENPEACE!

Personally I felt a bit nervous watching TV the other night. I saw the Greenpeace protesters themselves to the anchor chain of a ship that was trying to dump waste into the North Sea. Don’t get me wrong, it’s not that I don’t see their courage. It’s just that I can’t help wondering who the skipper is. If it’s your local DMI doing a spot as holiday relief on his fortnight off, then the next sensation our hero is going to feel is the thump in his ears as he races the anchor to the sea bed.

Nevertheless I’m immensely impressed with the commitment of these people and it does prompt you to think about the problem they’re trying to highlight.

After articles by Frank Dumas and Alex Smithson (in two consecutive editions), it was thought that we could do with something a little more direct to get the bears going. “That Greenpeace crowd are pretty ‘reckless’” someone said. What we didn’t know was that the reckless ones were all going to be on anchor duty or chained to sewage pipe outlet or abseiling down buildings, when we wrote to them. Who we got, was the person whose job it is to write the motions for the debate on the environment for the Green party’s annual conference. A very nice woman, but not reckless.

What we did get from the Greenpeace Press room was a serious and informative article on pollution in general on the North Sea which unfortunately we were unable to publish in full on the grounds that we had to take our sub editor off before it bored him to death. That doesn’t mean to say that there aren’t some very important points made in the article, it is true that you won’t be able to read them. This isn’t so different from what would have been the case if we had printed it in full.

It seems that the captains of our particular industry are not having it all their own way when it comes to polluting the North Sea. There’s some very heavy competition from others. Our lot are busy devasrating the “inner sea” by dumping oil mud, drill cuttings and all sorts of rubbish, resulting in the depleting of fish stocks. Meanwhile, even more damage is being done to the “productive but fragile coastal fringes”. What spews out of the Rhine and the Thames in a typical year, reads like a warehouse inventory from CI. (In Rotterdam, the industrial heartland of the sea, over 50,000 artificial chemical compounds, in more than one million different combinations can be found in its water and sediments. That would make you almost proud to be a mud engineer.)

On top of all this, shipping is a major culprit when it comes to shipping on our own doorstep. “In the 1980s, five ten per cent of all cargoes passing through the North Sea area are of a hazardous nature.” And quite a bit of that didn’t actually get “through.” In fact “On the beaches of South England between 1976 and 1986 over 100 adults and children were advised to attend hospital following exposure to the contents of chemical packages.”

And we’re back to dumping. It seems that “Britain stands alone in vehemently defending her right to use coastal waters as a convenient dumping ground for industrial waste and sewage sludge.” - a practice that is “wholly unnecessary”. In fact this month there’s to be a meeting of countries with North Sea coasts. The Scandinavian countries are claiming that Britain is breaking the agreements about dumping waste agreed at the North Sea Conference in 1987. Never.

There can be no doubt about it. The North Sea is under heavy pressure. Increasing fish stocks and decreasing animal populations threaten the North Sea’s role as a food basket. Meanwhile the things that roll up on your local beach could not be described in many cases as an improvement in the quality of your life.

Greenpeace argue for a “middle line” policy. “We need to exploit the North Sea for its fish and oil and as a shipping lane.”

But we also need to recognise that if we kill off the animals that live there, and for no good reason, then we’re destroying the world that supports us.

“Oil and gas workers can play a major part in improving protection for marine life,” says Greenpeace, “by being aware of the issues involved, and talking to managers and employers about clearing up pollution practices and implementing safer, cleaner systems.

One thing you could do is to make sure that none of the transmitters on board contain PCBs - these aboard Piper Alpha are now lying at the bottom of the sea.”

But it is not just you who is getting a visit, and a lot of encouragement, from our very good friends, the headbangers.

Calling All T&G&MU 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

Dolling members automatically transferred

All other members should write to the Aberdeen Branch of the T&G&WCU at King Street Aberdeen to include your name and address in the name and address of your employer.

Members will be placed in one of the following branches:

Construction branch: Tolkein, painters, labourers, heil deck crew, etc.

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

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

For Greenpeace' annual conference. A very nice woman, but not reckless.

What we did get from the Greenpeace Press room was a serious and informative article on pollution in general on the North Sea which unfortunately we were unable to publish in full on the grounds that we had to take our sub editor off before it bored him to death. That doesn’t mean to say that there aren’t some very important points made in the article, it is true that you won’t be able to read them. This isn’t so different from what would have been the case if we had printed it in full.

It seems that the captains of our particular industry are not having it all their own way when it comes to polluting the North Sea. There’s some very heavy competition from others. Our lot are busy devastating the “inner sea” by dumping oil mud, drill cuttings and all sorts of rubbish, resulting in the depleting of fish stocks. Meanwhile, even more damage is being done to the “productive but fragile coastal fringes”. What spews out of the Rhine and the Thames in a typical year, reads like a warehouse inventory from CI. (In Rotterdam, the industrial heartland of the sea, over 50,000 artificial chemical compounds, in more than one million different combinations can be found in its water and sediments. That would make you almost proud to be a mud engineer.)

On top of all this, shipping is a major culprit when it comes to shipping on our own doorstep. “In the 1980s, five ten per cent of all cargoes passing through the North Sea area are of a hazardous nature.” And quite a bit of that didn’t actually get “through.” In fact “On the beaches of South England between 1976 and 1986 over 100 adults and children were advised to attend hospital following exposure to the contents of chemical packages.”

And we’re back to dumping. It seems that “Britain stands alone in vehemently defending her right to use coastal waters as a convenient dumping ground for industrial waste and sewage sludge.” - a practice that is “wholly unnecessary”. In fact this month there’s to be a meeting of countries with North Sea coasts. The Scandinavian countries are claiming that Britain is breaking the agreements about dumping waste agreed at the North Sea Conference in 1987. Never.

There can be no doubt about it. The North Sea is under heavy pressure. Increasing fish stocks and decreasing animal populations threaten the North Sea’s role as a food basket. Meanwhile the things that roll up on your local beach could not be described in many cases as an improvement in the quality of your life.
A Look at SAR on the Brent by Bobby McNair (ex Stadilve) 

Helicopter search and rescue (SAR) facilities in Shell's Brent field were drastically affected in 1986. The effectiveness of the service was reduced by accidents that claimed to put safety above all other considerations. 

In that year the oil companies cut back their operations in order to maintain profits. This followed a progressive drop in oil prices over the previous 18 months caused by over-production. A major oil crisis followed, and when the effects were later analyzed, some 400,000 jobs had gone, directly or indirectly, from the North-Roune of Scotland alone. It can be argued that much of the disconnect that is surfacing in the oil-fields stems from this time. 

End of an era

Unprecedented decisions were taken by the oil companies in the oil price collapse. The suspicion of 'hunger', was that it was the end of an era and that the oil companies would virtually rationalize. And indeed in August and September of that year, decisions were taken that exploded the oil company claim that, "safety is of paramount importance.

In '86, the semi-sub "Treasure Finder" was under contract to Shell on the Brent. Principally she was an accommodation barge but had also a very important role as an in-field, 24-hour, helicopter base for Search and Rescue (SAR) helicopters. From her, Bell helicopter(s) were used as an inter-field shuttle service. These helicopters could be rapidly /transformed to perform a SAR role. The semi-sub also provided facilities for other helicopters on freight and crew change operations. The Brent field's hospital and only doctor were located on the "Finder", and the she was a great morale booster to a workforce whose working environment was isolated in one of the world's most unpredictable and hostile terrains.

Terminated

At the beginning of September 1986, the Treasure Finder's contract was terminated. This was despite being two weeks into a new two year contract. SAR helicopters were relocated at Unt at the Shetland. Her role as a doctor was no longer required because of the reduction in offshore personnel due to the oil crisis. The rapid SAR deployment had undoubtedly been compromised. In effect it meant that, because there was no longer a danger in the Brent field to justify the helicopter and

through thick and thin.

Often now he takes his work home with him and finds it difficult to forget about its on the time. This never happened when he worked offshore. But for the family there is peace of mind and the knowledge that each night he is safe at home.

Three weeks off

One thing that annoys me about how people see our life is when they say, "Well offshore workers get two weeks at home every month don't they?" But do they? When my husband gets home after working night shifts it takes him a few days to get into the routine again. Then it takes another two or three days to get himself up to go away again. So really he only gets about a week when he can relax and be himself.

In my opinion, for the hours men work while offshore they should surely get three weeks off.

A little selfish

As the wife of an offshore worker you're forced to endure a see-saw of emotions. The feelings of excitement, happiness and anticipation before he comes home. Shell moved another foreign registered semi-sub to the Brent field. Primarily her role was to fulfill the need for extra accommodation brought about by the very actions Shell had taken during the 1986 oil crisis. The Safe Gonga, a Swedish registered vessel, has another year to run of her two year contract.

A View from Home

Last month Blowout made a call to the partners of offshore workers. We said he would go and put your views on the industry. We are impressed by the response we received. We hope that these extracts from the letters we've received will encourage others to write in and open up a debate. What offshore behaviour do your partners bring home with them? What do you think of it and how do you handle it?

A special state of mind

Sometimes my husband was away for as long as five weeks at a time, and only home for a few days before being called out again. Other times he left home for a three week trip and was flown back to the beach after a few days because the material had not arrived or there was some other hold up. This was very difficult to cope with, not only for him but also for the family. Sometimes he would phone from the platform, other times he couldn't. I felt on edge all the time, reluctant to go out in case I missed the call. wondering if the was all right, trying not to think of the terrible stories I had heard regarding the floating of safety laws. My mind was in a constant state of worry. Usually I was just beginning to adjust to him being away, to settle down, when the phone call came. "I'll be home tomorrow".

Once he was back on the beach he was on holiday but for us life just had to go on as normal. "Normal" - what is that? Life for offshore workers and their families is totally unnatural.

But even now, a year and a half after finishing offshore, he misses the camaraderie of the life. The grapevine still brings offers of work, and people who became his friends then have renewed

TROUBLED WATERS By David Hebden

Some of the best stories start in pubs - that's my abid and I'm sticking to it. In this case it happens to be true.

Last summer I was in the bar at Stirling station and getting chatty to a guy who turned out to be the only gas fitter on Shetland. But it was the way that he got to the beer fitter that was the story. Like most offshore workers he was a bit short of sugar about life as a "tartan coolie" in the industry that has propped up the British economy over the last decade.

The one that sticks in my mind came from his mid-seventies when he was working as a roughneck. During a trip, one of his mates was slow to get clear of the spinning chain and ended in a cramped heap at the bottom of the V-door. Instinctively, his mate went to help him but were called back by the mate crew and told to keep drlicing. The pusher picked up the phone: "I'm short handed, send up a roughneck." The gas fitter was motivated to the beach. The next news of him was that the men got was when they visited him in hospital.

None of this may come as a surprise to readers of Blowout - but it did to me. It seems that you don't have to go to the ends of the earth to find tales of callous disregard for human life, a system of intimidation that would make the Mafia weep, and industrial relations practices that date from the Dark Ages. A few months of research established that my drinking friend wasn't paranoid. That's when I decided to make a TV programme about the oil industry. My proposal went to a couple of TV companies. (Another Piper Alpha programme?) Yawn...3, before it was taken up by Channel 4. It was from here on in that I realized that the real oil industry bosses feel about plums.

The claim that the world authority on deep water pressure drilling (Mr. D. Patton) knew enough to stop even taking for permission to drill high pressure wells. That was after the Department of Energy had let everyone start up again after Oceans Odyssey. Could we interview one of their experts?" They looked and said: "No. The member was hiking yet, as most the Brent are hardly Scotland's biggest secret. How about a trip out to see some filming? No! We heard oil workers expressing doubts about the Department of Energy. Could we go along and have a look at the rig inspection? No! Chevron are super chaps perhaps off to Ninnies? Excheapers? Give us a chance to look at the problem we're having with LSA scale? Er No! We safariied at each other's attempts. It looked like we were going to spend our Aberdeen shooting time at Bristows filming everyone else going offshore. Then, under pressure from UKOOA, Amanda Hess invited us to take a look at the AHO1 sitting, (or rather rotting) between Elphinstone and Rob Roy.

AHO1 was still under construction when Piper Alpha exploded. Amanda Hess commissioned an independent report into how it would shape up in a similar catastrophe. The consultants recommended many changes and additions - all of which the company (to their credit) implemented. The
Review by Eric Clapton: Journeyman

Danny Wilson: Bee Bop Mop Top
by John Rowlinson

Pretty thin pickings amongst the albums this month really forced my hand. Of those on offer, Neneh Cherry appeared to go the basic of three consecutively lively, intelligent singles but not enough to want an album. The Christians I also quite like but they are a bit smooth for my taste so I resisted their new number one. Then there was the maestro, Clapton, whom I adore.

A dumb move I thought at the time and a dumb move it proved to be. Don't get me wrong, as a guitarist, Clapton is fine. I used the word maestro by which I mean a musician in total control of his medium. Such is Clapton's mastery, the guitar becomes the instrument of his musical whim - you want it, he makes the guitar weep. You want a lead break to take it away, off it goes. Live and with good material, the guy's a genius.

It's the material that's the problem, though, and this album just doesn't have much worth listening to. He gets together a bunch of OK songs (even with some Jerry Williams who seems to write American MOR rock songs to commissions), fits together some OK arrangements (there's a Rye Coopey impersonation in "Hound Dog" that's more interesting than good) and ends up with an OK album but for a naff George Harrison song and an even sadder self-penned effort, "Bald Love," which should have stayed on the demo shelves. What happens is it sells like hot cakes because of the name (it's not even party number two in the album charts) and swells the already swollen Clapton coffers still further. To me, it stinks. So much of it is muck - it's not even Billy Fury-grade. Man! - and it does Clapton's peculiar genius no credit at all.

If I had a chance to personally thank everyone who helped in the making of the programme, perhaps I could do so now. As it is, the views on offshore safety don't count for an awful lot, but it's a privilege to be given a chance to reflect your views as offshore workers. We're hoping to make another programme so be broadcast when Lord Cullen publishes his findings into the Piper Alpha disaster.


"Troubled Waters" will be rebroadcast in the next edition of "Blowout."

"Southside." It's blaming. Which just goes to show there are better hands playing for partners in Scottish pubs than there are playing for Royalty.

"Last Rites" Directed by Wes Craven Starring Tom Berrington, Daphne Zuniga, Chick Vennera

"The Serpent and the Rainbow" Directed by Donald P Bellisario Starring Bill Pullman, Cathy Tyson

Reviewed by George Whitaker

Your video reviewer's lot is not an easy one. It seems there's either an embarrassment of riches among the latest releases or quite the reverse. Guess what is this month?

To be honest, I had problems with "Serpent and the Rainbow," as it's a horror film which, while interesting, doesn't satisfy. It comes across as being more of a rip-off of the 1960s' "Dr. Strangelove," than anything else. The special effects are adequate, but the acting is way off. It's a film that's too long and too slow, and doesn't really keep you interested. The ending is rather anti-climactic.

"Last Rites," on the other hand, is a much better film. It's a horror film, true, but it's presented in a much more realistic and believable way. The acting is good, the special effects are not过分, and the pace of the film keeps you interested. It's a film that you can really get into, and it's definitely worth watching.

In conclusion, while "Serpent and the Rainbow" is a film that you can appreciate for its special effects and acting, "Last Rites" is a film that you can truly enjoy for its story and presentation. So if you're in the mood for a good horror film, definitely give "Last Rites" a try.
FOR ALL OFFSHORE WORKERS

Dance & Buffet in the Central Hotel, Central Station, Glasgow on Friday 16th March 7.30 pm (licenced till 1.00 am) Price £15.00 per head (210.00 unwaged) Bed & Breakfast £20.00

SUPPORT YOUR PAPER

Blowout strives to be the offshore worker’s paper. It is yours to use whether you want to know the ill companies, or whether you want to speak to the rest of the offshore workforce. Blowout’s success owes a great deal to the OILC activists who have consistently supported the paper. These workers, mainly in the construction engineering side of the industry, have literally put paper and collected the money necessary for its running. This is currently £20 a month through a ‘blowout club’ scheme developed by the Offshore Information Centre. The money collected in this way is being supplemented by third parties. Again, these have been collected on the major platforms among construction and catering workers by OILC activists.

AROUND THE NORTH SEA

Continued from Page 7

BEATRICE

Beatrice has just been shedding some light on the real teethlessness of the Doc’s new safety regulations. What they suggest is that training must have contact independent of the companies and also emphasise the representative role of members of the safety committee. Unusually it even goes so far as to recommend the trade union courses for their experience in providing such courses.

Imagine one poor BP employees surprised when he was enquired about getting on the STUC courses at Treemask.

“Hello safety, I’m on the safety committee here and want to go on a training course for reps.”

“That’s nothing to do with safety - you want training.”

“B?”

“Hello training, there’s a couple of courses for safety reps I’d like to go on, they even fit into my current hours, and they’re recognised by the OTHB (oil industry training board - oops board).”

“Where are they being held?”

“Kilmarnock”

“What’s that in the middle?”

“The STUC.”

“Who or what is that then?”

“Scottish Trade Union Congress”

“No way.”

“But if it’s free…”

Then there was the service hand (lined help) who had the check to enquire about the way the safety committee, consistencies were drawn up and pointed

BEATRICE cont.

out that one half the installation was disassembled as nominations, votes and all were completed during one hitch. “So you’re a service hand - know what NRD means - well this is a matter that does not concern you - understand you have a family to keep…”

Well we can conclude ourselves with the twinkling lights of Helmsdale and Buckie as we hitch go by without another pipe or valve springing a leak on this merry haul.

- ATLANTIC -

What’s happening at Atlantic Drilling? 1989 saw one of Britain’s largest drilling contractors hit with a spate of serious accidents. It required various visits from the Department of Industry to sort things out. Whilst making their enquiries, the D of E discovered an anomaly in the management structure of the company. The OSHOs on Atlantic rigs, all qualified mariners with a Board of Trade certificate, were found to be responsible to the toolpushers, who, to say the least, unconsidered - (although it must be said in their favour that there were many on the rigs that felt that they should have been)

Quite rightly the D of E insinuated pointed out that it is the OIMs who should be the overall charge of the rig. Atlantic’s response? They promptly sent all their toolpushers on a 3 day course on joined up writing and now they are OIMs. Just like that. Meanwhile the men who were OIMs with their master’s certificates and years of experience, have been relegated to the post of Barge Master. The crews were a bit perplexed by it all. The D of E thought it was pretty cute and are monitoring the situation carefully. So we are.

-TERN-

An incident on the drill floor on the “Tern” on Christmas day had, “the potential for multiple fatalities and over £1 million worth of damage”, according to reports reviewed by Blowout. “Seemingly the ‘blocks’, weighing 35 tons were very nearly landed. It is suggested that the cause was a combination of the facts that the ‘blockline spooler had been removed’ as it was damaged, and the computerised ‘crew-a-matic’ had been faulty.”

HI-FAB AND DAVY

It seems that our information that there was keen interest by a couple of prospective buyers for the old Howard Norris yard at Kishorn was accurate. Reports say that a consortium including a Norwegian interest are fairly far advanced in negotiations with the workers.

Not everybody was happy with the outcome of the dispute that drugged for five weeks at Hi Fab. It seems that in money terms the deal that was accepted on a ballot vote amounts to about 5%. Could it be that the ‘typewriters’ method of bidding for work at which Hi Fab have been so successful, could have left them in some difficulty. Rumours has it that they have a £17 million loan on their quotes. No wonder they were digging their heels in.

The men at Davy Offshore in Dundee have also been basking in the sun (They’re the guys who’ve been renting the Ocean Odyssey apart, or at least what was left of her when Arco and Odeco had finished with her.) They survived a lockout before finally agreeing to terms which we believe was worth just over 10%.

It certainly looks like it’s going to be a long hot summer and the snow hasn’t even started yet.

Get on some letters in last week, it seems we have to work your beat for you to subscribe, we have very few rates.

P & J RALLY SUCCESS

In one of the biggest demonstrations seen in Aberdeen in recent years, well over a thousand workers marched in support of the sacked P and J Evening Express journalists.

The list of speakers read like a who’s who in the upper echelons of the Scottish labour and trade union movements, with a few others besides.

Blowout readers might want to see if they can put the official position alongside the appropriate personality.

Here’s a clue Donald Dewar is the shadow Scottish Secretary. Well done Sandy Bremer! You nearly got that right.

The speakers were: Malcolm Bruce, Alex Salmond, George Bolton, Duncan Campbell, Harry Conyngham, David Sharratt and Ian Campbell, who we can tell you is the leader of the “sacked 100” and who we should have put at the top of this list.

Then there was the service hand (lined help) who had the check to enquire about the way the safety committee, consistencies were drawn up and pointed

OFFSHORE INFORMATION CENTRE

BUSIEST THAN EVER

The Offshore Information Centre is Aberdeen is busier than ever. But they’re still looking for as much information as you can get them. They urgently require all the documentation that you can lay your hands on, concerning the safety and industrial relations practices of the oil companies, from wherever source.

The latest piece of news on the preparations of an industry agreement, is that the national officials of all the unions with a stake in the North Sea will be meeting very soon. They are the MSF, T&AGWU, AESU, GMB, NUS and EETPU.

Offshore Information Centre
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Aberdeen AB11 8N
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MEETINGS

GLASGOW : AEU HALLS WEB RENFIELD STREET EVERY THURSDAY 11.00am

ABERDEEN : TRADES COUNCIL CLUB EVERY TUESDAY 11.00am

NEWCASTLE : AEU HALLS HIGH ST GATESHEAD WEDNESDAYS 14 AND 28 MARCH, AND 4 APRIL 7.00pm

MIDDLESBROUGH : AEU HALLS BOROUGH RD WEDNESDAYS 14 AND 28 MARCH, AND 4 APRIL 11.00am

LIVERPOOL HULL DUNDEE and GT YARMOUTH

CONTACT

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