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AMOCO UNDER SCRUTINY

OIL WORKERS MEET

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 NW Hutton 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 Arbroath platform, and on her associated drilling rig Mr Mac. On the Arbroath, the permit to work system was exposed as having completely broken down. (Deficiencies in Oxy's permit to work system were identified by Lord Cullen as a significant factor in the Piper disaster). At the same time a Department of Transport inspector onboard the Mr Mac had identified 14 defects in safety equipment.

But it was on the Arbroath's close neighbour the Montrose that the most serious incident occurred. The February 25 edition of Observer 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 refurbishment. Over twenty alarms were set off. Work had recently been undertaken on a pressure safety valve. Incredibly a source of ignition did exist throughout the emergency. Transit 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

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

O.I.L.C. STATEMENT

Deficiencies in Amoco's working practices are a source of grave concern. The Offshore Industry Liaison Committee calls on Peter Morrison the oil minister, to immediately shut down the Montrose platform until Amoco's fitness to manage has been re-assessed, and new fire proof accommodation has been installed.

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 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 McDermotts in the case of Piper.

The abuse of the permit to work system on the Arbroath 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 Arbroath platform's oil is to go ashore routed 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 her 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 an hour). The Montrose accommodation module has been condemned. It is years since the H-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 this has been done.



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

Well, The answer to the first part is that he's John Wakeham, 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, "... it is especially unfortunate that a handful of people have continued to make scaremongering allegations unsupported by the evidence, which have only occasioned further distress and anxiety."

Your guess is as good as ours on the second question. Maybe he should have had the courage to name names and forget about smear tactics.

AROUND THE NORTH SEA

Every fortnight you fly up to two hundred miles in a helicopter just to get back and forth to work. On top of that you may be lucky enough to get two short flights a day for fourteen days Maybe you shuttle from the Safe Felicia to Forties Bravo.

SHUTTLING IN THE FORTIES

One thing you can be sure of is that the man who calls all the shots will be with you in the chopper. The final decision whether it is safe or not to fly will not be taken by some fucking accountant who's never been near a rig. The guy who makes the decisions about whether it's safe to fly will be taking the same risk as you. What

A series of meetings open to all offshore workers is already well under way. Well attended meetings have taken place in Glasgow Aberdeen Newcastle and Middlesborough over the last month. These will continue. (see the ad on page 8)

High on the agenda has been the subject of a "Continental Shelf Agreement". Such an agreement would attempt to regulate wages and conditions for all offshore workers whether they work in construction, catering or drilling. A Continental Shelf Agreement would offer protection to workers in an environment where intimidation is rife. It would seek to end "Running Off" and the NRB syndrome

The unions have been forced to tear up of the Offshore Construction Agreement, which covered only a small minority of construction / engineering workers. That has opened up the real possibility of unity and created considerable interest throughout the oilfields.

Discussion at the meetings has been serious and thoughtful. It has reflected the great opportunity to unite all sections of the offshore workforce. But also has reflected the offshore workers understanding of the uncompromising nature of the oil companies and contractors. And as always where oil workers meet, grave concern has been expressed about the offshore safety regime and the seeming lack of commitment by the government. The Department of Energy's ability and willingness to police the oil giants is quite frankly doubted.

These meetings have been historic in the best sense of the word. Really for the first time in the industry in Britain, workers are organising to take control of their own futures, and are no longer prepared to just play along with whatever scheme the employers dream up.

better assurance could you have?

As BP press office says. "The pilot is like the captain of a ship. No one can make him fly when he doesn't want to."!?!?

But an extract from the minutes of a, "Safe Felicia, Safety and Welfare Meeting," held on board the vessel on Tuesday 20th February says this.

"The Bond pilot complained the pilot had cancelled the shuttle this morning, he felt pressure was being applied to continue. The FRE asked for full details as NO ONE is allowed to put any pressure on pilots. They and only they decide if it is safe to fly. Bond is to advise FRE who put pressure on.

Watch this space for details of what Mr DB Gray found out, and what BP did about it.

.....Continued on Page 7

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 anguish 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 it was likely to cause some alarm amongst men who earn their wages working on that installation.

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 their threats. Our only fear is that another Piper will happen because we did not speak out."

ODYSSEY ENQUIRY

Blowout welcomes the Lord Advocate's recent statement concerning Ocean Odyssey. He announced that he had instructed the Procurator Fiscal in Aberdeen to proceed with a "Fatal Accident Enquiry" into the death of Timothy Williams. Mr Williams died when a well being drilled for Arco by the Ocean Odyssey blew out and destroyed the rig.

We are somewhat concerned that there has been an unprecedented delay of 17 months between the disaster and this announcement. But we are confident that the Odyssey survivors will ensure that the whole story unfolds before the enquiry.

We were heartened to learn that the Lord Advocate has not ruled out the possibility of criminal charges being brought at a later date.

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 executives that the only way to bring the entire offshore industry into line with the Norwegian sector is to demand a Continental Shelf Agreement. This means a single offshore agreement approved by the Contractors Council and the Trade Unions. It would preclude a despicable practice of some of the contractors - arranging their own "agreements" without any dialogue with the trade union officials or 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 apathy disguised by the union bashing virus that most offshore workers seem to catch, regardless of whether they hold a union card or not? (And if they do hold one whether it is months in arrears or not). It gets unbearable for me at times to hear the offshore workers casting aspersions at full time officials, when all along that worker has contributed nothing to the trade union movement. How many offshore workers can say that they have never done a three weeker? How many offshore workers can say they saw last year's dispute all the way through, without looking elsewhere for a job? How many offshore workers can say they went to their OILC meetings regardless of the distance they had to travel? There is no justification for any excuses, the reality is that hypocrisy is as much part of the offshore industry as the fifteen hour day.

The full time officials have pinned their colours to the mast by convincing the national officers that by not signing the OCA and Southern Waters Agreement, that offshore workers will respond and rally round the OILC. I urge all workers in the offshore industry not to let them down. Go along to your OILC meetings, these are forums where your hopes will be raised. OILC meetings are planned this year throughout the length and breadth of the country. It is our duty to go along to them. If Shell UK can squeeze four contractors into a rabbit hutch, then surely we can have our own halls bursting at the seams

John Padden

A LONG WAY TO GO!

I hope that the OILC will spare a thought for offshore workers who have hundreds of miles to travel to and from home each trip. I hope we can lay the foundations now, so that come time 1, and others like me, might just get home the same day that we leave the rig. As it is our journey home eats another day out of our two weeks leave.

The oil companies have 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 sit in the waiting room until 6.0 am the next morning to catch my connection to Doncaster and then on to Scunthorpe.

I've 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 gets me home about 2.0 to 2.30 am the following morning. But I have to risk life and limb for this, having to drive so far and at night after a fortnight on a rig.

Any requests for an earlier check-in have always fallen on deaf ears. No one wants to know. They've heard it all before. R Faid (GMBTU)

Wood Group on BP's Thistle Platform

CONTACT BLOWOUT

If "Bill the Drill" will contact Blowout and give his name and address and if possible 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'll publish his letter too.

c/o Offshore Information Centre
Criterion Buildings
52 Guild Street
Aberdeen AB1 2NB
Or phone the newsdesk:
041-423-0461
Fax:
041 552-5519

FLARE OFF

YOUR LETTERS

"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's causing a lot of whingeing and moaning amongst the bears who have become well used to their 15 hours (normally compulsory)

After months of trying to coax them 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 worsened the situation. My brothers are now happily working three weeks on one week off, something only a few months ago Chevron would not entertain, as numerous reminders from the construction super pointed out. These people I am trying to highlight are not casual workers but men on regular crew and supposed to be working two on two off rotas.

APG 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 down manning over Christmas and the 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 to fit into a new crew change

Two and two

IT NEEDS TO BE SAID

Having read the fourth edition of Blowout and in particular Jim Fleming's letter, I felt that he had missed some of the point of the NW Hutton Article. The fact that the oil companies are economical with the truth and that their "official" statements can sometimes make witnesses feel that they were 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.

"The 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 cares to ask

From Mr Fleming's "who cares" attitude 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

DUES By John - Finlay Fine
BULLY, FILL OF ALL THE SHIT AND UNDRINKABLE CUP THAT IS HANDLED OUT, SO WITH THE HELP OF YOUR PAPER BLOWOUT, YOU CAN SEND ALL YOUR GRIPES TO ME AND HAVE THEM IN PRINT FOR ALL AND SUNDRY TO SEE AND READ. YOU ALL WANT A BETTER DEAL, AND THE TIME IS NOW, OVERDUE, SO GET THE FINGERS OUT OF YOUR BUMS, AND LET US KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING.

IN LADS, MY NAME IS GRIPES, I WORKED OFFSHORE FOR FOURTEEN YEARS AS A SCOFFER, NOW I WALK CHANGE, LESS MONEY, BUT FEWER OF THEM, I HAVE HAD MY...

THERE ARE THOUSANDS OF YOUR WORKMATES OUT THERE IN THE SAME FRAME OF MIND AS YOU, SO DON'T JUST LEAVE IT TO HIM TO WRITE YOU DO IT, EACH ONE OF YOU HAS HAD A CRIBE IN THE PAST, SOME OF YOU HAVE JUST ACCEPTED IT, OTHERS DON'T, SOME PAVED WITH OTHER JOBS, HOW LONG ARE YOU GOING TO TAKE THEIR SHIT? THEY PISS ON YOUR SHOES AND TELL YOU ITS RAINING AND FOR YEARS...

IF YOU BELIEVED THERE IS A BUSY WORLD OUT THERE AND THERE NO MESSAGE, ITS A BODDY CONSCIOUS ONE, THEY NEED YOU LADS, SO DON'T LET THEM SHIT ON YOU AND MORE, YOU ALL KNOW THE ADDRESS, IF YOU DON'T KNOW IT, HERE IT IS.....

I DON'T INDEX OFFSHORE NOW, BUT I KNOW THAT YOU SHOULD BE HEARD, AND I WILL STRIVE TO HELP YOU SUCCEED BLOWOUT WILL HELP YOU, BUT YOU MUST IN TURN, HELP BLOWOUT SO MANY THINGS HAPPEN OFFSHORE THAT ARE A COMPLETE CONTRADICTION OF THE NEWS AND SAFETY BUT THAT ARE NEVER REPORTED, NOW YOU HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO REVEAL THEM, SO DO IT

GRIPES, BLOWOUT, 52 GUILD STREET, ABERDEEN

SEE YOU NEXT ISSUE
GOOD LUCK
Gripad

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 no. They will be withheld if you ask.

CATERERS & C.O.T.A.

It would be daft of me to say that I'm not in favour of a continental shelf agreement. I have the same view on a single union offshore. But being realistic, I know that one union is not on for obvious reasons. However, I honestly believe that one agreement is achievable, with all unions who have an interest offshore being signatory to it.

It's about time that all the unions with an interest offshore sat down and got their act together. I know the Offshore Construction Agreement (OCA) has not been signed, and that the COTA agreement is not signed as yet, as some of the catering companies are still arguing about recognition. (COTA is an agreement that the T&G and NUS have with some of the catering companies offshore - Ed). The wages have been agreed after a secret ballot - I still get annoyed when some of the members phone and say that the agreement is rubbish, even after they all got a ballot to vote on it. I was very upset when 700 members out of 1550 never even voted!

I remember six months ago when the bears called off their industrial action. Our members started shouting that their wages came well below the construction workers etc. We put in a claim for parity. We had meeting after meeting, the membership was always kept informed. We had a successful one day stoppage - but we had an unsuccessful two day stoppage, which failed for various reasons. Although the stoppages were unofficial, it was you the membership who called for them against the advice of the full time officials. The question I keep getting asked is why didn't we ballot the membership then to make it official. The answer is quite simple - every time we were going to ballot the COTA companies put another

offer on the table. (remember it takes 6 weeks to organise a ballot)

I am disturbed when the membership attack the negotiating committee and the full-time officials, when the only people they should be getting upset with is themselves. If they're not happy with the way things went they had ample opportunity to reject the offer. We must remember that it is imperative that we stick together, - that is what the word "Union" means.

Now we're being urged to go along with the OILC in their fight for a continental shelf agreement, but the only people that can decide that are you, - the membership. The TGWU and the NUS cannot sign or tear up any agreements without consulting the membership i.e. by ballot. That is the democratic way. The TGWU and the NUS have agreed in principle to the idea of a continental shelf agreement subject to the position of the other unions locally and nationally. There are a lot of arguments for and against the COTA agreement, but I think deep down in everyone's hearts they would like to see a trade union agreement that covers all aspects of offshore work.

My advice is to listen to all arguments, make sure you attend the many mass meetings and get all the information before you make any decisions. When it comes down to it, it's up to you - not the full time officials or anyone else.

**YOU -
THE MEMBERSHIP
WILL DECIDE->**

Derek McGillvray

THOUGHTS OF A BORED BUTCHER

May I, through your great North Sea newspaper, try and get the attention of the OIS onboard the floatel Safe Supporter. I'm 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 medivaced 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 what 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.



SEDCO SEMI

Recently received issue 3 of your excellent paper "Blowout". I would appreciate 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 BREATH 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.

"RIGBLAST" ON MAGNUS

In your last issue you wrote about cowboy outfits, Rigblast, 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 £4.60 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 who felt that Rigblast 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.

Ian Brown

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 wires and a timing device attached was found in the D2 cellar area onboard the CCP installation at 8.30 by HGB production personnel. It was 9.30 before a platform announcement was made, but not to this effect, 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 AV1 and a similar situation occurred onboard AP1. From 10.15 until 14.30 (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 at 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 going back to the other badly handled bomb scare in the Morecombe Field last Xmas in 1989, on Tuesday 27th December, when again, all the men were right in the dark until the last minute.

14.30

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 wires and a timing device attached and was being treated by production personnel as a possible bomb. The OIM then said they had radioed the beach and asked for the bomb disposal experts to be sent out. They were due to arrive at approximately 16.00 - yet another big delay! Especially 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 the platform, but without wages and that they would not 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

MORECAMBE BAY OUTRAGE



know, I'm just a sailor boy". At that tense 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 into heli-admin 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 loose your job - NRB - 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, so what choice did we really have when HGB were not prepared to keep us men on pay, if we choose to go to the beach until the situation was made safe. We all had to accept the 2nd option and sit things through, waiting for an update and hopefully an improved situation once the experts arrived and assessed the situation.

Blowout is publishing this letter in full. We do not think that there is a better or more eloquent way of raising the crucial issues that are raised in the letter. Not only the incident itself but the length of time that it has gone unreported must raise serious misgivings amongst many workers in the industry and amongst their families at home. Please feel free to use the pages of Blowout to have your say on these questions.

14.40 until 18.30 - still in recreation lounge waiting and more waiting.

There is a great need for a union 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 AV1 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 lying 15' from one of the 26' gas riser pipes and is tucked in behind an H beam. The riser is bringing across the gas from one of the producing satellite platforms, either the DP1, DP3, DP4 or DP6 - the risers all except one, have been depressurised, the one 26' riser not depressurised, 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 fire teams are on full standby - all personnel on the AV1 will remain here in the cellar 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 myself 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 AV1 is only a jack up and it's legs are only sitting on the seabed, surrounded by sandbags - it has no permanent pile driven fastenings. 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 us men please get a chopper off, before this controlled explosion takes place?" The answer from the AV1 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'll 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 meant 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 onboard British Gas' accommodation rig AV1. It was addressed to the head of Inspection and Operations Branch, Petroleum Engineering Division, Department of Energy

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 put first".... and various other things. Offshore all installations were issued with Safety Notice 14/88, but has anything really changed? Did these people learn anything from the enquiry, or would they like another glimpse of a young mother and child crying for their loved ones?

Who the fuck do these Jack Dumfries really think they are to decide to have a controlled explosion, involving 300 mens lives. I wonder what qualifications those who made that decision actually have - if any! They obviously didn't possess any common sense; they were probably less intelligent than the sailor boy.

Mr Marguerie, I would like to hear your opinion on whether you and your department feel this whole bomb scare issue was badly handled and what your thoughts are on this unnecessary involvement of 300 lives in a so called controlled explosion. If nothing justifies it and you agree it was 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. But I 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 Morecombe Field, yet no one except production personnel were told. We only found out through one of the production lads telling us he was out for three hours the previous evening searching for a hidden bomb on the CCP platform. Apparently HGB received a phone call saying there was another bomb onboard. HGB had managed to keep it quiet. But it is time they started confronting this issue seriously and with their men's safety furthest in mind, before time runs out!

I expect my 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 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 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.

Advertisement

HEADBANGERS !

Personally I felt a bit nervous watching TV the other night. I saw the Greenpeace people tying 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 salute their courage. It's just that I can't help wondering who the skipper is. If it's your local OIM doing a spot as holiday relief on his fortnight off, then the next sensation our hero is going to feel is the popping 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 Doran and Alex Salmond MPs in two consecutive editions, it was thought that we could do with something a little racier 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 just means 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 depletion 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 ICI. "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 shitting on our own doorstep. "In the 1980s, five to ten percent of all cargoes passing through the North Sea 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 disease 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," say Greenpeace, "by being aware of the issues involved, and talking to managers and employers about cleaning up pollution practices and implementing safer, cleaner systems. One thing you could do is to make sure that none of the transformers on board contain PCBs - these aboard Piper Alpha are now lying at the bottom of the sea."

Blowout is not really sure how much good it'll do you talking to management offshore. Just how much authority do they really have? But if you're on a floater, definitely don't tie yourself to the anchor chain. You could always write or phone us with any news of oil or mud spills, and we'll contact Greenpeace. You never know, maybe some day soon you'll be getting a visit, and a lot of entertainment, from our very good friends, the headbangers.

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

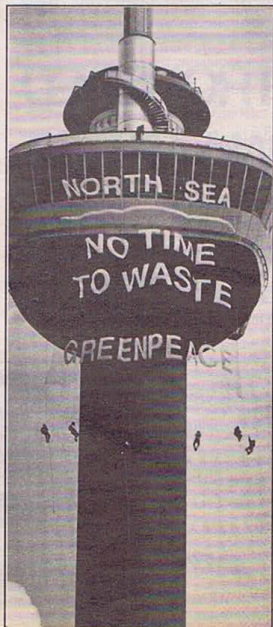
All other members should write to the Aberdeen Branch of the T&GWU King Street Aberdeen. Please include your name and address and the name and address of your employer.

Members will be placed in one of the two following branches

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

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

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





A Look at SAR on the Brent by Bobby McNair (ex Stadive)

Helicopter search and rescue (SAR) facilities in Shell's Brent field were drastically affected in 1986. The effectiveness of the service was reduced by a company that claims 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 crisis followed, and when the effects were later analysed, some 40,000 jobs had gone, directly or indirectly, from the North East of Scotland alone. It can be argued that much of the discontent 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 offshore, was that it was the end of an era and that the oil companies would viciously rationalise. And indeed in August and September of that year, decisions were taken that explode 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 field. 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 an 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 she was a great morale booster to a workforce whose working environment was situated in one of the worlds most unpredictable and hostile seas.

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 Unst in the Shetlands. Her role as a flotel was no longer required because of the reduction in offshore personnel due to the oil crisis. The rapid SAR deployment had undoubtedly been compromised. Ineffectiveness that, because there was no longer a hanger in the Brent field to safely house the helicopter and enable

it to "start up" safely, after the last crew change helicopter had left the area, the SAR had to return to Unst after completing its shuttle operations. The doctor and medical facilities were also relocated to the North Cormorant, and useful helicopter facilities had gone.

One of the repercussions of this action was that freight helicopters carried more than usual. But the lack of an SAR facility during the night hours was the most indefensible consequence, especially when, because of fog, the SAR helicopter could often not return the next day. It seemed surprising that the Department of Energy had allowed this retrograde step to take place. Another factor in the relocation was that persons taken seriously ill offshore could wait a great deal longer for the attention of the field's doctor, now stationed on the North Cormorant platform.

Target Zero

Had Shell in taking this action not also compromised its well publicised policy and PR on safety - their "Target Zero" safety campaign? In March 1989, 27 months after the Treasure Finder had gone, Shell moved another foreign registered semi-sub to the Brent field. Primarily her role was to fulfil the need for extra accommodation brought about by the very actions Shell had taken during the 1986 oil crisis. The Safe Gothia, 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 write in and give us 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 materials 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.

To go offshore needs a special state of mind. The worker and the family "psyche" themselves up for this. The few days prior to leaving are hell. Depression sets in because in reality he does not want to go.

Sometimes he could 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 he was all right, trying not to think of the horrific stories I had heard regarding the flouting 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 remained so,

through thick and thin.

Often now he takes his work home with him and finds it difficult to forget about it on his time off. 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 shift it takes three to four days to get into the routine again. Then it takes another two or three days to psyche 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.

Life is very lonely for us wives when our husbands are away.

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. The depression and misery when he goes.

Then there are the times when things are going wrong and you just have to soldier on alone. Some women I know only live half their lives and just wish the other half away.

I think you can make the best of it by trying to make life as interesting as possible, by joining clubs, going to night classes and taking part in sport. However this causes problems too. When my husband comes home we need time together, and as I work full time and have three children, this is not easy to find. I think that in some ways you have to be a little selfish to survive this type of life: but compromises must be found.

Dads do miss many important moments; a child's first step, first word or even first tooth. But of course they miss many of the sleepless nights too.

On the plus side I must admit that I enjoy the independence and the sense of responsibility and freedom that this life offers.

TROUBLED WATERS

by

David Hebditch

Some of the best stories start in pubs - that's my alibi 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 got chatting to a guy who turned out to be the only gas fitter on Shetland. But it was the way that he got to be the gas fitter that was the story. Like most offshore workers (past and present) he wasn't short of sagas 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 the 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 crumpled heap at the bottom of the V-door. Instinctively, his mates went to help him but were called back by the tool-pusher and told to keep drilling. The pusher picked up the phone: "I'm short handed, - send up a roustabout!" The injured man was medivaced to the beach. The next news of him 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 offshore oil industry. My proposal went to a couple of TV companies, (Another Piper Alpha programme? Yawn...), before it was taken up by Channel 4. It was from here on in that we learned how the oil industry bosses feel about glasnost.

BP claims to be the world authority on deep high pressure drilling. (It certainly knew enough to stop even asking for permission to drill high pressure wells. And that was after the Department of Energy had let everyone start up again after Ocean Odyssey). Could we interview one of their many experts? No! Shell's problems in the Brent are hardly Scotland's biggest secret. How about a trip out to do some filming? No!

We heard oil workers expressing doubts about the Department of Energy. Could we go along and film one of their rig inspections? No! Chevron are super chaps - perhaps they'd fly us to Ninian? Er perhaps! Give us a chance to look at this problem we're having with LSA scale? Er No!

We sniffed at each others armpits. It looked like we were going to spend our Aberdeen shooting time at Bristows filming everyone else going offshore. Then, under pressure from UKOOA, Amarada Hess invited us to take a look at the AH001 siting, (or rather floating) between Ivanhoe and Rob Roy.

AH001 was still under construction when Piper Alpha exploded. Amarada 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



bill came to an extra £15 million. I reckon that if the same level of protection were to be effected throughout the North Sea it would cost the industry more than £3 billion.

After shaking off a couple of PR people, I did manage to speak to some of the bears. They said - except for a couple of exceptions - that Amarada Hess was a good company and had avoided some of the worst unsafe practices of the older North Sea operators. Some of the PR people were by this time getting nervous that Amarada Hess might be an embarrassment to the other operators.

Before interviewing him on camera I chatted to the OIM Geoff Lawrence. It turned out that he was himself an ex-contract worker, and resented the way that, "the industry treats contract people like shit". But he said that onboard AH001 contractors get the, "same overalls, same meals and the same sized pieces of soap". (Same wages? - Ed.) Amarada Hess, he explained, requires contractors to pay for their employees' survival training. Excellent! But the PR people wouldn't let Lawrence say these things on camera: "We have to live in this industry," they told me.

So, big oil companies intimidate little oil companies. Oil companies intimidate contractors (stay in line or you won't get on the next bid list). And both of them treat offshore workers like shit. They also try it on with television directors.... I discovered that faxes I sent to the Department of Energy were ending up on UKOOA's desk. A week later an industry spokesman was on-camera rejecting suggestions that there was any kind of "cozy relationship" between the two. And right up to the last minute I was being pressured to change the bloody programme title. "Troubled Waters" it seems is to contentious for the oil companies. Maybe they were thinking about all the oil they've spilt on them over the years.

What annoyed us most of all were the on-camera denials followed by off-camera admissions that our allegations were dead right. I can respect sincerely held views - however mistaken - but hypocrisy gets me mad.

If I haven't had a chance to personally thank everyone who helped in the making of the programme, perhaps I could do so now. As outsiders, our 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 to be broadcast when Lord Cullen publishes his findings into the Piper Alpha disaster.

David Hebditch is an independent television director. He wrote and directed the recent Channel 4 documentary, "Troubled Waters" for the "Dispatches" series. Working with him at Abraxas on the programme were:
Richard Haywood : camera,
John G Pearson : sound,
Tony Sharpe : graphics,
Richard Haywood and
Barry Watts : off-line editors,
Neil Hatton : on-line editor,
Sue Watts : production manager,
Nick Anning
and Celia Bledowska : research,
Pat Gregory : production assistant,
Tom Roberts : executive producer,
and Barry Watts : producer..

"Troubled Waters" will be reviewed in the next edition of Blowout

REVIEWS.....

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 Cheri appealed on the basis of three consecutive 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 chose.

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 for me is it. 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 sad, 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 (several by some Jerry Williams who seems to write American MOR rock songs to commission), fits together some OK arrangements (there's a Rye Cooder 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 naff self-penned effort, "Bad Love", which should have stayed on the demo shelves. What happens is it sells like hot cakes because of the name (it's presently number two in the album charts) and swells the already swollen Clapton coffers still further. To me, it sucks. So much of it is muzak - Pavarotti sings Barry Manilow - and it does Clapton's peculiar genius no credit at all.

Moving to what my record store refers to, rather unfortunately I think, as the Hype-Free Zone, I picked up Danny Wilson's Bee Bop Mop Top on the strength of two good singles, Many's Prayer and Second Summer of Love, and a live televised version of the former. I'm glad I did. It's a refreshment, musical Alka Seltzer. The music is eclectic, taking it's inspiration from a thousand music influences and periods that you can recognise more easily than you can place. George Gershwin, The Beatles, Steely Dan, Stevie Wonder, Don Partridge, even Larry Adler. Bee Bop Mop Top echoes them all in a stylish, witty collection of songs.

The quality of musicianship is a pure delight. From the foundation of a crisp, authoritative drum and bass, keyboard, guitar, harmonica and occasional xylophone move in and out, changing key, rhythm and mood to suit the intricacies of some pretty tricky song structures while the lead vocal and two part harmonies shole up and down the octaves with total control. We are not talking mugs with these guys.

In all, there are thirteen songs on the album, all of which can withstand a lot of listening without losing anything. And therein lies my one complaint. There's just too much of it for one sitting. I listen to it a side at a time, otherwise my attention wanders and the individual songs get lost in each other. Maybe on later albums, they will allow their talent for arrangement longer lease on fewer songs.

One final note. So disgusted was my nine year old daughter with the current top fifty, she too went to the Hype Free Zone (ugh) and bought a Texas album,

"Southside". It's smashing. Which just goes to show there are better bands playing for punters in Scottish pubs than there are playing for Royalty.



VIDEO.....

"Last Rites"
Directed by Wes Craven.
Starring Tom Berenger, Daphne Zuniga,
Chick Wenera

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

Reviewed by
George Whittaker

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

To be fair there's Tom Berenger's acclaimed though controversial thriller Betrayed, but it falls to me to say something about Last Rites, in which Berenger plays a New York priest tempted by the steamy charms of a young Mexican dancer.

The opening of the film is quite remarkable. A heavy sex scene in a Manhattan hotel suite between the Mexican girl and her boss is interrupted by the understandably peeved boss's wife who promptly wreaks a particularly messy murderous revenge on her erring spouse by shooting off his testicles. Conveniently enough for the needs of the plot but in defiance of all likelihood the girl escapes the shots and later on spills her secret in the confession box to Father Michael Pace (Berenger). By the time he tracks her down to her eerily isolated hideout her would-be murderers - from the Mafia as it turns out - have sussed out her whereabouts too, and the unlikely pair are forced to hightail it under fire across the rooftops. Pace has no option but to offer the girl the sanctuary of his room in the cathedral where he performs his priestly duties.

So far so good. The plot is not wonderfully original but there's a distinctly macabre feel to these early scenes and no shortage of high tension as the lugubrious and menacing Mob members track their hapless prey. Furthermore, it's by no means clear just how innocent the girl is and since Pace's family are involved, his loyalties - to his calling, to his kin and to the girl (with whom he is rapidly falling in love) are intriguingly divided. Unfortunately, however, the pace slackens quite dramatically in the middle of the film and despite some unexpected twists in the plot, never regains it's original edge. Because of this the films other shortcomings begin to annoy: the music is often absurdly over-the-top, Berenger is far too pretty for the part. Pace smokes and swears too much and too readily succumbs to the girl's sexual allure for a one supposedly dedicated to the cloth.

To be a major league thriller Last Rites would need to be tightened up all round and shortened by at least 20 minutes but Berenger's charisma, the twists of the plot and the unusual religious angle make it worth watching.

Last Rites apparently went straight to video and I suspect the same fate befell The Serpent and the Rainbow, a tale of black magic, zombies and corruption in low places. Bill Pullman plays Dennis Alan, an explorer hired by a medical company to investigate reports of Lazarus like returns from the dead in Haiti. The

company want to get their hands on the potion that they've heard is responsible for inducing the Zombie like state of inanimation that has resulted in the live burials. If they can market it they will not only provide a safer substitute for conventional anaesthetic but will make a few tidy bucks for them in the process.

Yeah, but things get complicated doncha know, when good lookin' Alar Quatermain types start meddling in things they don't understand. Hence lots of - uh - siniste: hints from eye-rolling, lip-curling black men in bad summer shirts ("In Haiti there are secrets we keep even from ourselves..."), bad dreams, bac vibes and a plethora of bad lines ("There's a doo to the mystical and you've just walked through it"). Pullman with local doctor Cathy Tyson in tow, finds he's fighting dark forces indeed, no the least of which proves to be the district police commissioner - a right nasty bastard who collect souls in jars and who gets his come-uppance in spectacularly appropriate fashion.

Not really one to search out unless you're looking for something with all the failings of a B-movie and none of the dumb charm Strange thing, it's based on a true story. Strange still, it contains a ball-shatterin' scene - not so away, as in Last Rites, but nailed to a chair. If you watch these two back to back, keep your leg crossed.

AROUND THE NORTH SEA continued from page 1

-GO SAFELY -GO SHELL

Could it be true that Koos Gasterland, the Shell OIM on the Fulmar was discovered by a technician inspecting the inside of an oil separation vessel. Only problem was that there was no permit in place to allow this work to go on, and he wouldn't have known what he was looking for if he'd found it. Koos was last seen on a, "safety audit." At least he had the good grace to give the Fulmar a miss.

How was it that he explained his actions again?

-MONEY

At one of the OILC's open meetings in Glasgow a couple of construction workers were reminiscing. Seemingly on the Brae hook up in 1982 these guys were earning £5.95 an hour. By '83 they were on £6.45 and working it out at a 5% increase each year and a 10% thrown in once for good measure they reckoned that they should be on about £9.60 today.

It strikes me though that that doesn't really take into account the fact that it's a sellers market for labour on the North Sea just now. However it might just be OK as a bottom line.

-HOAX

The events described in the letter on Page 4 are so outrageous that Blowout's first impression was that it was a hoax. However the D of E confirmed that they had received it and indeed replied to it. Hydrocarbons GB's press office in Hayshar refused to discuss the document by order of according to them, Mr Jeff Morgan the Morecombe field manager.

Continued on Page 8

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 (£10.00 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 answer the oil 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 on the construction engineering side of the industry, have distributed the paper and collected the money necessary for its running. This is currently being done through a "football card" scheme administered by the Offshore Information Centre. The money collected in this way is being supplemented by OILC funds. Again these have been collected on the major platforms amongst construction and catering workers by OILC activists.

The paper is being read widely offshore. It is reaching drill crews and production workers on the platforms. It is also appearing on the semis. This is great - it is a paper for all sections of the workforce. But it is important that the job of financing it is not left only to one section of the workforce. If you feel that it is important to get the paper regularly and in sufficient numbers on your installation, or in your department, make a regular order and we'll send them to you either onto the rig or to a home address.

Football cards are available from the Offshore Information Centre in Aberdeen. If you feel that this would be the best way to raise the finance on your installation, phone and arrange to get some sent, or call and pick them up.

If you believe that the best way for you is to subscribe, we have very fair 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&J and Evening Express journalists.

The list of speakers read like a who's who in the upper echelons of the Scottish labour and trade union movement, 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 Bremner! You nearly got that one right.

The others were: Malcolm Bruce, Alex Salmond, George Bolton, Duncan Campbell, Harry Conroy, David Sinclair 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.

Blowout would like to send it's greetings to the sacked journalists and assure them that any words attributed to its editor in the Scab 'n Journal, were definitely not the result of any interview with him, or with anyone else for that matter. No interviews were given to anyone.

Blowout Subscription Rates

100 papers : £25.00
50 papers : £15.00

Blowout, 52 Guild Street
Aberdeen, ABI 2NB
Phone 0224-210 118

AROUND THE NORTH SEA

Continued from Page 7

-BEATRICE

Beatrice has just been shedding some light on the real toothless nature of the Doc's new safety regulations. What they suggest is that safety training must have content 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 employee surprise when he enquired about getting on the STUC's course at Treestank.

"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"

"Eh?"

"Hello training, there's a couple of courses for safety reps I'd like to go on, they even fit into my current hitches, and they're recognised by the OITB (oil industry training board - oops board)"

"Where are they being held?"

"Kilmarnock"

"Hmm...who is running them."

"The STUC"

"Who or what is that then?"

"Scottish Trade Union Congress"

"No way."

"But.....click.....brrr."

Then there was the service hand (hired help) who had the cheek to enquire about the way the safety committee constituencies were drawn up and pointed

OFFSHORE INFORMATION CENTRE

BUSIER THAN EVER

The Offshore Information Centre in 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 whatever source.

The latest piece of news on the the preparation 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&GWU, AEU, GMB, NUS and EETPU.

Offshore Information Centre
52 Guild Street
Aberdeen ABI 2NB
Telephone 0224-210 118
Fax 0224-210 095

BEATRICE cont.

out that one half the installation was disenfranchised as nominations, votes and all were completed during one hitch.

"Son you're a service hand - know what NRB means - well this is a matter that does not concern you - understand you have a family to keep..."

Well we can console ourselves with the twinkling lights of Helmsdale and Buckie as not a hitch goes by without another pipe or valve springing a leak on this rusty hulk.

-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 OIMs on Atlantic rigs, all qualified mariners with a Board of Trade certificate, were found to be responsible to the toolpushers, who were, to say the least, uncertified. (although it must be said in their favour that there were many on the rigs who felt that they should have been)

Quite rightly the D of E inspector pointed out that it is the OIM who should be in 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 puzzled by it all. The D of E thought it was pretty cute and are monitoring the situation carefully. So are we.

-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 received by Blowout. Seemingly the "blocks" weighing 35 tons were very nearly down. It is suspected that the cause was a combination of the facts that the "blockline spooler had been removed" as it was damaged, and that the computerised "crown-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 Dorris yard at Kishorn was accurate. Reports say that a consortium including a Norwegian interest are fairly far advanced in negotiations with the receivers.

Not everybody was happy with the outcome of the dispute that stretched for five weeks at Hi Fab. It seems that in money terms the deal that was accepted on a ballot vote amounts to about 8.7%

Could it be that the "turnkey" method of bidding for work at which Hi Fab have been so successful, could have left them in some difficulty. Rumour has it that they are about £17 million out on their quotes. No wonder they were digging their heels in

The men at Davy Offshore in Dundee have also been in the wars. (They're the guys who've been tearing the Ocean Odyssey apart, or at least what was left of her when Areo and Odeco had finished with her.) They survived a lock out before finally agreeing to a offer 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 stopped yet.

Get us some letters in lads we want to hear your point of view.

We hope to have some news in our next issue from the outfit that refit the semis up at Nigg. They're looking for clarification as to whether they're on or offshore workers. It makes a difference if your working 12 hour shifts, whether 4 of these hours are being paid at premium rates

FOR ALL OFFSHORE WORKERS

MEETINGS

GLASGOW : AEU HALLS
WES 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

MIDDLESBOROUGH : 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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CENTRE ABERDEEN
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