



DELEGATES DELIVER AWARD TO GLENCORE OFFICE IN HOUSTON

International Delegation hosted by USW Local 235A

Sherwin Alumina, a subsidiary of Glencore, illegally locked out 450 members of Local 235A on Oct. 11 after the membership overwhelmingly rejected a contract proposal that demanded steep cuts in benefits for both active employees and retirees. In response to this Trade Unions from all over the world sent a delegation of activists to show their solidarity with the unfairly treated workers.

WHO TOOK PART?

The delegation consisted of various different trade unions including Bob Timbs and Alan Scott from Australian trade union the CFMEU. Bob used to work for Glencore before becoming a full time official, looking after mineworkers. Alan used to work for Glencore before being made compulsorily redundant, a decision that is currently being challenged in the highest court of Australia.

The international Relations officer for the South African union of miners, NUM, was also taking part. Patrick Mathebane said that it was important

for South African unions to take part in international solidarity as they were greatly helped by international support when fighting apartheid.

We were also accompanied by Jennifer Wirrick from Michigan she is the full time president of USW District 2. Also present, Carolyn Stokes used to work in a paper mill before being charged with the important task of assisting workers with their benefits and advising members during lockouts or strikes.

WHAT LED UP TO THE LOCKOUT?

We were met by several local members including Lesley Thomas, he had been at Sherwin 28 years as a mechanical fitter and sat on the plant safety committee. He informed us that because Texas is a right to work state as early as July last year the company started bringing in contractors. The engineers and consultants were asking how the regular employees do their jobs.

Sherwin Alumina Unite Solidarity Delegation

Charlotte Upton

Andy Murray

Ian Skinner

Phil Bray

FEBRUARY 23RD – 28TH 2015



ON THE PICKET LINE

Members of the international delegation stand with local USW on the picket line



GET THE GRILL GOING

To maintain morale and to keep the pickets going during their shifts on the line USW members cook burgers and sausages for them.

WHAT THE COMPANY 'OFFERED'

In September the company proposed a contract that included:

- Increase in health premiums from \$110 per month to \$500
- Language allowing scabs to come in so when the contract was up unionised workers would no longer be required
- Health benefits taken from over 65's
- No pensions for new starters



USW members believed that this was the first step to locking out the unionized workforce. A combination of the fact that the plant is 60 years old, there is no apprentice program and the dangerous substances required for the process, such as mercury, lead to a lot of safety issues. Lesley told us how the union had challenged the use of outside workforce as they weren't safe but the number of outsiders still gradually increased. This is believed to be Glencore planning to lock the workforce out after their contract ran out on October 1st 2014.

Jessie Green, who is a negotiator for local 235, explained to us that management had told the workers to train their foreman on their jobs. He went on to tell us that the company wouldn't look at the USW' counter proposal and that they presented the contract detailed above as the, 'best and final offer' locking out the

workers after a 98% no vote on the contract.

ON THE PICKET LINE

Once all this had been explained to us we made our way down to the picket line outside the plant. This is manned 24 hours a day by USW members. They have a hut where they can escape bad weather and keep resources like food and water. They also had a Rota up that members could sign up to, to ensure that the picket line was always manned. They had a BBQ and spirits were extremely high. The members said that the district was doing a good job of keeping morale up and that they had been looked after over Christmas and thanksgiving. They also said that the show of international support gave them hope and that it was comforting to know that the bad treatment they endure is getting worldwide attention.

AWARD WINNING

On the second day of the trip we went to Houston to the building that Glencore had an office in. Glencore has recently come second in the search for the worst company in the world to work for so we went to go deliver their award, demonstration with USW members from Houston who support the Sherwin Alumina workers. There was about 100 people including oil workers who are currently on strike.



ONE DAY LONGER, ONE DAY STRONGER

Supporting the Oil Strikers

TEXAS CITY

After the demonstration at the Glencore offices we moved on to Texas City where we met USW members from the oil industry that are currently on strike. The three plants impacted by the strike in Houston include Shell Oil Refinery and Chemical Plant, LyondellBasell Refinery and Marathon (refinery and cogeneration facility). A total of 2,200 workers are striking in District 13, with 5,000 on strike in the Greater Houston area. The remaining refineries and oil facilities are operating under a rolling 24-hour contract extension.

SAFETY CONCERNS

The workers have a number of grievances. One is the "on call system." They report that they are asked to be on call when the plants anticipate possibly being short-handed. This means that, supplied with pagers, workers may be alerted anywhere they happen to be and told to come in even during what is supposed to be their off time. Alternatively, they may be told to check in on certain days to see if they are needed. Even if they are cleared for the day, however, the on-call

system prevents them from committing in advance to social and family plans.

Moreover, there is an "attendance program" that penalizes workers for not fulfilling their on-call duty. Each day they miss, they accumulate hours and points against them and do not get a clean slate until a year from each missed day. This makes it very easy for workers to be plagued, at any given time, with "points against them," with little or no hope of working them off unless they can go for years and years with no missed days. It does not even matter if the reasons for the missed days are legitimate and unavoidable by all reasonable judgment. This is combined with working conditions that regular members are working 12 hour shifts for up to 15 days in a row before they get a day off. The final nail in the coffin is the steady increase in the amount of agency staff at the refineries, they are poorly trained and poorly paid, meaning that an already volatile process is made even more unsafe.

We visited picket lines at sites in Texas City and Pasadena, stopping off for some food at the union hall where they were



holding a family event. A union activist spoke to the children present about why their parents were on strike and how money would be tight before pressing play on the Frozen DVD being projected onto a big screen.

CONCLUSION

All in all the trip taught us that although we live miles apart we face the same challenges, erosion of our terms and conditions, health and safety concerns and corporations that consistently put profit before people. As corporations operate in a global market so must trade unions. With global unions such as workers Uniting and federations like industriALL fighting for workers' rights globally we are stepping up to the plate and the continued support of our International brothers and sisters means that we in turn will be supported and the global labour movement will be stronger for it.

