

ENOUGH IS ENOUGH

The Bulletin of  — The offshore energy branch of 

Living on a scrap heap?

Are you living on a scrap heap? You know the score, look around at the rotten and leaking pipe-work, corroded steelwork everywhere, handrails and walkways falling apart or even falling off, cable trays supported with scaffold and the infamous ‘blue rope’, and so the list goes on. It’s been part of our offshore scene for years and it appears most of you are still living in this kind of environment according to an HSE report called – “External Corrosion Management; Inspection Report”.

You can download the complete report at:

www.hse.gov.uk/offshore/corrosion-report.pdf

RMT/OILC has been at the forefront of a long running battle to expose the operators who let their installations fall into the ‘scrap heap’ category. Now we have the support of the HSE’s Offshore Division who recently published this damning inspection report which confirms our fears and shows that some oil companies are paying little more than lip service to the safety of workers on their installations.

Some of the comments from the Chief of the Offshore Safety Division, Steve Walker, should be ringing the alarm bells in your head if the state of your installation isn’t doing that already. He warned that workers’ day-to-day safety must not be sidelined, saying:

“While we recognise the commitment of companies in preventing any failures that could lead to major incidents offshore, it is essential that they are not neglecting the general fabric of their installations. The management of external corrosion to safety-related plant and equipment offshore must not become the ‘poor relation’ offshore.”

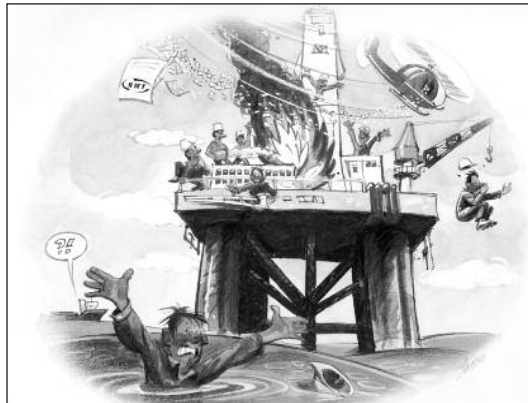
The report found the physical condition of installations visited by HSE inspectors varied – significantly “from good to poor” and that dutyholders, who hold day-to-day responsibility for running platforms safely, showed a wide range of attitudes. Reporting on these attitudes the report says;

“Some demonstrated proactive commitment by refurbishing as part of major upgrade projects, whereas others showed insufficient commitment to addressing their situation.”

The report goes on to say;

“Though a number of dutyholders provided verbal assurance that safety-critical and safety-related plant and equipment were treated equally, relevant corporate documents failed to endorse this position.”

Clearly some operators are trying to hoodwink the HSE by giving these verbal assurances about how important safety related plant and equipment is to them. Some operators might



actually manage this, at least in the short term, but they can’t fool you because you’re working around the plant every day! And what’s ‘safety related plant and equipment’? – we’d argue it’s all around you offshore. Let’s face it, if you’re unlucky enough to be on an installation that goes ‘bang’ in the night, you want to be sure you can use the walkways and stairs to get you to a place of safety or even off the unit. You certainly don’t want to be falling through the gratings having survived a fire and explosion or

have cable trays and heavy cables crashing down on you while trying to escape, but on some units this is a possibility!

HSE’s Steve Walker confirms our fears saying: *“Offshore installations that progressively deteriorate and corrode, with hazardous walkways and poorly supported pipes or other infrastructure are not only putting workers at risk of serious injury, but in the event of a major incident can exacerbate the consequences.”* Mr Walker added, *“this is not an issue that can be ignored”* and we agree 100% with the man, especially on those older offshore installations.

We want you to get behind the push to improve your working and living environments by telling us about the ‘corrosion’ issues on your installation. Write us a brief report and we’ll run it (anonymously of course) in future publications or on the web site. If photographs can be provided, all the better. You shouldn’t have to live on a scrap heap, as the HSE says, it’s not safe so let’s get it sorted.

We commend Mr Walker and his colleagues, clearly they’re sending a message to Oil & Gas UK that they’d better get their house in order. The report reveals the unacceptable face of big oil, gambling with workers safety, while trying to hoodwink the HSE offshore division into believing that everything is fine.

Surprisingly we haven’t heard from OGUK and their Chief (of spin) Malcolm Webb on this issue. Maybe he and his members don’t want to talk about the report and are hiding in the ‘too difficult to deal with bunker’ at OGUK offices in Aberdeen. Our message is – you can’t hide forever! With ever greater scrutiny of failing oil companies occurring the pressure is set to mount. Our members lives are at stake and RMT/OILC will not rest until these dutyholders are brought into line. The HSE has also now put the marker down, so let’s see real improvements. If there’s no improvement, let us know and we’ll chase it up. If they can’t run safe operations then there’s only one solution to the problem - SHUT THEM DOWN and give the licences to dutyholders that can fulfil their statutory obligations.

Migration to the UK – remove the cap?

The Scottish Trade Unions Congress (STUC) was held in Ayr back in late April this year and there was a motion moved by the STUC Black Workers Conference and seconded by the University & College Union Scotland. The motion called for the Cap on Migration of non-EU workers to be lifted and the STUC General Council to -

Continue to put pressure on Government to remove the cap on migration for Tier 1 and Tier 2 migrants

Continue to work with the Scottish Government and other interested parties against this policy and support the development of a more flexible approach to immigration in Scotland.

The RMT delegation which included General Secretary Bob Crow and President Alex Gordon debated this resolution. The Offshore Energy Branch delegate and the Offshore Energy Regional Organiser Jake Molloy argued strongly that we should oppose the motion, due to the fact that without controls our member's employment in the Offshore and Shipping Industries could be seriously jeopardised.

After lengthy discussion and debate the RMT delegation took the decision to oppose the motion due to the consequences it could have and not just in our industry but in all industry's in the UK. From an RMT point of view this was an ill thought out motion that could have serious consequences for our members. Regional Organiser Jake Molloy for the Offshore Energy Section went to the rostrum to oppose it and we reproduce his statement to Congress;

Amended Motion No. 94 "The Cap on Migration"

RMT response

Congress, it is an unenviable task to oppose what is essentially a very principled motion, but the thought of facing our offshore oil and gas and shipping members if I didn't come up here and oppose the motion is even more unenviable.

Our members want a cap to accompany the Tier 1 and 2 requirements because the employers in our industries continue to claim there is a need to bring in labour from out with the EU because they have specific,

I got the feeling delegates voted the way they did because it was 'PC' to do so. No one wants to be seen as being 'racist' or 'xenophobic'

urgently required skills – Congress this is nonsense!

There is only one reason these industries want to bring in Filipino, Indian and other nationals – it is to replace UK workers and exploit the foreign nationals. We know this to be the case because it is happening now! As I speak, UK workers are being told they are no longer required by major diving companies and they are being replaced by Filipino workers. We have the contracts of these workers and they show the Filipino workers will be paid around \$300 dollars a month. The UK workers displaced were previously on over £150 per day.

Only 30 years ago congress there was over 30,000 shipping grades working around our shores - today there is less than 8,000. We have around 30,000 offshore workers today and RMT wants to protect their jobs and the jobs of our remaining shipping workers. To do that we need to 'CONTROL' immigration – but not because we want to prevent workers coming here to work – NO – we want 'control' to prevent unscrupulous employers using migrant workers to undermine existing terms and conditions, replacing UK workers, and exploiting those foreign nationals for no other reason than – GREED!

Congress our diving and drilling members are today prevented from working off the coasts of Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, US, Mexico and many other regions around the globe, because of immigration restrictions. Their ability to find work is being significantly

reduced meaning access to work around the UK and EU is becoming all the more important.

If the mover of this motion was able to provide assurances that removing the cap or relaxing the current requirements would have no effect on the employment of our members, RMT might be able to reconsider our position; if not, I would ask congress to oppose this motion.

As Regional Organiser Jake Molloy made RMT's statement on the matter, there was an eerie silence around the Conference hall. Many delegates appeared shocked that someone would have the audacity to suggest we keep a cap on immigration. The motion then went to the vote and we can report that every other Union supported the motion for removal of the cap.

We were totally defeated which left some of our delegates scratching their heads in disbelief. Jake Molloy said later; "I got the feeling delegates voted the way they did because it was 'PC' to do so. No one wants to be seen as being 'racist' or 'xenophobic'. I don't think we are being racist in any way and I'm not convinced this motion would have been supported by many of the public service workers currently facing the dole queue! I know for a fact it wouldn't be supported by UK offshore and shipping workers and that's what we're at the STUC for - to represent our members."

RMT's position is clear; we are not going to sit back and let unscrupulous employers engage non-EU Nationals for no other reason than to EXPLOIT them and undercut agreed and long established rates of pay and collective bargaining agreements. Our members can be assured we will tackle this problem head on if it arises. Offshore employers should take heed of our policy in this respect. Offshore workers should 'wake up and smell the coffee'; because if you're not organised and ready to fight against this social dumping, then you can be sure it will happen. Are you going to sit tight and wait for it to come to you? We're not!

[Members are reminded our ability to influence these matters is restricted to the UK and UK waters. Ed.]

News in Brief: UK incidents

December 2010 Talisman; were issued with an improvement notice by the HSE regarding the condition of some equipment on the Fulmar Alpha platform. Inspectors found corroded pipes and nozzles on fire sprinkler systems and deluge equipment. The HSE said in their report; “You have not ensured that plant on the installation is maintained in efficient state.”

December 2010 Chevron; had a gas leak that initiated a full muster on the Alba Platform. They were also issued with a couple of safety warnings from the HSE, the first regarding the state of pipework on the platform and the second because Chevron did not have a proper system in place to ensure that installation fabric issues, such as walkways and cable trays, were being maintained properly. The company has now complied with both warnings.

December 2010 Schlumberger UK; were fined £300,000. Schlumberger had been contracted to carry out wireline logging on the EnSCO 101 when a sealed radio isotope used in a logging instrument to obtain well data was left laying on the drill floor unshielded for about four hours after an engineer failed to load it properly into the tool. Fourteen workers on the jack-up EnSCO 101 in the UK North Sea were placed at risk of radiation exposure.

January 2011 Premier Oil; had two Improvement Notices served on them regarding operations on their Balmoral Installation. One of the Improvement Notices was served about three weeks after a platform shutdown and said the risk of a hydrocarbon release had not been adequately controlled due to a failure to ensure the integrity and functionality of the accumulators. The second Improvement Notice was issued when it was discovered 25 years’ worth of safety certificates relating to emergency shutdown valves were missing!

A spokesman for the HSE said; “We can confirm that the Balmoral offshore installation manager voluntarily shut down production during an HSE inspection of the installation in

December, after a lack of certification of accumulator bottles was brought to his attention. Two improvement notices were issued to Premier Oil in January, relating to maintenance of plant and equipment and to procedures for the use of operational risk assessments.”

February 2011 BP; came under fire from the HSE and was served an Improvement Notice regarding a catastrophic failure of a piece of equipment on the Schiehallion FPSO that resulted in boiling hot heating fluid at a temperature of 123 degrees Celsius escaping. Wall thinning of the heating line was believed to be the cause. HSE said in their report that BP knew several days before that there was severe thinning of the heating medium line.

May 2011 Shell; came under fire from the HSE regarding two gas leaks on the Brent Charlie platform. The HSE told Shell to submit a revised safety case for the Brent Charlie platform after gas was detected on its topsides following leaks on 12 January 2011 and 27 September 2010.

Shell took the decision itself to close the platform after the January incident. The company has been battling for some time to resolve technically complex issues related to the venting of gas from inside one the platform’s huge concrete legs — Column 1 (C1) — and dispersing it effectively away from the platform. The operator expects the ageing Brent field to remain shut down for several more months.

June 2011 Rowan Drilling; had five Improvement Notices served against them. The HSE told Rowan: “You have not ensured adequate and appropriate supervision, particularly for those who are learning and who are new to a job, such as the new hire roustabouts on board who are not yet deemed competent by the Rowan competence system, but were undertaking and performing the full range of responsibilities for this role.”

The HSE went on to say; “You have failed to give effect to suitable and sufficient arrangements to assure competence, in that individuals working on the Gorilla VII have not been

provided with adequate information, instruction and training.”

The regulator also said Rowan was putting workers in harm’s way because it had not effectively implemented on the Gorilla VII measures it had been told to address on the sister unit Gorilla V relating to “significant deficiencies” in the permit to work system. Other notices said Rowan did not have effective systems and procedures in place for the safe isolation and re-instatement of plant and equipment, and was not carrying out proper assessments of risks to safety when plant or equipment was being operated outside normal operating parameters or defined maintenance schedules.

June 2011 Shell; was ordered to pay £1 million in fines and £242,000 in legal costs over the explosion and fire at its Bacton gas terminal in 2008. The company had “neglected basic maintenance” for a long period before the 28 February 2008 explosion at the Norfolk plant, said the UK’s Health & Safety Executive after sentencing at Ipswich Crown Court.

HSE said it was only good fortune that no-one was killed or seriously injured, because workers were returning to offices for a shift change when the blast happened just before 6pm. The blast cut off nearly a tenth of the UK’s gas supply. Shell had pleaded guilty to breaching seven counts of health and safety and environmental legislation.

July 2011 Shell; the company was issued with a Prohibition Notice against the Brent Charlie platform after more problems with one of the platforms concrete legs, Column 1. Sources on the platform suggest these ongoing problems will probably mean a much earlier ‘retirement’ for the platform than was anticipated. There was an expectation the platform could run for another 10 years plus by bringing the Penguin Field through Brent Charlie. However, it now appears Shell will opt for another way to produce the Penguin field meaning Charlie, like the rest of the Brent Field, is staring decommissioning in the face!

[Thanks to Rob Watts at Upstream Oil and Gas newspaper. Ed.]

Self Employed Offshore? NO THANKS!

The Offshore Energy Branch is concerned by the ever increasing numbers of self employed workers in the industry. We are now seeing cases where members who are working as self employed 'Services Contractors' are claiming they have been NRB'd, or they've been selected for downmanning out of turn, or they've been 'fingere'd' by some bully gaffer who wanted rid of them! The guys argue they want to fight this and they want our help to do it.

However, in almost every case when we look at the claims a bit closer, we are forced to explain to the member that unfortunately the claim just doesn't hold water. In normal employment circumstances, the claim might have been valid but only if the member was an actual 'employee'. In a case of NRB for example, RMT/OILC can raise the matter with Oil and Gas UK and demand answers as to why our member has been removed from the installation. The NRB guidelines allow the member an opportunity for some recourse on this matter with the distinct possibility of having it overturned.

Not so with the self employed people though! The problem we face is that when the member decides to go down the 'self employed' route, they are effectively watching all their employment rights go out the window. When you

look at the majority of these self employed contracts, they tend to be for - the Provision of Services - and contained within that contractual arrangement there is a clause saying the 'agent' or 'client' can terminate the agreement at any time. So when a member claims he's been downmanned out of turn, we have to explain that it is in fact a Termination of Services and in employment law terms there is nothing that can be done about it.

Employers are more than happy to accommodate these sorts of contractual arrangements as it relinquishes them from most liabilities. The self employed worker will also have to provide their own Public Liability Insurance; this means if you have an accident you could potentially end up suing yourself! Workers who go down this self employed route are therefore playing a dangerous game, their employment rights are non existent and claims for personal injury compensation could be compromised.

There are some exceptions to the rule; some of the Divers that RMT organise are self employed but they have a bona fide Trade Union Collective Bargaining Agreement. Rates of pay are negotiated through the agreement, and are applicable to the self employed people who are classed as "day rate divers". Also, if there is any dispute, they can

collectively take action where deemed necessary, albeit they are essentially withdrawing their labour as opposed to taking 'strike' action. It can therefore work, but those involved have to organise themselves and create protections against unscrupulous employers.

Compare this to the self employed rigger, pipefitter, or rope access tech, working on an installation through an agent providing services to a client - they are totally exposed! The Offshore Energy Branch does not recommend this sort of 'employment'. The tax concessions may well get you an extra few quid in your pocket, but the downsides far outweigh the benefits. The self employed service provider offers up an employer's charter to hire and fire at will, where the worker can be removed without any recourse or answers as to why it has happened.

In a nutshell, we advise anyone who currently works offshore under these terms to reconsider their options, and anyone being offered this kind of 'employment' to think long and hard about what they are doing. Believe us when we say, this sort of 'employment' could be detrimental to your health and wealth! Just fall out with the wrong supervisor and before you know it, you won't be on that job and there's not a thing you can do about it. Self Employed? NO THANKS!

Offshore jobs "rewarding", say workers

Nine out of 10 offshore workers globally are proud to work in the oil and gas sector, according to a recent survey. Recruitment firm, NES Global, conducted a survey and got 300 respondents to its questionnaire. Apparently a good salary, free time on leave and high quality accommodation and entertainment were all listed as 'positives' of working offshore.

What a load of codswallop this is! Or at least that's what the 300 or so workers who read the article about this survey said to us. The article was printed in the P&J business section 27/04/11 and it certainly had Offshore Energy Branch officials laughing and especially about the good accommodation and "entertainment"?

Looking closely at the specific points reported on, the first issue is; "a good salary". We're sure significant numbers of our members would like to know where they can get a GOOD salary in this industry, because in real terms wages

have decreased so badly over the last decade or so that skilled people are looking to other industries to further their careers. Why go offshore when you can earn as much working at home and be in your own bed every night? And why sit at home with little or no income waiting for a call to mobilise offshore, there's not many other industries treat people like that!

The next point reported was "free time on leave". Most members responding to this would say - you're having a laugh! The majority of members and workers generally are now doing training course after course in their leave. Additionally, employers are resisting through the courts all attempts to reduce the already exhausting 2,200 hour plus working year by fighting the entitlement to paid leave in the Working Time Reg's.

Finally there's the biggest joke of all; "high quality accommodation and entertainment"! Since when has high

quality accommodation been a minimum of 2-man cabins with both workers on the same shift? And that's the good accommodation! What about 3 or even 4-man cabins and using communal showers, with no place to store your gear, poor ventilation, no heating or air conditioning and so the list goes on. As for entertainment, we expect that comes in the form of newspaper articles like the one we're referring to here – if that is you can get a newspaper offshore!

Neil Tregarthen, NES Globals chief executive said; "There is a general misunderstanding among many outside the industry about what working life is really like offshore. As increasingly more people around the world are desperate to find work, it is important they understand that a career

offshore can be hugely rewarding."

That might be the case if you're a poor unfortunate normally housed in a slum in some godforsaken corner of the globe, but we suspect few working in the UK sector of the North Sea would agree with Mr Tregarthen. In fact this fairytale image he is trying to create wouldn't be out of place in a Disney production. This branch would suggest Mr Tregarthen gets himself a 2 or 3 week hitch on nights on an ageing installation in the UKCS, maybe needle gunning for a week then tripping in the hole using a good oil base mud for the rest of the trip. We're confident even he would question the use of the term "rewarding".

Letters

Disgusted!!!

After years of fighting for annual paid leave I was shocked with what I found out recently. Caterers are always moaning about not getting this and not getting that, especially when it comes to holidays!!

I have been hearing rumours from other fields of caterers working part of their paid leave, or caterers on preferential rotas working part of their 3 or 4 weeks off. I took all these stories with "a pinch of salt" until recently. Then I witnessed it first hand within the Forties field. We have a rota that gives one six week paid leave period per year. To my horror a chef in the Forties field has come back to work a week of his six week leave . . . AS A STEWARD/ESS . . . and even worse he/she is, I'm led to believe, an RMT member!

I realise some people might do extra time when they need some extra cash flow, but doing it whilst supposed to be on 6 weeks paid leave is wrong.

The holidays are there as holidays!!! Extra time can or could be had throughout the year. E.g. Christmas time?

Companies must be looking at this and thinking, may as well just give them a bonus and revoke the holidays as they obviously don't want them!

Member No M0106821

No surprise about Brae

I was on the Brae Alpha for about 12 months and I am not surprised about the gas leak, the whole thing is rotten including the management. We were on there removing corroded derrick cladding because it was falling off, so Scotia told them they would no longer take aircraft to the Alpha prompting their action.



Whilst on Brae there was at least a couple of gas leaks per week. One day I was in the tea shack while a chopper was on deck when the tea shack (Temporary Refuge) began to stink of heli-fuel. There had been a mishap when refuelling, so there was no water in the drain traps or whatever so the TR could be over run by heli-fuel.

A debate started in the tea shack with the old hands rhyming off all the times this had happened in the past, shocking! The escape to sea ladders were absent too because they had corroded, then fell off. So when we were on there we were working to reinstate new ones.

I noticed a temporary scaffold that was edge protection because hand rails had fallen off on the MSF and the scaff-tag was out of date by 7 years! Sunday morning usually began with an hour's deck clearance, but if you brushed and shovelled too hard you could literally take the deck up it was so rotten. Funny enough if you said anything about all this stuff you didn't last long on there. So all the old hands are brain washed yes men in charge of a time bomb, proper scary stuff. And Marathon are right up there on the Times list of the best people to work for? Mind you, their staff did get taken to Florida to play golf, you need to play golf to get up the Brae career ladder.

Member No M0109169

Dear Mr Secretary

I have to express my dismay at the derisory offer made by the oil companies with regards to this year's pay negotiations. As you rightly point out in your breakdown, it does not even account for inflation acting upon our wages, never mind the increased profits enjoyed because of the obscene price of oil. What annoys me most was the expectation of our members to take a wage freeze when the oil price was suppressed a few years ago. Surely if we support the industry when things were bleak, then it is only right and just that we share in the good fortune, when things are riding high! It would appear that the oil industry is using the present economic climate to once again suppress any chance of a representative wage offer. This is simply not good enough in my eyes.

Member No M0104863

Well, well, well

Whilst perusing the Press & Journal on Wednesday 11th May, I almost choked on my breakfast cereal! On turning to page 17 there was a business profile on Susan Elston, MD of Aramark, who gave us some gems in her interview, such as when asked for her favourite restaurant, the answer was; "too many to be limited to one", well bully for you Susan!!

Susan mentions that Aramark's chef's have to keep the workforce healthy, nourished and motivated, and provide theme nights and special nights to keep morale high! Well Susan, how about keeping your chef's morale high, as you and several other MD's of the COTA companies agreed a deal roughly 5 years ago that changed the grading structure and now sees Chief Stewards (non

tradesmen with no qualifications needed) getting paid more than your chef's.

Considering amongst their tasks is "laundering skiddy's", "cleaning toilets" and "selling sweets/cigarettes" (they obviously don't have to keep the workforce healthy as part of their job requirement), you can see why there is an ever growing list of disgruntled chef's AND baker's!!

Is this the same Susan Elston who couldn't wait to take the stand at the Working Time tribunal and put forward the company's case as to why the workforce should not get 4 weeks paid leave?

Is this the same Susan Elston who will not tell the Aramark workforce on BP contracts, why they are the only core crew workers on these platforms that are not on a 2on/3off rota, despite BP management on several installations (when questioned), saying that you need to approach Aramark as to why you are not on the same rotation as everyone else?

Finally, it mentions that Susan has been shortlisted for the 2011 "First Women Awards"; it seems that the way to get ahead these days is to "SHAFT YOUR STAFF"

Member No. M0104379

[You don't have to worry about Ms Elston any more colleague, she has parted company with the company! Ed]

Union unity

In response to the article in the Blowout on the proposed cooperation between the three unions, RMT, Unite and GMB, I can only say that if you cast your minds back a little it wasn't so long ago that we, the "bears" actually showed our teeth and gave the BIG OIL boys a fright. I am referring to the last time they came to us and suggested that it would be a good idea for us to take a 10% pay cut due to the "economic climate".

I remember the collective answer, from all quarters and it was a resounding NO! Not only was the e-mails flying around between members of different unions but also different OCA company employees and different disciplines. The talk, openly, of industrial action if they tried to force this through was a big shock to them and proves that when we decide to stick together they dare not take us on.

They dropped the idea like a hot potato and as far as I can see they are now trying to get the same result, a 10% pay cut, but over a longer timescale. They are gradually



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eroding our pay and conditions with below inflation deals. I for one am all for the unions working together, we can make them listen; as I have pointed out we did it before.

Member No. M0104306

Dear colleague

We should be asking for 10% and nothing less. Lets' start to take a leaf out of the way the Norwegians run their oil business and start to negotiate for the next 5 years well in advance, instead of waiting until the last minute.

Member No M0104154

What's important

Stop and just have a wee think for a second about all the following- things in your wonderful life. The wife, fiancé, girlfriend your kids, car, mortgage, house, new clothes, jewellery, nice watch, good times, nights out, holidays...and so it goes on.

Do you have all that pictured in your mind?

Did you forget your JOB?

Your job, your job, your job!

Take your job away and all of the above would be difficult, stressful maybe not even possible?

So take note and just listen to some good advice from a member who has been through the mill and back!

A recent Bullying and Harassment case nearly cost me my job and all of the above would have been increasingly difficult to have and cherish. If it was not for the fantastic skills of none other than Mr Jake Molloy and the backing of the RMT/OILC life would be a whole lot different.

So do not waste anymore time thinking about it, just join now and have peace of mind for the future. Let's be honest and think about what is important in life.

If you value your job and want peace of mind and support, then JOIN NOW.

Thank you so much Jake, to you and your organisation - you stand for honesty & integrity.

Member No. M0111934

Colleagues

I work, they pay me. I pay my taxes and the government distributes my taxes as it sees fit. In order to earn that pay cheque, I work on a rig for a drilling contractor. I am required to pass a random urine test for drugs and alcohol, with which I have no problem.

What I do have a problem with is the distribution of my taxes to people who don't have to pass a urine test. Shouldn't one have to pass a urine test to get a benefit cheque? I have to pass one to earn it for them!

Please understand that I have no problem with helping people get back on their feet and who are genuinely in difficulty. I do, on the other hand, have a problem with helping someone to sit on their arse drinking beer and smoking dope!

Can you imagine how much money the government would save if people had to pass a urine test to get a benefit cheque? Something has to change in the UK, and soon!

Anon.

[This was written by a rig worker in the North Sea - what he says makes a lot of sense!]

Piper Alpha remembered

Dear OILC/RMT, I visited the Piper Alpha memorial on the anniversary date, July 6th. I do it most years if I'm home, just to spend a wee bit of time in the rose garden thinking about all those men we lost on that bloody awful night.

The roses were out and they were beautiful. There was nobody else around when I got there and it was so quiet and peaceful. I sat for about half an hour and the only noise that broke the peace was a helicopter passing over. I was sitting there thinking to myself - life goes on and nobody seems to remember anymore. It's only 23 years since our mates were killed but it might as well be 123 years!

Before heading home I went to the plinth just to touch it. There was some bunches of flowers there and one big wreath of red roses, it was beautiful. There was a card on the wreath and it read; "In memory of our lost brothers, gone but never forgotten. From OILC/RMT members."

Here was me thinking I was the only offshore worker that cared. Thanks to all at OILC/RMT, it gives you a lift to know somebody remembers.

Name and address supplied.

In Malcolm we trust?

Recently, in the “Energy” supplement of the Press&Journal newspaper, Malcolm Webb head of OGUK was asked for his comments on the recent tax increase on oil companies working on the UKCS. Malcolm is quoted saying;

“Furthermore and most importantly, trust has been severely shaken. It may have been lost. Trust is a precious commodity and one which is vital for good and sustainable business. Trust is built up over time through clear, consistent and reliable words and actions. Once it has been lost, it can take a considerable time for that trust to be restored.”

What the OGUK Chief said came as no great surprise to the Offshore Energy Branch, as he’s paid to defend his members, the oil companies, from tax hikes, regulations, even ‘difficult’ unions. That’s his job, defending his members’ interests, just as we defend our members’ interests. We might understand this, but we doubt whether the general public would and they’re certainly not sympathetic with the industry as they watch oil companies make obscene profits year on year.

The Offshore Energy Branch does have concerns about the effects of the tax rises and especially as regards investments for forthcoming projects and the impact this could have on jobs. We will be monitoring the situation very closely over the coming months.

However, getting back to the OGUK man’s words; what bothers us most about Malcolm’s statement is his emphasis on

the word “Trust”. He’s obviously using it in terms of the trust between the industry and government and specifically in relation to the issue of tax. But what about ‘trust’ between employers and employees Malcolm? If you expect mutual trust with government, aren’t we entitled to expect the same from your members? After all, it’s our efforts which sustain your members’ income, and we’re the people facing all the risks!

In the last edition of Blowout we highlighted numerous cases of total disregard for the workforce, where it was evident that trust was virtually non-existent. In fact, as we reported, even the HSE had trusted the industry to rectify certain problems without the need to slap Improvement or Prohibition notices on them, only to find on returning to these installations for a further inspection that nothing had been done. Trust tarnished!

Our man Malcolm is clearly being selective in his use of the word ‘trust’, and in this case he is obviously angry about the implications of the taxation issue. But we’d like to see Malcolm and his members applying the same principals more comprehensively, because our members are just as angry as he is and have no trust in their employers or the installation operators.

We agree with Malcolm, trust is a precious commodity and is vital for good sustainable business. But try telling that to our members living and working on rusting and rotten heaps, some of whom get downmanned at the drop of a hat and can’t even trust their employers to pay the

appropriate stand down rates. Trust really is built up over time, and we agree this can only be done through clear, consistent and reliable words and actions. But try telling that to the increasing number of workers who find themselves facing disciplinary sanctions up to and including dismissal for minor non-injurious safety breaches in a “no-blame” culture! The trust has been thrown out the window Malcolm. And finally we also agree that once trust has been lost, it can take a considerable time for that trust to be restored. Malcolm, our members and their colleagues lost any trust they had in your members a long time ago and your members have a mammoth task on their hands to restore it. Our trust hasn’t just been ‘severely shaken’, it’s been completely obliterated!

This is the industry our members are working in today Malcolm. No trust, no respect, no commitment or enthusiasm. For most it’s a case of ‘watch your back and don’t let the bastards grind you down’. So here’s a thought Malcolm; the next time you want to talk about trust, do it at your OGUK Board meeting and take a look around the table at the MD’s. Ask them what they could do to win back the trust of their ‘most important assets’, the workforce. And if they need any pointers Malcolm, we’d suggest your Board gets everyone over to a safer, healthier, and more rewarding shift rota of 2x3 for the entire North Sea and maybe then the ‘precious commodity’ of trust might begin to build up.

Offshore Energy Branch Secretary

RMT pensions victory!

RMT has won a significant victory for seafarers and offshore workers that will see them included in the automatic enrolment provisions of the Pensions Act 2008.

The victory was confirmed in a letter from Pensions Minister Steve Webb to RMT Parliamentary Convenor John McDonnell, stating:

“...we are proposing in broad terms that the Pensions Act 2008 provisions should apply to seafarers and offshore workers in the same way that they apply to land-based workers. With this approach the location of the employer would not be a key determining factor in deciding whether an individual is ordinarily working in GB, nor would their nationality or place of residence, or indeed the country of

registration of the ship.”

RMT General Secretary Bob Crow said:

“This is a massive victory for seafarers and offshore workers secured through the hard work of the RMT’s Parliamentary Group with our shipping and offshore officials and branches.

“For too long seafarers and offshore workers have been excluded from key working regulations and this victory on pensions will simply reinforce our campaigns in other areas like the minimum wage and the working time directive.

“This major breakthrough will apply to all workers and shows once again that campaigning; industrial trade unionism is the only weapon that workers have in defending and extending their rights.”