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CONTACT BLOWOUT

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ODYSSEY DEATH ENQUIRY AT LAST

THE FATAL accident inquiry into the death of a North Sea radio operator will take place at the Exhibition Centre in Aberdeen on May 21, an unprecedented 20 months after his death.

Timothy Williams died aboard the ODECO semi submersible Ocean Odyssey when the hole she was drilling for Arco blew out.

The crew were forced to abandon the rig. Most escaped by lifeboat, seven by jumping into the sea.

Blowouts avoidable

The chain of events that led to Mr Williams' death did not start with the blowout. It started a long time before that, in the course of drilling the well. The official line from the Department of Energy and the oil companies, is that blowouts are entirely avoidable. They cannot occur if you follow established safe procedures for drilling a well and, once the inevitable warning signs have been detected, controlling the kick. We can only hope that the enquiry will recognise that and afford us a real explanation of how our colleague died.

This enquiry could also be important for other reasons. The flames of the Ocean Odyssey may illuminate better the oil company and Department of Energy attitudes to safety prevailing in the industry at the time of the Piper disaster.

by Garry Forbes

When the Odyssey went up on September 22 1989, the entire offshore workforce was still in deep shock. Only 3 months earlier Piper had erupted and killed 167 men. National politicians had been up in Aberdeen exhibiting their grief in public. The oil and contracting companies were reviewing safety. Everyone was on red alert. Or at least that was the public perception.

Drilling practices

Perhaps the enquiry will confirm a different reality. Instead of maximum vigilance, the first reports from the rig were of a reckless disregard for established safe drilling practices, and of improperly functioning equipment. If it does emerge at the enquiry that procedures were followed that jeopardised the safety of the men,

Odyssey enquiry may illuminate oil company attitudes to safety at the time of the Piper disaster.

possibly some attention should be paid to those who through their silence condoned such practices. Shell, the major shareholder in the well, must have been monitoring progress to protect their investment. Possibly the other shareholders as well.

Surely the fitness of the D of E to regulate safety on the North Sea will come up for discussion again. Their inspector, who visited the rig only days before the disaster, must have thought he was experiencing deja vu when he heard of the prison inspectors remarks on a visit to Strangeways just days before it too exploded.

The D of E temporarily downrated all 15,000 psi BOP stacks on the North Sea soon after the disaster. This created the impression throughout the industry that equipment failure had been the main problem. It will be interesting to hear what their investigation eventually came up with as the real cause of the disaster.

Hopefully we will get some explanation for the delay in convening the enquiry. It



IAIN LETHAM, receives a gold medal from Ron Todd General Secretary of the T&GWU in a ceremony in Aberdeen. Iain was the surviving member of the three man crew of the standby boat Sandhaven's fast rescue craft. They repeatedly returned below the blazing Piper Alpha platform to rescue survivors.

His colleagues, Brian Batchelor and Malcolm Storey who died that night, were awarded medals posthumously.

(Photo - Peter McGlone)

must be a great strain on his relatives, to wait 20 months for an explanation of how Timothy died. We can only have sympathy for them as they have to relive the whole experience so long after the sad event. It also means that any lessons that may emerge from the enquiry have had to go unlearned during that time.

UNIONS DISCUSS CSA

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

NATIONAL officers of all the trade unions with an interest in the North sea met in Glasgow on April 18.

There they discussed, and adopted in principle, the draft "United Kingdom Continental Shelf Agreement".

Present were representatives from the AEU, EETPU, GMBATU, MSF, TGWU and NUS.

Here, for the first time in the 25 year history of Britain's offshore oil industry, was a united approach by all the unions towards confronting the problems of the whole North Sea workforce. It marks the end of a remarkable 12 months and the beginning of a summer which will, one way or the other, leave the North Sea a very different place.

Earlier this year, under intense pressure from the unofficial Offshore Industry Liaison Committee (OILC), the four union signatories to the old Offshore Construction Agreement (OCA), junked it. This was the culmination of a strategy begun by the Tern

shop stewards etc.

The OCA was an agreement which only covered between 5 and 10% of the offshore workforce. (all in construction). It was in effect a policing agreement which allowed the employers industrial peace when they were at their most vulnerable, during the construction of the production platforms and the bringing on stream of the oil. When it went it took with it the last real obstacle to unity amongst all offshore workers.

But removing obstacles to unity is not the same as creating unity. And this is the significance of the Continental Shelf Agreement that the April 18 meeting endorsed. It is an attempt to do just that, to unite the entire offshore workforce as a first step to transforming the North Sea.

The day after the unions met, Bill Morris, the deputy general secretary of the giant Transport and General Workers, Union, attended the regular weekly OILC open meeting in Glasgow. His union, along with the National Union of Seamen, had

participated in joint talks at national level with the other offshore unions for the first time. His message was clear, The T&GWU along with the other unions, stood absolutely firm in support of the offshore workforce.

Organised round the OILC and with the engineering/construction "bears" out in front, the offshore workforce have created this situation. Now all that remains to be seen is their verdict on the draft Continental Shelf Agreement. "It's not perfect and it's not carved on tablets of stone", said Ronnie McDonald OILC chairman, "but it is a necessary first step if we are to meet the challenge of 1992, and also place ourselves as a workforce at the centre of our industry."

Union signatories to the claim will meet in London on May 8 to further consider their position.

See Page five

EDITORIAL

OCCIDENTAL AND THE PRESS

JAIMIE JAIMIESON, a mechanical technician and safety representative on the Claymore, spoke up and described a situation he had seen. By doing so he inadvertently exploded a campaign of insinuations about sabotage. These insinuations had originated in the Oxy office on the rig, and had spread like wildfire to the beach.

Unwittingly he had diverted Oxy's poisonous smear from the entire workforce and onto his own back. For his troubles he was huddled ashore and detained by the police.

His colleagues struck immediately. He was released without being charged. Occidental said he was welcome back on Claymore any time, and his employers, AOC, advised him to return to his work at his earliest convenience.

A number of loose ends do remain however. Oxy have as yet refused to make an apology for their outrageous smear. Their spokesperson had spoken of "a potentially malicious act", and "a stupid irresponsible act" which suggested the presence on the rig of a person with "no respect for the

safety of his fellow workers".

Had Mr Jaimieson remained silent, this filthy insinuation might just have stuck to the entire offshore workforce. Certainly if Peter Steele of the Daily Record had had his way it would. He faithfully repeated Oxy's filth and tabloidised it to read, "Sabotage Bid By Rig Maniac", "Cops' Chopper Dash After Grudge Scare", and "A MADMAN with a grudge could bestalking a North sea oil rig... bent on sabotage."

Peter Steele can show his notebook and say that all he did was write what Oxy told him, and of course he would be telling the truth. But that in no way excuses him. He repeated without question, the guilt ridden fantasies of an oil company held in deep suspicion by many offshore workers. It was on Oxy's platform that 167 of our people died that night nearly two years ago. Piper Alpha was infamous, long before it blew up.

Peter Steele would have done better to speak to the offshore workforce before dipping his pen in slime. Now I fear it's too late. He and the paper he writes for are beyond the pale.

Jaimie Jaimieson says he owes a debt of gratitude to his colleagues who moved so quickly in his defence. Undoubtedly so, but the real debt of gratitude must be from us to him for sabotaging this filthy smear attempt.

"PRESS"

IF JOE Moran says that "Press" NRB'd him from the Beryl B for collecting money for Blowout then that is exactly what happened. No doubt Press employees will make up their own minds about the accuracy or otherwise of John Ironside's denial.

Blowout has it on the best authority that Press' bare knuckle fighting enthusiasts from the Darlington office have recently had to have a word in the ear of the golfing enthusiasts from the Aberdeen office. Basically they're saying that it's time to stop the practice swings and start wielding the club in earnest.

Joe Moran is only one of a number of Press workers' spokesmen who are under attack on the North Sea and the workforce at the Press Howdon yard on Tyneside are out in defence of their shop stewards, sacked on the most spurious grounds. (see Round The Yards on Back Page)

It looks as though Press think they can intimidate their employees into co-operating with their clients plans this summer. Well I suppose that was inevitable after the 11.7% bribes failed to stem the demands for a Continental Shelf Agreement.

The days when the offshore worker can be treated like dirt are nearly over. Blowout looks forward to seeing our friend Joe Moran reinstated and recompensed.

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RULES MADE BY IDIOTS

I read the Blowout with interest. Most wives don't get told by their husbands what goes on because they don't want to worry us. Your paper gives us an insight into the risks and dangers our husbands work under.

You keep on about safety aspects and I have to agree that the companies don't give a damn about what workers have to do. If safety is the top priority why the hell do men who have been working night shift suddenly get put on day shift half way through their trip. Surely if a man is working nights his system becomes geared for this, and so to change his shift half way through doesn't make sense. The men must get disorientated.

I am not an expert. But in my opinion, common sense would tell you that it would be better to let them work the whole two weeks on nights, and after their leave start on day shift. That way it would cut down the risk of accidents due to the fact that they would be starting back fresh.

As a lay person in this field I would love to meet some of the idiots who make the rules, and tell them how I think they could make safety at work a "priority". God help our men if this is an example of safe working practices.

Concerned wife of a zombie

FLARE OFF YOUR LETTERS

AMOCO 49/27 CHARLIE

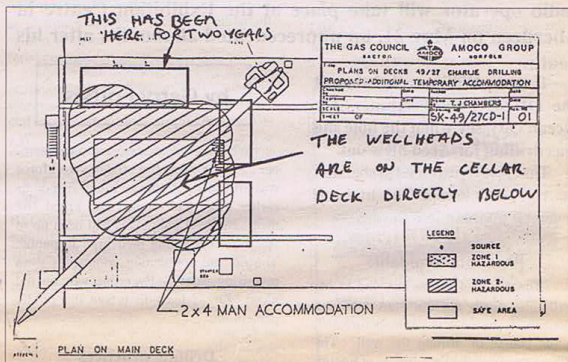
Congratulations yet again on another splendid edition of "Blowout". If only more people both in and out of the industry had access to it our struggle would be that much easier.

I was particularly pleased with your mention of Amoco's 49/27 Charlie platform in

the Southern Sector. However I was incensed that Amoco denied that the portacabins were above the wellhead area. I was living in one of them and other workers have been living in it for two years! Another two portacabins were to be delivered a couple of weeks ago. I enclose a plan which verifies this.

The irony of this latest tale of woe is that the contract we are working on (AOC) is called, "ESD valves safety project"! (Obviously for tax relief purposes)

Keep up the good work
Yours in Comradeship
Name withheld by Blowout



SADLY FAMILIAR

I read with interest "A View From Home". Although I am the ex-wife of an offshore worker, I still have connections with the oil industry, and reading "A View From Home, was sadly very familiar.

Being an "offshore wife" brings its own specific difficulties. My ex-husband worked in the southern sector in the early 70s before bringing us all to Aberdeen. In those days the money was good, but unfortunately as my husband was a contract worker, I never knew how long it would last.

He had always been a heavy drinker, so his onshore period was spent "relaxing" with his daily bottle of gin and a dozen cans of special brew. The kids' friends used to ask, "why has your dad always got a can in his hand?". The kids became as adept at making excuses as I did.

During some trips onshore it felt like the check in day would never come. When it did a feeling of absolute relief came with it. For two weeks we could lead a normal life.

I think I was always a single parent. It seemed as though I already had total responsibility for making decisions and dealing with the children's problems. When he was offshore there was no choice about this. The frustration came when he arrived home and needed "time to unwind", then spent the rest of the fieldbreak period too drunk to think clearly. It came to the point where I resented him interfering in my independence. My marriage failed, not entirely due to the abnormal lifestyle, but it certainly contributed.

The sad thing is that I've talked to lots of offshore wives over the years, who can tell a similar story. Maybe it's not always the drink. Sometimes it's just the pressure of having to cope with all the problems on their own for half the year. I suppose most of us new that offshore work was dangerous before Piper Alpha, but since it there is the added anxiety for oil wives that it could happen again. Neither the oil companies or the government are interested in the men's family problems, yet surely if a guy's having problems at home, his concentration level is lowered, and he will have difficulty coping with his job. No one is interested as long as the oil is pumped ashore to fill the company pockets.

In my opinion offshore wives should have a say in what goes on. After all their husbands' work affects the whole family. I hope other wives will feel able to put pen to paper. I am also sure there are other wives who feel quite positive about offshore life, and it would be nice to hear from them too.

An Ex-wife

EXCELLENT

I have worked offshore for many a year now, - on the catering side, - and Blowout is the first of its kind to help the workers. It is excellent and straight to the point. There is no pussy footing about. There are many people starting to take notice of Blowout, and realize that it means business

Keep up the good work and let the workers have a say, - always.

Jambo

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.

PRESS ON THE BRENT

I would like to take the opportunity of sounding a word of warning about the new terms and conditions of employment imposed by, amongst others, Press Offshore. I'll do this by relating my recent personal experience.

During my last trip on the Brent Charlie, which ended on 12/4/90, a meeting of Press nightshift personnel was called (not by me). At the meeting, dissatisfaction was expressed at Press' Dickensian industrial relations policies. Summoning people to Aberdeen for meetings on the last day of their leave under threat of dismissal for non attendance, was not widely appreciated. Nor was the imposition of the "agreement" without consultation with the workforce or their representatives. The subsequent treatment meted out by supervisors who had been expressly instructed to give the bears a hard time didn't go down well either.

It was proposed (not by me), and seconded, (again not by me), that we should exercise our right under the new terms and conditions, and work only 12 hour shifts. It was stressed that this did not mean entering into a dispute, but merely exercising one of our very meagre rights under the company's own rules. This was voted on and carried with only one dissension.

It was decided, whilst it was not necessary because we were not in dispute, that we should nevertheless inform the management of this decision as a matter of courtesy. It was voted that I should have this honour, and I together with a representative of the black trades informed Mr Whiteleaf of the men's decision. We were very careful to emphasise that we were not in dispute and refused, despite several requests, to list any grievances.

When it was finally accepted by him that we were not in dispute and were perfectly within our rights to take such a decision, he asked about the general mood of the men. We then related the subjects that had come up at the meeting, stressing that they were not "grievances", but might perhaps enlighten him with regards to his expressed wish to know the feelings of the men.

Two days before I was due to go back offshore, I received a telephone call from an

anonymous "Manuel" (I know notheing), informing me that I had been down-manned. Three days after this I received a letter explaining that this was due to redundancy.

In the company's terms and conditions, written by them, for them and imposed by them without input from the men themselves, it states:

"The method for selecting employees for redundancy shall be based on their service with the company and the need of the company to retain particular skills. It is recognised that this shall be the agreed method within the terms of section 99 of the Employment Protection Act."

But I know from speaking to colleagues who were not down-manned, and who have less service than me, that this procedure has not been followed. I decided to enquire as to how this "mistake" had been made. The sequence of events were as follows.

I phoned Neil Christie's office. I was told he would phone me back.

I phoned again. Once more I was told he would phone me back.

I phoned again and insisted on hanging on. I was ignored for 20 minutes.

I re-dialed. The switchboard could get no answer from his office

I re-dialed again and was put through to his secretary who hung up without saying a word.

I re-dialed once more and left a message with the switchboard operator to the effect that any further communication would be via my trade union, and that this incident would be reported in Blowout.

I hope this makes your position out there clear. You have no rights. The companies will not even abide by the rules they themselves have written. The need for a continental shelf agreement is vital. Only then will we have any rights. The rest is window dressing.

Read and discuss the draft document. If you think amendments are needed contact the OILC. Go for it.

The companies are lying when they say they want a skilled and motivated workforce. They want bluebottles who'll eat sh. you know what. I'm betting on them getting bears who'll growl.

Phil Ex Brent Charlie

STRANGE(WAYS) BEHAVIOUR

I am writing this letter in the hope that through the paper I can make my point to contracting personnel on the Ninian field. We are every bit as worthy of an 11.7% rise as our brothers on BP and Shell platforms.

Why should Chevron have the luxury of our special skills and experience on the cheap? Especially when we hear of the rates that are being paid on the beach.

How can this situation help them in "MEETING THE 90s SAFETY CHALLENGE". Morale is at an all time low. Perhaps they should examine the high turnover

of labour and the increased incidence of of "first time" new recruits offshore. It's no wonder that tea shack banter is now replaced with anger and frustration.

Roll on the summer. I hope we get the chance to take action along with the OILC in support of a decent agreement for everybody.

If instead o' ovs, we wore soots w wee arras on them, we'd be turfin slates aff the roof bi noo.

Long term inmate

A WIFE'S SUPPORT

Having just read your latest edition, and absorbed a few points made by other offshore wives, I have this great urge to make my views known, whatever they are worth. I've been a grass widow to an offshore worker for thirteen years, and believe me it's a very lonely life. And if you are wondering why, "if it's that bad", I haven't put my foot down and insisted my husband works onshore, well it's simple. My husband loves his job, and there's no way I'd ask him to give it up. At the moment he's on a lone crusade to improve safety and conditions for himself and his colleagues offshore. I say "lone crusade" but I realise now that that's not totally true. There are a lot of guys out there doing the same, it just feels as if he's the only one.

My biggest fear at the moment is that in his efforts to improve things he might just ruffle a few feathers and find himself without a job. I'm sure that there's a lot of you out there know what that feels like. Oh yes! These big oil companies have ways and means of shutting you up. Having said that, I realise my husband is so determined in his belief that safety and conditions out there must be improved drastically, to prevent another Piper Alpha disaster, (and all the other disasters too numerous to mention), that the threat of never working offshore again will not deter him from trying to do his duty as he sees it. If anything, it'll only make him more determined to upset more people as long as it gets the job done.

The worst thing that can happen to me and the children is that we could lose our home and some of our possessions. But what's that after all? A man's life should be more important, and I personally would rather live in a tent with nothing but the security of knowing that my husband is safe.

And to my husband I say this: Your wife and family are behind you 100%. Keep up the fight! Possessions can be replaced but husbands, fathers, and loved ones can't and we love you.

And to all his colleagues, friends and co-workers out there I say, please stop thinking about yourselves and think about your wives and lovers and your children. Get your fingers out and do something about your own safety. Actively support the current campaign for an agreement for all offshore workers.

Now sit down and think about your colleagues on Piper Alpha and Ocean Odyssey etc.

Carmel Chambers

TROUBLED WATERS

I recently came across the February issue of your paper "Blowout". If this is a typical example I would like a regular copy. Please find enclosed a subscription, and as I spend more time offshore than at home, please send it to the address given below.

I look forward to your review of David Hebditch's documentary in the next edition. Unfortunately, television reception on the platform was such that I/we were unable to fully appreciate what seems to have been an extremely interesting programme. (Is it possible to obtain a video copy?) The "Ocean Odyssey" incident and forthcoming inquiry are obviously of particular interest.

Hopefully, as time progresses, offshore employers will take the opportunity to reply to some of the points raised through "Blowout" rather than selected (or even selective) media channels.

John M Morrison

OUTRAGEOUS ATTACK ON PHILLIPINOS

While working for AOCl, myself and several other welders were contracted to work on the Amethyst hook-up, off Humber-side. The hook up was being done by Herema for Britoil.

On arrival onboard, I found to my dismay, that the Phillipinos on board the Hermod were being paid the following rates. Stewards were on £8.00 a day, deck crew on £10, pipefitters and platers on £12, and welders on £13.

On top of this they had to pay an Amsterdam agent £180 to get the jobs in the first place, and then work for three months on board as per contract, or lose a large part of the wage for breach of contract.

The Dutch crew treated the Phillipinos like dogs, and they were terrified to be seen talking to me, for fear that they would lose their jobs. In fact they sometimes went out of their way to keep clear of us.

Once the jacket and the topside were in place, the serious work started. There were no hand rails, no life jackets, no safety harnesses, and even when it was dark and raining the Phillipinos were climbing everywhere. I couldn't even see a standby vessel. It was incredible.

And it's not even 1992 yet.
Norman Robertson Welder

FLY TO WICK

My husband works offshore, so when he comes home I look forward to reading Blowout to see what's happening to you all out there in the North sea.

While reading issue 5, I came across a letter "A Long Way to Go", about a bloke who looses a couple of days leave every fortnight because he's got to travel home to Scunthorpe.

We are in exactly the same boat except that we live in the north of Scotland, in Caithness. The question I ask myself is why can't blokes living in the north be flown to Wick instead of Aberdeen. Surely if they are not going to stay overnight, or travel to or from Aberdeen, it's going to save the oil companies money. Maybe even enough to pay landing fees at wick?

You all work hard enough out there without having to spend another 24 hours to get home. I sympathise with everybody who has problems traveling home.
Name and address withheld.

ENTHOUSIASM ON THE TLP

Please continue to send copies of "Blowout" to my home address as you have been doing. I enclose a cheque to cover the cost of further copies.

I also enclose a donation for OILC from my crew on Hutton TLP. Please pass this on.

It seems to me at least, that support for the OILC is picking up on the TLP, thanks to the enthusiasm of a handful of people who can see that through the OILC, some semblance of unity among contractors may be possible. Keep it going.
Name withheld by Blowout

It seems that everyone on Hutton TLP isn't as enthusiastic as you about Blowout. We would be pleased to publish any letter from persons who might have disagreements with our "Women Offshore" feature in Issue 6 - Ed.

THE OVERTIME QUESTION

"PERSONS SHOULD NOT NORMALLY WORK FOR MORE THAN 12 HOURS IN ANY ONE DAY" - Department of Energy

FIFTEEN hour shifts and "three weekers" are out of order. Even if employers and workers were working together on the best of terms, these hours would not be justifiable. As it is, with the draft Continental Shelf Agreement on the table, we're in dispute. And it's on the overtime question that the fight has begun.

Everybody offshore, even the Department of Energy, knows that long shifts are a killer. Excessive hours has been identified as a direct contributory cause in two of four recent disasters (Zeebrugge and Clapham). And in another two it was a factor. It's got to come to an end.

The D of E safety notice (PED 5 1/90) makes that point. And when the summer shutdowns are over, overtime will end as surely as night follows day.

However the oil companies have a dilemma and quite frankly safety, as far as they are concerned, is going to have to take its usual place, a high profile in the press handouts, and the rubbish bin on the rig. They want to and will, end "the ham". But only once they've used it to get themselves out of the mess they're in.

The oil companies, and Shell and Chevron in particular, have a load of work to do this summer, work that will severely disrupt oil production. But they cannot do this without working the bears 15 hours a day. If they want the work done they need the goodwill of the "bears". Well the way to get the goodwill of the offshore workforce would be to immediately sit down with our representatives and negotiate an agreement that will give us permanent protection.

It's becoming clearer by the day that without protective agreements in place in the near future any financial gains made by the workforce since last years strikes, is going to be hauled back off us at the first opportunity. 1992 offers the employers the prospect of a massive influx of cheap labour. This summer provides us with the opportunity to forestall this attack by organising now.

The latest 11.7 wage increases were handed out quite cynically to try and stop the men from going the whole hog for an agreement. However it has had the effect surely of taking the wages to a level that we don't have to rely on overtime to get by.

Last summer saw the first shots fired as Piper showed us all what our future would be if it was left in the hands of the oil companies. The winter has seen the building up of the resources necessary to challenge the employers. The offshore workforce have collected massive amounts of money and have equipped the Information Centre in Aberdeen with resources to challenge those that the companies themselves have.

The threat has been made and now quite frankly is the time to deprive the operators of the man hours they so desperately need.

Before we can force the oil and contracting companies to treat us with respect we have to demonstrate our self respect. Working 15 hour shifts and three weekers is not showing self respect. We have the right to work to our contracts of employment. A 12 hour shift for fourteen days is enough for any man.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY SAFETY NOTICE PEDS 1/90 EXTRACT

"... PERSONNEL cannot be expected to work responsibly, reliably and therefore safely when they have been deprived of sleep for excessive periods. Oil companies, owners of offshore installations and employers alike should set limits on the hours to be worked without a break for sleep. Persons should not normally work for more than 12 hours in any one day... Any period of work of more than 12 hours should be followed by a break for sleep of at least 8 hours."

STRESS

STRESS is a problem long recognised, (but seldom discussed), to be associated with the disjointed lifestyle of oil workers. You don't have to be a trick cyclist to know that the conditions of offshore life and the treatment meted out by the employers is damaging. Letters from "offshore wives" and our regular correspondents to the "View From Home" column describe some of that damage, and how it's transmitted to our families.

Certainly in Norway, and even with companies like Shell UK, the effects of "two and two" have been recognised to be destructive to the individual and to his family. It's likely that relationships are placed under strain when couples are continuously meeting up at the same stage of a woman's menstrual cycle. At it's simplest level it can be deeply distressing to couples attempting to have a family.

Even a straight two on two off leaves the offshore worker spending the biggest half of his life either working or traveling to and from work. Three weekers are crazy. They can only damage your health and that of your family. And the same goes for the fifteen hour shifts that men are regularly expected to do. Yes we know the oil executives ashore put in even longer hours, and they have no leave period in which to recover. But it's obvious to everybody that many of them are off their nuts. I'm looking forward to the first letter from an oil or service company manager's wife. Then we should get a real insight into damaged behaviour.

There's been little study of the damaging effects of our way of life on us and our families for obvious reasons. You'd have to be a pretty tame doctor before you got past the oil companies and onto the rigs. What little I've seen has been full of jargon. Obviously it wasn't written to give us any idea of what's happening to us. It doesn't get offshore anyway. Maybe some of the experts will read Blowout and write a series of articles for us in plain English. In the meantime I suppose we carry on refusing to accept the s*** that's handed out, and get this Continental Shelf Agreement together, as a start in creating an offshore environment that's fit for human beings.

O.I.L.C. STATEMENT

SUCCESSIVE meetings of the O.I.L.C. standing committee have discussed and agreed to the need to end the practice of routine overtime working.

We call on all offshore workers to meet offshore, discuss this decision, and immediately begin to work to your contract of employment.

NORTH SEASPEAK

THE ENGLISH language is very subtle. Everybody knows that things don't always mean what they sound as if they mean.

Politicians in particular have always had the facility to make it sound as though you were about to experience something unimaginably nice, when in fact they have just told you you're in for a kick in the crotch.

"North Seaspeak" has its own subtleties, and no doubt you have your favourite expressions. A current favourite amongst general foremen is "the ham's guaranteed". Notice how even at a first hearing you get the impression that something deeply desirable, that you've been coveting for ages, has just been granted and will be yours for ever.

However when looking up the "North Seaspeak/ Plain Speaking" dictionary we find that the translation of "The ham's guaranteed" is "Overtime's compulsory". That leaves us with a less comfortable if more honest feeling.

There are still a constant stream of offshore workers being disciplined because they heard "the ham's guaranteed" and it stirred up some deeply held ideas about choice, and they didn't have access to the right dictionary.

2135 HOURS :
the hours that we work in a regular year of two on two off and 12 hour shifts

1840 HOURS :
the average hours worked in manufacturing industry ashore

1767 HOURS :
the hours that Hoover workers in Cambuslang near Glasgow, and British Gas' onshore workers are contracted to.

1650 HOURS :
roughly what engineering workers hope to achieve in their campaign for the 35 hour week.

1120 HOURS :
the hours a year a teacher is expected to work. Mind you that still sounds way too much for that job.

We do more than enough before we start on the 15 hour shifts and the three weekers.

MOVEMENT ON THE NORTHERN NORTH SEA

KCA DRILL CREWS

FOR SOME time now there have been grievances aired by KCA drill crews on the Cormorant Alpha.

No overtime was being paid for shuttling and hard lies, and the men reckoned that they were due in the region of £5,000 a man in "monies not forthcoming".

Central to their grievances was the recognition that safety was being jeopardised by a huge turnover in men, due to the low morale caused by this situation.

When a couple of guys came ashore and contacted the trade unions, they took back offshore enough forms to recruit into the T&G and NUS, all four crews on both the Cormorant Alpha and the Tern. The unions then wrote to KCA asking them to recognise the new shop stewards.

KCA's response was immediate. They imposed a 13% wage increase, a sick pay scheme giving men half pay for the first 6 months, and are now paying shuttling money.

TERN MEETING

ON TUESDAY the 24th of April a mass meeting of contractors took place on the Tern.

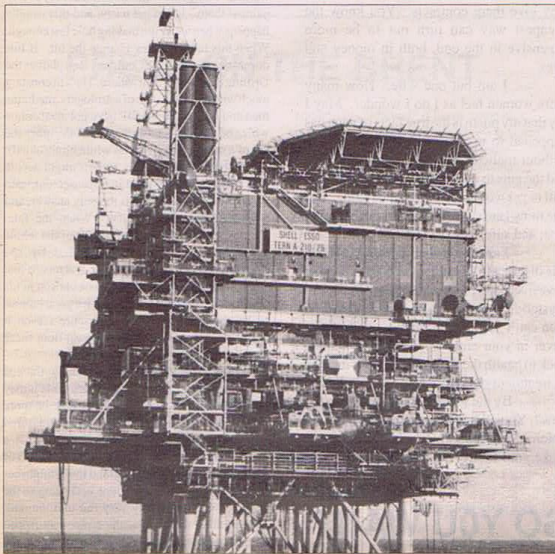
Not only were the construction/engineering workers present but also CCG caterers and KCA drill crews.

The outcome of the meeting was that the men decided to follow O.I.L.C. recommendations during the campaign to win the Continental Shelf Agreement.

The question of working to the contract of employment was raised and agreed to. The men are working normally to give other installations an opportunity to meet and take their decisions.

By the time Blowout went to press, onboard meetings were scheduled widely throughout the Shell Fields to discuss the position of compulsory overtime.

CONTINENTAL SHELF AGREEMENT



TWENTY THREE pages of closely set type with no pictures and stapled together between blue cardboard covers.

Not a likely starter for the title of the North Sea's second most widely read publication I'd have thought.

But the "United Kingdom Continental Shelf Agreement" (Draft), is steadily heading for that honour.

Already over a thousand copies have been distributed from the neat piles that clutter the floor of Aberdeen's Offshore Information Centre.

It's a historic document in the truest sense of the word. A first in the 25 year history of oil and gas exploration around Britain's coasts. The draft is very much the inspiration of the OILC and it reflects the origins and the strengths and weaknesses of that organisation and of the offshore workforce itself.

The Continental Shelf Agreement (CSA) has one primary, and absolutely positive function. It aims to unite all offshore workers. Whether you are a "bear" working in construction/engineering, a steward in the mess room, or a roughneck on the drill floor, the agreement is for your consideration, for your comment, and ultimately for you to achieve.

It was the Piper disaster that highlighted our common cause. It made no difference to the flames what your job classification was. And in reality the employers use a similar criteria. To them you're meat - to be used and abused as they see fit as long as they can get away with it.

In the 17 months of its existence the OILC has always striven to organise the widest possible range of offshore workers. This document carries on that tradition.

What a picture it would make to see the faces of those animals amongst offshore management as they read and contemplate signing the clause which would bind them to

recognising the unions and encouraging their employees to join. If only one redneck bully choked trying to swallow that one it would be worth it.

After decades of frankly inadequate, and in some cases non-existent intervention by the unions, many of us might have our own reservations about some union practices. But there is no doubt that the right to organise openly is a pressing necessity. And the unions have at last come out openly in favour of the agreement and of unity.

Without it, the companies will continue to dictate to us on all the important questions relating to our lives. That includes safety, and will surely leave us sooner or later, staring at the twisted remains of another Piper.

In addition, the draft recommends procedures for the settlement of disputes. It proposes an end to the arbitrary discipline of the employers. No more "running off" workers because their faces don't fit or because of imagined crimes. It offers an end to the NRB (not required back) syndrome.

Proposals include a proper pension scheme which recognises our rights to change our employer, and at the end of our stint offshore have proper provision for our future.

It proposes provision for parental leave if your partner has a baby, and of course bereavement and compassionate leave when appropriate. These are to be our right and not subject to the whim of an OIM.

Standardised sick pay and accident and life insurance schemes are proposed as are regulated procedures for redundancy.

Significantly the actual wage rates have been left blank. But procedures for the calculation of wage rates, including

shift allowances and overtime payments, are laid down in some detail. This certainly reflects the feeling at successive OILC open meetings that while wages are important they are not the crucial consideration today. As has been stated time and time again, there is so much work to do and so few trained people to do it over the next couple of years, that even if we walked away from the OILC and the Continental Shelf Agreement today, the employers would still have to continue throwing money at the construction workers, and at least some of that would be knocked on to the rest of us. They've already imposed up to 60% wage increases on some workers over the last 12 months.

No! The issue is how can we spread these gains throughout the whole industry and retain them? 1992 and the open market is approaching fast. If we're caught without an agreement that regulates wages and conditions for every worker on the continental shelf then the disgraceful behaviour of companies like Herema, (see the letters page), will become a commonplace. We will be facing the conditions that are being endured by our Philipino colleagues today.

The document has of course got weaknesses. They, as well as its strengths, flow from the real history of our industry. The draft very heavily reflects the the now defunct Offshore Construction Agreement. The fact is that at the centre of recent agitation and organisation on the North Sea have been the "bears". To a very large extent drill crews, especially on the exploration semis and jack ups have been largely passive. The isolation and vulnerability of the exploration crews is well known. So is the ignorance and brutality of much of the management in this sector both on and offshore. This is rapidly changing as drill crews organise themselves in an unprecedented fashion.

Some of the particular problems of such workers it might be argued are not confronted in the document. Certainly some exploration workers don't even appear in section 6.2 "List of Categories". This is a relatively minor problem that can be remedied. In the course of discussing this draft drilling personnel will surely raise all these points and point the way to the changes required.

It is a draft document. It is not chiselled in stone and it does offer these workers, as well as all other offshore workers, their first real opportunity to discuss openly their grievances and a solution.

One important issue that is raised is that of holidays. The proposed two weeks holidays a year represents a big gain for many categories of offshore worker but it will obviously not go nearly far enough for others. Two weeks may indeed be the best place to start as some union negotiators think, but Blowout feels that it must be made clear that this is only a first step. We propose that immediately the continental Shelf Agreement is established as the basis for negotiating our conditions, that a demand for a two week on three week off schedule be lodged. In addition a timetable must be published for the achievement of parity with Norwegian workers who work a two on three off two on four off schedule. These are the issues that we must be discussing in 1991 and 1992.

A QUIZZ

compiled by

Martin Hind

AFRAID that the fear of boredom would have you, "out chasing the ham" (This I am told is what you rough tough bears call doing overtime.), I thought that you might appreciate a few moments of quiet contemplative activity. Brawling and cursing boisterously over the pros and cons of the draft Continental Shelf Agreement might fill the void for some of you but there are others I'm sure of a more sensitive and didactic disposition.

I do hope to be pitting my wits against yours on a regular basis from now on, so please write with any suggestions. And if you're interested in running quizzes offshore and you want some help to compile them I'll be glad to help. At a price of course.

So here we go .. You'll find the answers on page 7

- (1) What is the name of Norway's North Sea oil corporation?
- (2) Through which three capital cities does the river Danube flow?
- (3) What was invented and first sold in 1935 by Charles Darrow?
- (4) Who was the first monarch to be known by a number?
- (5) With what is sole veronique gamished?
- (6) In which sports did the following Olympic champions excel?
Jean Claude Killy (1968)
Paul Masson (1896)
Lasse Viren (1976)
Teofilo Stevenson
- (7) On November 2 1924 which British newspaper became the first to publish a crossword?
- (8) Which film of the 1960s took more money at the box office?
- (9) Tussah, habutai and georgette are examples of what?
- (10) What distinctive first did John Dryden achieve in 1688?
- (11) Who were the first punk rock band to release a record in Britain?
- (12) How many gold disks did Elvis Presley earn?
- (13) In which television series did the following families appear?
The Drummonds
The Lamonts
The Ingles
The Tates
- (14) What is the formal name for joined up handwriting?
- (15) In which year was the BBC established?
- (16) Outside the Soviet Union which eastern European nation produce most oil?
- (17) What are the seven deadly sins?
- (18) What is the singular of bacteria?
- (19) Who was the first British footballer to be sold for £1million twice?
- (20) What are the state capitals of :- Texas, Wyoming, Arkansas, Virginia, California and Pennsylvania?

A VIEW FROM HOME

IN OUR regular column, A View From Home, we print two pieces. First the ignorant and illiterate ramblings of Channel Offshore's Logistics Manager. His words appeared in a letter which terminated the employment of one of Channel's employees on the Safe Felicia in early January this year. Next we print the eloquent and defiant response of the man's wife written in the form of a poem.

YOU'RE SACKED

On arrival at the office today the 3rd of January 1990 we are in receipt of a telex report from the BP Marine Representative Mr R Jardine/Mr R McClung/Mr I Ritchie on the Safe Felicia. We quote the following contents of the telex for your information:

"1) Refused to stay on overnight to cover for non-appearance of back to back.

2) Refused to provide meal cover for remaining members of helideck crew

3) Indicated that he was going ashore even if it resulted in a P45 (dismissal)" unquote

Both our senior HLO's on Safe Felicia, B Geater and R McClung have stated that although you are a good worker you have an unfortunate attitude towards the supervision on board and unable to accept that as an HDA you were responsible to the HLO and subject to Installation Company Discipline.

After lengthy discussion with Roger Leigh our Managing Director, re the above facts it is with regret that under the terms of your current contract we must terminate your contract effective two weeks from the above date.

Yours Sincerely,

J W-Whitehorn
Logistics Manager
Channel offshore Services Limited

A WIFE'S TALE OF WOE

Men listen to my tale of woe. Listen to it well. Within these words I've got to say there's quite a tale to tell. My husband worked for "Channel", contract given by "BP" Just like you he trusted them and worked on the North Sea.

Exams he took and passed them all so you could trust him too. But please read on for in the end this could happen to you "The rise" for HDA's and such you awaited patiently. But in the end when it was paid you you couldn't show much glee.

Your hourly rate was not too bad but overtime was less? What ploy is this I wonder? Just your lot I guess.

Cause if you start to question why Ashore they'll tap that drawer and reply. "There's plenty names in here who'll do To be a pair of hands like you"

Now I'm angry 'cause suffer I must Because of the man with the power lust The men who sit on the office chair Thinking they light the oil flare

The only thing they'll fire is you If you don't do what they tell you to What do they know of lonely nights Of storms or gales or bloody frights

They sit there with their central heating Having such an "important meeting" Wining and dining on your sweat and blood Caring not about man, beast or flood

My husband worked for Channel Offshore But he was promptly shown the door At New Year his relief was late He wouldn't stay on so they opened the gate

They never asked why he was so upset If you don't do what they tell you to get His work they said was very good But didn't like his attitude

If he had stayed off sick in bed For Xmas crew change but no instead Went back to work with a "surgical collar"

And relieved the chap who caused some of the bother

When the chap was late he didn't get the sack Because his face fits he got back My man had done his work although ill himself And at home I was looking like a skelf

The day he was due home a letter he'd read

That I'd been told of a hospital bed But because he felt a private grief He didn't tell the almighty chief

He phoned the office before he got the boot But I'm afraid that courtesy didn't suit He'd done his fifteen days offshore But they said the contract "included more"

Contract! That's a new one on me Cause at the time there wasn't one you see On my husband they went to town To such an extent he had a nervous breakdown

All this I'm telling cause it could be you Who'll be next to lose their mind and home too All you boys who work offshore Could make companies like Channel exist no more

They need your skill. Without your training They would be the ones complaining Without trained HLO and HDA How could you oilmen earn your pay

Men of the Felicia: About your back pay Did you ever find out how they worked it that way You all know yourselves it should have been more Are you frightened to ask cause they'll open that door

Because of this victimisation and row I don't know what will happen to us now But when my husband's healthy to work once more I won't be for cowboys like Channel Offshore

"I WAS NEVER IN YOUR EMPLOY"

Along with my poem I'm writing this to include my condolences to all the trained men who work offshore and have to suffer the indignity of being treated as having no intelligence. And also to the helicopter pilots who rely on the men on deck being trained properly and not undermanned. God be with you all.

I for one certainly hope BP will look into the integrity of companies before they give them contracts. You know the cheapest way can turn out to be more expensive in the end, both in money and lives.

I am but one wife. How many more women feel as I do I wonder. May I say that my poem is the true facts of what has happened to my husband. It was written without malice. Probably because I have had the guts to open my mouth, my husband will never work on the North sea again. But one thing I am sure of is that he will be by my side, and safe.

I also hope that those involved in this disgraceful treatment of a good worker have many sleepless nights. God works in a mysterious way his wonders to perform. You can't sack me oh mighty chief. I was never in your employ. I am only nursing back to health the results of your method of treatment of employees.

By the way where are all his mates now? You all know where to go to join the union. Stand up as men and be counted to make your future secure.

SO YOU WANT TO BE A ROUGHNECK?

SO WHAT do roughnecks do anyway? I've heard them described as the most versatile tradesmen in the world, but since this was from a Yankee pusher who once verbally lashed me for asking for a torch, ("it's a flashlight you want bo", torches are for burnin' niggers with"), we can kick that one into touch right away.

Probably on the look out for some rough trade, A. Alvarez in his book, "North Sea Journey", romanticised the roughnecks on the rigs he toured as "Roman gladiators grappling with iron in the arena....." Mmm! Quite! Maybe I've just been working on the wrong rigs dear.

On one particularly nasty barge where I did a couple of hitches, (nobody did more than a couple of hitches), the nicest thing the Pusher could bring himself to call us was, "worm". But that was only after we had won his confidence. And, while we're at it, lets put paid to the idea that some drilling contractors send their roughnecks to finishing school to round off these ragged edges - that all stopped during the slump of '86.

So apart from what they're officially paid to do, which is to connect the lengths of drill pipe into a drill string and see it into and out of the hole at something approaching the speed of sound (the sonic trip it's called, the drillers dream), the roughneck is in reality the drilling industry's scapegoat. If you've done more than a shift on the drill floor you will know that scapegoats are as necessary as drilling mud to keep the bit turning. Roughnecks are the whipping boys who do not speak back lest the great god of petroleum, the mighty DO-LLAR gets angry.

So discipline on the drill floor is harsh. It's no coincidence that the drill floor resembles a cross between a Medieval torture chamber and an industrial dentist's surgery. You've signed ships articles for a start, and they've hardly changed since the days of the Bounty. Except that the buggers have canceled the rum ration.

Punishment is still simple. Most rigs being conservative institutions by nature still plump for the traditional use of the "cat", to keep the scruffies on their toes. It really does concentrate the mind. It's said that some of the more progressive companies have done away with keelhauling altogether and that some pushers are even refusing to rub salt into the wounds after a whipping. All this liberal talk might sound good to a roughneck, but in the long run discipline is bound to break down. Then we'll have anarchy and the unions and before you can say, "spot price per barrel", they'll have to bring the yanks back to straighten us out, and show us how it's done all over again.

But the potential baby roughneck should be warned. Things are sometimes not as rosy as I've painted them - it can get nasty, and this usually happens when we're not making hole fast enough. When this happens they change the bit. If this doesn't do the trick the Company Rep phones the Drilling Superintendent ashore. He's in constant touch with a whole range of astrologers, medicine men and other experts. (BP have got an absolute whizz of a bloke who they say can decipher the lay of a set of chicken bones while blindfolded).

Anyway, any of these experts might decide that DO-LLAR is in need of appeasement, and when this happens blood is the only answer, and a roughneck's blood at that. When the fatal Tannoy message goes out the spirit of the whole occasion can tend to be spoiled by the disappearance of the entire crew, and means that the sacrificial roughneck has to be chosen in his absence. The Aztecs considered it a great honour to be chosen, but for some obscure reason it doesn't go down a bundle on the rig floor these days.

When the chosen one is finally tracked down and strapped across the rotary table it may appear horrific to the uninitiated. But the more squeamish bears reading this can be re-assured that it is all done most tastefully. There is a standard drilling code of practice which the D of E insist is adhered to strictly and the Toolpusher is there to see that it's all done according to the book. They are usually very fair and the dark superstitious days when the heart was ripped from a live victim and tossed down the hole are thankfully long behind us.

And lets give credit where credit is due. It's a well known fact that the Department of Energy don't like the practice but their hands are tied by an energy minister who literally quakes in his Redwing boots when the DO-LLAR rumbles. They quietly accept the inevitable. The petroleum god must be satisfied.

Of course I've exaggerated all this a bit. I was lying about the energy minister wearing Redwings, more like brothel creepers.

D'y'e still wanna be a roughneck?

AROUND THE OILFIELDS -ARBROATH

WHEN THE unions pulled out of the OCA, (Offshore Construction Agreement), the contractors administered it themselves on the Arbroath "hook up". The men should have been due a rise on its revision date of January 1st. They eventually got a rise on March 1st. It was not backdated. Three weeks after this, as the first oil flowed, the workforce had their rate cut.

After this succession of kicks by management, the men did register their complaints, but the agreement they've come to has left other contractors around the North Sea aghast, and some of the men on the platform "beeling".

To compensate (not quite fully) for the money that's been removed from their wage packets they've agreed to do an extra hour a day taking the normal shift from 14 to 15 hours a day. (CONT. NEXT PAGE)

Unbelievable as this may sound, it is Blowout believes, the truth. We're looking forward to a stream of letters proving to us that we are indeed wrong and that the majority of men on the Arbroath have every bit as much self respect as the rest of us.

-WIDOWMAKER

SHELL have chosen tender assisted drilling for their Gannet A platform. It'll be a first for the North Sea.

It seems that the Sedco 704 is to be used to provide the support. Mud and power for the drilling operation will be supplied from the rig by a "flexible hose catenary system".

Drill crews will live on the rig, and access to the platform on a daily basis will be provided by a "heave compensated gangway". This will fit in well with Shell's new £400,000 "Lifestyle" campaign designed to persuade staff and contractors to adopt a health and safety conscious home life.

In other parts of the world where this system is used, for example by Shell's partner Esso on the South China Sea, this gangway is known commonly as the "widowmaker".

No doubt our North sea designed gangway will be bigger and better than its foreign forerunner. Certainly when it comes to widowmaking the operators on the North sea are in a class of their own.

REVIEWS.....

ALBUMS.....

LITTLE FEAT
Representing The Mambo
Warner Brothers



Reviewed by
John Rowlinson

IN A MONTH of major releases, I'm afraid I found little to my taste for this edition's review.

The immensely popular Susan Vega has a new album out which, given her last album went double platinum, should make a lot of people happy.

Then there's a new Fleetwood Mac album which doubtless went into the chart at number one making any comment of mine superfluous (I found it predictable and distinctly ordinary).

For the lovers of what I believe is termed "soft metal", the estimable Heart also have a new album out which is much better than the current hit single taken from it. Equally formulaistic but no less enjoyable for that is Allannah Myles' album of the same name from which the excellent single "Black Velvet" is taken - music from and for the groin. I plumped for "Representing the Mambo", as I believed the band who have made it, Little Feat, folded with the untimely death of Lowell George, some years ago.

I must confess my prejudice. Little Feat, to me, were one of the great bands of the seventies and Lowell George, one of rock 'n' roll's men of enduring genius. Making playing slide electric guitar seem as easy and natural as falling asleep, he could create moods in his songs from thigh-slappin', good time boogie to the bleakest desolation, with wonderful lyrical precision. Listening to some Little Feat songs could be quite disturbing. However, taking Lowell George out of a rock 'n' roll band is a bit like taking egg out of omelette. I really wanted to like this album but didn't hold out much hope.

What I got was, on the whole, a fair album which should have been better. Songs like "Texas Twister", "Feelin' s All Gone" and "Teenage Warrior" are classy, chunky little foot-tappers which will stir even the most jaded natural juices while "Woman In Love", "Rad Gumbo" and "That's Her, She's Mine" do their best to recreate the slide-dominant boogie of a classic Little Feat, and almost manage it.

There are however tracks of which I am not fond, unfortunately, the last three tracks of side two, one after the other. I hate it when an album ends on a tame note and this one does. "These Feet'll Steer Ya Wrong Sometimes" is a fake, good ol' boy, Texas trucker song sadly lacking the lyrical sharpness of wit George would have lent it. Then you get "The Ingenue", all intricacy and no substance and to round it off, "Silver Screen" which is pointless.

So - to buy or not to buy. Put it this way, if you haven't heard much or any Little Feat, take the £7.99 this album cost me and get either "Dixie Chicken" or "Sailin' Shoes". If you do know Little Feat, then I think, like me, you'll miss Lowell George enough in this not to make it worthwhile. Having said that, if Vega, Heart or Fleetwood Mac don't light your personal fire and you want some new sounds, I think this album gives you just enough good music to make it value for money. I believe that's called damming with faint praise.

QUIZZ ANSWERS

- 1) STATOIL, 2) VIENNA, BUDAPEST AND BELGRADE, 3) MONOPOLY, 4) HENRY THE EIGHTH, 5) WHITE GRAPES, 6) SKIING, CYCLING, ATHLETICS AND BOXING, 7) THE SUNDAY EXPRESS, 8) THE GRADUATE, 9) SILK, 10) 1st POET LAUREATE, 11) THE DAMNED, 12) 37, 13) DIFFERENT STROKES, TAKE THE HIGH ROAD, LITTLE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIE, SOAP, 14) CURSIVE SCRIPT, 15) 1922, 16) RUMANIA, 17) PRIDE, AVARICE, LUST, ENVY, GLUTTONY, ANGER AND SLOTH, 18) BACTERIUM, 19) CLIVE ALLEN, 20) AUSTIN, CHEYENNE, LITTLE ROCK, RICHMOND, SACRAMENTO

VIDEO.....

"Jackknife"
Directed by David Jones
Starring Robert De Nero,
Ed Harris, Kathy Baker.

"See No Evil, Hear No Evil"
Directed by Arthur Hiller.
Starring Richard Pryor,
Gene Wilder,
Joan Severance,
Anthony Zerbe.

Reviewed by
George Whitacker

JACKKNIFE is such a solidly worthy study of the protracted mental strain the war has put on a couple of Vietnam veterans that I feel more than a little guilty at having been quietly bored by a great deal of it. De Niro plays Megs, a hirsute beer-swilling garage mechanic who, at the beginning of the film, digs up his old army buddy Dave, a withdrawn and drunken nobody now living



an aimless life with his schoolteacher sister Maria. Seemingly content to have his meals cooked for him and to while away his free hours sulking alone in bars, Dave responds less than positively to Megs' attempts to jolt him out of his depression. When the three of them go off on a fishing trip together, for instance, Dave spends the time lying about the rocks swigging beer and has to be carried home senseless. Ironically, what does finally begin to rouse him from his torpor is the developing relationship between Megs and Maria, although he is unable to articulate his objections beyond grunting misgivings about any sister of his going out with such a "loser".

A few brief flashbacks reveal the problem: the boys' best pal was killed in the war and neither of his surviving friends can purge himself of remorse or guilt. In Megs' case this manifests itself in an odd mixture of brashness and insouciance, in Dave's in prolonged bouts of embittered self-absorption. Inevitably, the truth has to be confronted sooner or later and the moment comes when Dave, pissed out of his head, melodramatically gatecrashes the local High School Prom, where Megs and Maria are attempting to dance their blues away, and at last gives vent to his angst.

Jackknife is a deliberately measured, low-key piece of work that eschews sensation in favour of small, often skilfully-worked

scenes between the three protagonists, but despite its serious "message" and the first rate performances, the result is a somewhat over-earnest exercise played out almost entirely on one emotional plane. Passable drama, perhaps, but distinctly lack-lustre cinema.

If Jackknife takes itself a little too seriously for its own good, the (ahem) "hilarious comedy" **See No Evil, Hear No Evil** unforgivably fails to recognise the full potential of either its plot or its leading characters. Pryor and Wilder play a couple of nonentities, one blind (Pryor), one deaf (Wilder), accidentally mixed up in murder and villainy and as a result, on the run from both the law and a brace of hoods. The plot is absurd but that could just about be forgiven if the script had come up with anything other than the most obvious set-pieces involving a man who can't see and a man who can't hear trying to avoid murder and/or arrest. With no fewer than five scriptwriters credited, however, the whole thing would have appeared to have been a bit of a chore and indeed it shows as we move from one contrived scrape to the next (Wilder shouting instructions to Pryor in a bar-room brawl, Wilder shouting instructions during a car chase to Pryor, who's stuck behind the wheel etc etc etc etc).

Despite itself, however, the film has some genuinely funny moments - Wilder adopting a daft stomping walk so that Pryor can follow his footsteps from behind, the pair impersonating a pair of Swedish medics at a conference, Wilder's occasionally inaccurate lip reading and consequently bizarre responses, and so on. These, together with Pryor's moments of inspired zaniness and Wilder's unique sad-funny face and engagingly vulnerable comic persona, possibly just saves the film. Even so, it's a shame that the pathos at the heart of their relationship is never developed. We are, after all, told that Wilder's wife left him after he lost his hearing, and while Pryor admits to having "Pussy" permanently on his mind, the only woman in his life appears to be his sister. There's something touching, too, about both their dependence on each other and the lengths they go to conceal their disabilities from everybody else. In the final minutes certainly, Pryor acknowledges that he's been running from the truth for years and that basically he's "full of shit" but the serious moment is buried beneath more routine high jinks and the kind of ending favoured decades ago in the Saturday matinees.

If you're in the mood and if, like me you still think Gene Wilder one of the funniest actors around, give it a go but don't expect too much.

PRESS HOWDON- WALLSEND

PRESS WORKERS offshore have been right to the fore in building the OILC.

They continue to do so despite the growing harassment from Press Offshore's management. (see Editorial P 2)

Meanwhile onshore, at the Press Howdon yard on Tyneside, these same employers with the full support of their oil company clients, are setting about trying to dismantle the rights that the construction workers there have built up over the years.

Six shop stewards were sacked for having the temerity to carry out the instructions of a mass meeting, and inform their oil company clients of some of Press' safety shortcomings.

Basically supervisors were instructing workers onto the site while it was still undergoing inspection by stewards and safety officers to see if it was safe to work after severe winds

The sackings came months after the alleged offences. And today as workers strike in defence of their spokesmen, Shell employees on leave from the North sea are being used to break the strike with a view to floating out the Kittiwake platform soon.

After hearing a request for support from the Tyneside stewards, the OILC standing cte donated £500 towards their funds and sent delegates down to the picket line where they were able to identify one of the scabs.

We know from our own experiences that Press think that the way forward is to play tough. But there is no doubt that in the relationship between the oil companies and the contractors, just who are the monkeys, and who grinds the organ.

In contrast the men of Press Offshore have a proud record of fighting for their own self respect. Given the way the wind's blowing on the North Sea, and using that as a guide, I'd put my money on the human beings on this one.



PRESS WORKERS ON THE PICKET LINE AT THE HOWDON YARD - THE KITTIWAKE TOPSIDE IN THE BACKGROUND (photo Steve McTaggart)

AROUND THE OILFIELDS

Continued from page 7

-PIPER LIFEBOATS

JORGENSEN & VIK A/S are Norwegian Lifeboat builders, and they have been since 1903. They have been supplying free fall lifeboats to the oil industry since 1986 and are entitled to consider themselves as one of the most experienced manufacturers in the world.

Occidental, the operators of Piper Alpha, can boast no such prestigious credentials on this or any other aspect of safety provision.

So when Jorgensen and Vik get extremely uptight about losing the contract to provide free fall boats for the new Piper development, Blowout think that their point of view should be looked into more closely.

A detailed investigation into Oxy's decisions about the new lifeboats they're going to install, and Jorgensen & Vik's response will have to wait till another day. For one, documents in Norwegian need to be translated, and for two it'll require an engineering expertise that Blowout does not possess.

What should however be aired now are some of Jorgensen and Vik's reservations. They say that for Oxy to have awarded the

contract to their competitors they have had to make concessions in the specifications to which the boats are to be built. They list the four concessions and go on to state:

"We feel it is intolerable that the parties involved should be allowed to take such an apparently unjustifiable and arbitrary decision, and that their unethical behaviour has flouted all customary procedures of handling sealed bid tenders. In our opinion what appears to be an elaborate farce enacted to lend an air of credibility to a decision that would seem to have been taken without reference to the tenders submitted...."

Blowout will carry longer extracts from Jorgensen and Vik's correspondence with the Norwegian union NOPEF, in our next edition.

-WEST SIBERIA

WHEN 700,000 West Siberian oil workers threatened strike action recently, Gorbachev and his gang caved in immediately. They announced their, "permission for local producers to sell 400,00 tonnes of oil and 300m cubic meters of gas directly on the international markets in order to buy food supplies for the region."

This isn't the end of the story and more demands of the oil workers are going to have to be considered, and by the looks of it met too.

The power of the oil weapon is certainly becoming very clear in what used to be the Soviet Union. An oil embargo was one of the first weapons used by Gorbachev in his dispute with Lithuania. On that occasion the boot was on the other foot. He held the oil.

A QUESTION OF RESPECT

NINE MONTHS ago Thomas Wood, an SGB scaffolder, was killed along with two workmates, Peter Thompson and Mat Darcy. They were on their way home from Chevron's Ninian North.

Today his widow, Mrs V Wood is still being prevented from getting on with her life bringing up her daughter.

Even the insurance settlement, (reduced because he was off the rig), has not been paid in full by Crusader.

More disturbing is the distress caused as SGB insist on confirmation from the Procurator Fiscal that no drink was involved in the crash.

To raise this after all this time in the case of a man who was a passenger in a car is outrageous. The Procurator fiscal has informed the company that there was no drinking involved and the policy will now be paid out promptly.

However Mr Dobinson, of SGB was completely unable to address himself to why this question should be asked at all about a passenger in a car crash. This has all caused extra hurt to a woman who has suffered enough.

Mrs Wood would like to take this opportunity to thank all those of her husband's workmates who gave sympathy and financial support when her husband Thomas (Toe) Wood died.

-SEDCO WEIRD

BLOWOUT was interested to hear that a forklift truck lost over the side of the Sedco 707 recently, had been retrieved. The story did seem strange to us. It's not the sort of thing that's routinely lost over the side of a rig. Not like scrubbing brushes and paint brushes and the like.

If we were being a bit cautious in believing the story it was because there have been a couple of rather unbelievable stories coming from Sedco installations of late. Dave McEwan, Sedco's personnel manager, recently took some pains to squash the rumour that a number of incidences of drug using had been uncovered on this same rig.

Regular readers of Blowout will remember a story in our December edition that took to task an outrageous article in the Daily Record on the subject of a "drugs raid" that had taken place onboard the 707.

Blowout are pleased to report Mr McEwan when he says that not one Sedco crew member tested was found to be positive.

Stranger still is the rumour that the Sedneth 701 has now got curtains on the bunks and four lifeboats instead of two (instead of one, if you don't count the one that had the hole in it).

-MOBIL'S HELPLINE

MOBIL are claiming a first with the setting up of a help line. They know all about how stressed up they've managed to get us. So they're going to make the advice of lawyers, barristers, psychologists and financial advisers available to us round the clock.

They'll excuse us if we take their concern for our mental well-being with a pinch of salt. Sitting on the Beryl B after the Piper disaster wasn't a healing experience. While Aberdeen ground to a halt on the day of the St Nicholas Kirk memorial meeting, we worked on as usual with no opportunity to express our grief. Their field manager a Mr Smith could see no reason to get upset at this.

Maybe a helpline's not such a bad idea after all.

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Blowout Circulation. This month we have upped our print run to 10,000 from its usual 8,000. Credit for this is entirely due to you, the men who have carried it offshore, distributed it and collected the money for it

Blowout as it stands is on a firm foundation. However if it is to expand to meet the needs of the entire offshore workforce, additional subscribers will have to be found.

Even more importantly, Blowout requires help in all aspects of its production. Realistically this can only come from you the readers. Contact! 041-423 0461

THE OILC Standing Ctte would like to stress that the only criteria necessary to attend one of its meetings is that you be an offshore worker

FOR ALL OFFSHORE WORKERS

MEETINGS

**GLASGOW : AEU HALLS
WEST REGENT STREET
EVERY THURSDAY 11.00am**

**ABERDEEN : TRADES
COUNCIL CLUB
EVERY TUESDAY 11.00am**

**DUNDEE : TRADES
COUNCIL CLUB
1A RATTRAY STREET
EVERY WEDNESDAY 7.00pm**

**NEWCASTLE : AEU HALLS
HIGH ST GATESHEAD
EVERY WEDNESDAY 7.00pm**

**MIDDLESBOROUGH :
CENTRAL HOTEL
43 CORPORATION ROAD
EVERY WEDNESDAY 11.30am**

**LIVERPOOL
MERSEYSIDE T.U.
RESOURCE CENTRE
HARDMAN STREET
10th, 24th MAY &
7th, 21st JUNE 7.00pm**

**HULL : G.M.B. OFFICES
62 RUSSELL STREET
11th, 24th MAY &
8th, 22nd JUNE**

**GT YARMOUTH
contact
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