Comment

Lord Cullen heard 10 million words submitted during the 178 days his inquiry sat. That's a little over one day and 59 thousand words, for each of the men who died. But for the survivors and the families of those killed, not another day will pass, and not another word will be spoken, that will not in some way be tainted by the disaster.

Every offshore worker will be listening when Lord Cullen makes his report and recommendations, possibly as early as this summer. Blowout hopes that he will lay the blame fairly and squarely on those who have had unchallenged authority on the North Sea oilfields over the past 25 years. We hope that his recommendations will provide a basis for the massive changes that have to take place before we can be confident that another disaster like Piper will never happen again. The signs however are not good.

Occidental, the operator of Piper, still believes it can manage. They shamelessly used the enquiry to try and lay the blame onto two contract engineers. In the glare of the Piper blaze, Armand Hammer, Occidental's boss, speculated that separate accommodation platforms might be necessary. Not a mention of the possibility as Occidental announced that a conventional successor to Piper Alpha was to be built. And all this before the Piper enquiry had even finished taking evidence. They at least are confident that Cullen is not going to come up with anything that might cost them a lot of money.

Since Piper, a succession of major incidents have occurred offshore. They have exposed an attitude to safety very different to that publicly held by the oil companies. Piper was still smouldering when the well Arco was drilling with the Ocean Odyssey blew out, killing one man, and forcing the rest of the crew to flee. Almost immediately accusations were made of unsafe drilling practices.

A year later Arco openly lied about a serious incident on the NNZ Hunter that led to a more evacuation of the platform. Their assertion that no blow out had taken place was only exploded when Peter Morrison, the oil minister, gave the ODE a version of events in a written answer to questions raised in Parliament.

The Department of Energy are also widely discrepant in the eyes of the offshore workforce. Their 6 general and 2 diving inspectors are so obviously insufficient to police the North Sea that there is widespread belief that they collude with the oil companies. Why did they withdraw their recommendations made after the technical enquiry into Piper that the installation of sea bed ESVs be mandatory? There must also be doubt about their handling of the Ocean Odyssey blowout. They sent the same inspector to investigate the blowout, who before had inspected the rig and passed it fit.

The failure of the authorities to open an enquiry into the death of Timothy Williams, 17 months after his death onboard Ocean Odyssey, is unprecedented. It must also raise fears about a cover up on the question of safety on the North Sea. Could it be that exposing Arco's attitude to safety on the Odyssey would have forced Lord Cullen to examine Occidental's claims about their attitude to safety, in a completely different light?

The only people who have emerged from the post Piper period with dignity, have been the offshore workers themselves. The evidence of survivors and rescuers alike testify to their very great courage. And the relentless campaign being waged by the OILC on safety, underlines their determination that a repetition of Piper will be forestalled.

Lord Cullen's report will be read closely wherever it appears. Certainly there can be no setting for any less than the transferral of responsibility for safety on the North Sea away from the Department of Energy. But a word or warning to all those who believe that a transfer of responsibility to the Health and Safety Executive would solve all our problems. Fred Drakey of the Construction Safety Campaign warns that, "...under their not too watchful eye, there have been 1000 deaths in the offshore construction industry over the past ten years."

Goodbye OCA

The oil companies have relied on the two completely different methods of policing the offshore construction workforce. On new projects, the contractors, organised in the Offshore Contractors Council, have had an agreement with the unions called the Offshore Construction Agreement (OCA). In the Southern North Sea the equivalent is the Southern Waters Agreement. These were fairly comprehensive agreements allowing for the negotiation of pay and conditions. They included grievance procedures and allowed for representation of the workforce by shop stewards.

But at the appearance of first oil these agreements ceased. No longer so vulnerable to dispute action, the oil companies and their minions in the OCC, adopted a different strategy. In this post "hook-up" and maintenance phase, intimidation and NRO (not required back) were the employers industrial relations strategy.

Finally, on Wednesday January 24, the union signatories to this agreement, kicked this crutch from under the employers. They argued that they wanted the agreement extended to all construction work offshore from the 5%-10% of work that is covered at present. The employers said they were sorry they would have liked to go along with this, but the oil companies wouldn't let them.

On the union side, Tommy McLean, Secretary of the National Negotiating Committee stressed the importance of events by noting that: "Not many national groups would walk away from a national agreement." He thought that the likelihood was that a dispute would develop, but stressed that it would not be an official dispute. Various newspapers are already speculating about strike action across the North Sea this summer.

Ronnie McDonald of the OILC drew attention to the fact that an enormous amount of construction, and maintenance work was due to come ahead this summer and that without any agreement the oil companies were "relying on the goodwill of the engineering construction workforce" to minimise the disruption to production.

The OILC have called a series of open meetings throughout the country during February and March to allow the offshore workforce to discuss the situation and formulate a response. They have called for a "continuous agreement" that would stop offshore workers from being taken advantage of.
If you read a paper regularly, say The Recorder or the Glasgow Herald or the Sun, you might begin to get annoyed with it. Maybe because of what it says about the way it is written. So you decide you're going to junk it. But you don't, of course, because you know that if you did you'd regret it. And you're right, you wouldn't regret it.

But there is a solution to this problem. Don't just stop reading The Recorder or the Glasgow Herald or the Sun, stop reading all of them. If you like something you read in a newspaper, go and buy it and read the whole thing. If you like something you read in a magazine, go and buy it and read the whole thing. If you like something you read in a book, go and buy it and read the whole thing.

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FOR A SINGLE UNION

The round of strikes offshore early last year sparked off a serious discussion about setting up a specialist single union for offshore workers. This was not just a handy idea but came from a genuine frustration with the attitude of the traditional unions, and their record offshore, as well as the very different problems we face compared to factory or other jobs on the beach.

The OLC is the biggest step forward for the organization of oil workers in the North Sea. It has drawn together in action, many more than ever before. But even though the OLC is drawn from rank and file delegates, it knows its own difficulties and is trying to tackle them. In the first instance this means trying to pull together a set of demands that will not only satisfy construction workers but also reach out to the drilling rigs and the production workers.

What is certain not happening, is a positive attitude from the unions to which we belong. A delegation of union officials met with all the offshore workers present at the TUC conference in Blackpool. That was positive and so was the interest which was expressed in supporting the OLC. But the sticking point was clear: the fact that the main union leaders are only interested in their own numbers, and seem to live for the expenses account of any effective organization in Britain's most profitable industry.

The OLC is therefore co-ordinated by oil workers in Britain. It is the most democratic body of workers in Britain and could be the foundation stone for a powerful new trade union as part of the trade union movement as a whole. It would be taking any significant number of members away from the others. Certainly not all are getting as good a service from being members of the OLC, it would be run by oil workers who have been dealing with the problems of working and living offshore. At many of us work ashore from time to time, we would see some social amenity systems could travel union membership of thousands. And I am sure we would bring many new benefits to the trade union movement from those which have been summarised by the fact that no union has so far taken any positive steps towards fighting for oil workers. It would also put the union out from under those who use the excuse that there is no such thing as "looking after the backs of the oil workers".

Springfield will see us again organising around the demands yet still unmet by the oil companies the government and the contractors. We have to take our demands out into the world of the oil companies, and win the support of all oil workers, to win the struggle to win the struggle to win the struggle to win.

NORMAN LOCKHART.

Harry spent some thirty years connected with all types of engineering, mainly in the marine field, the recreational industry and Pineapple platform. It has provided me to consider the hazards involved in working offshore. As a result of all the discussions, I proposed a safety system for a massive explosion of potential hazards. This system is based on the principle of preventing the explosion.

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JIM FLEMING.

"Revolutionary & Long Overdue"

I enjoyed the third edition of Blowout, but I feel that I must express some reservations about the article, "The Truth about North West Hutton". I'm not the only one. I've heard others expressing similar concern.

You seem to assume that all offshore workers understand the technical jargon about drilling that you seem keen to spout. Just what do you think it means to most of us out here when we read, "It was programmed to be set at 150 feet into the Cretaceous formation, or "A cement bond log was not run," etc? "Very little," is the answer. And who cares?

Perhaps you are unaware that the average construction, maintenance or catering worker is given no instruction or training in the drilling side of the industry. The exact opposite is in fact true. Over the years it would appear that there has been a deliberate policy to isolate drill crews from the rest of the offshore workforce, and keep the bears ignorant of what's happening. And what the dangers are in drilling.

Maybe now that the new safety legislation allows for our reps to do inspections on the platform, and gives them access to technical information, then we'll begin to learn a bit about what's going on up on the drill floor and at the bottom of the well. Until then could you stop trying to bore us to death with jargon? If what went on North West Hutton was as important to us as you seem to think, then you had better find a way of explaining it properly.

That apart, I think that the paper is excellent. Keep up the good work.

JIM FLEMING.

A REPLY

I think that your letter will be of interest to many offshore workers. First, it does highlight some of the problems involved in the possibility of a safer offshore. As our industry becomes more and more complex, the danger of accidents increases. Therefore, it is essential that we work together to ensure that safety is of the highest priority.

I would urge you to write to the editor of blowout and express your views. I believe that it is important that our views are heard and considered.

GARRY FORBES (EDITOR)
enjoy
my job
(AMBULANCE)

Traffic Accidents etc until the A&E crews turn up. We have virtually no equipment except carrying chair, a stretcher and our personal first aid bag. My monthly take home is £501, and as my wife is not working there’s not a lot left after mortgage food etc. We work shifts -them to 4:30, 10:30am to 7pm and one weekend in six. My wife goes swimming once a week. I am also in charge of the animals. I see the highlight of my week is getting out on the bike. We don’t get time to do things as a family. Last time we had a holiday was 3 years ago, possibly that’s why we have a son now. It was the last time we enjoyed ourselves.

MICHAEL GRACE 27. The PTS crews ferry patients for out patients appointments to clinics such as radio therapy and renal dialysis, but everyone needs different attention. A feeding, a cancer patient, the terminally ill, or depending on conditions, patients transferring between hospitals have to be cared for in different ways. I’m married to a police woman who has 5 years experience and when she returns twice as much as me. Admittedly she works longer hours, but there should be some comparison between A&E crews and police officers. But we work holidays or overtime we just get the plain rate. My wife got £100 for Christmas working. Anyways you don’t take the overtime pay in your hand until about six weeks later. I’m a bit off on my colleagues, but even so we only eat out or go to the pictures about once a month. But we couldn’t manage on just my pay or we’d be struggling big time with Peter we feel it well.

MARIE: I play bowls, and swim, and cycle in the summer, but we are very busy and a lot because of shifts. If you’re easily feel you’ve got to be in your bed already by 9, and you’d be by the time you get home you’re tired, and of course right shift you sleep most of the day. And you can’t go out for a drink before you go to work. I don’t hate my husband very often as he also works shifts in a brewery, and you don’t go to bed with mine.

Mainly I’d like to see an agreement where we’d get a pay formula for a definite wage rise each year without having to take industrial action. Three years ago when we first went onto a salary payment structure, they promised we’d be kept on parity with the fire brigade. That was never kept to, and now we want £3,000 or more a year. The Whitley Council which decides our wages and conditions is going to be elected again in October this year. That is when the government’s 9% over 18 months would be up, as this dispute is about the pay rise we were due in April 89. When the council has gone, management could hand us 2% and we’d have no say in the matter. The way it is, when the service my wages were half of what I’d been earning as a bus driver.

DAVID: We’re not parochial. That extra £2500 only applies to 2200 people in Scotland, and they’re more like contract workers, who don’t attend to the public but train us in our skills. I think it is coming as an off strike - the doctors are taking the TUC off the books, but we’re not ready for you yet. If Northern Ireland were agitating for strike action we will not support the dispute, because the police and army could not go for the same way as in Britain for fear of attacks.

DAVID: Hopefully an all out strike would only last 6 or at most twelve hours. It is a crisis situation, and it would make us a higher offer. But it is determined not to listen to public opinion.

But there is no weakening of resolve amongst the crews. The dispute has united the A&E with the PTS crews in a lot of stations.

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Shell Diary

February: A Good Month For It

Nonetheless, I believe that the entire year is going to be a tough one for Shell. The West Desert is already under threat from the oil companies, and Shell is not immune to this pressure. The oil companies have the power and the resources to make Shell's life difficult, and Shell is well aware of this.

Shell is well aware of the difficulties it faces in the West Desert, and is working hard to ensure that its operations are as efficient as possible. Shell is also trying to reduce its environmental impact, and is working on a number of projects to reduce its carbon footprint.

In addition, Shell is working on a number of projects to reduce its environmental impact, and is working on a number of projects to reduce its carbon footprint.

The West Desert is a challenging environment, but Shell is well equipped to deal with the challenges it faces. Shell has a long history of operating in the Middle East, and has a wealth of experience and knowledge.

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NEW FEATURE

VIEW FROM HOME

You'd better keep your eye on this space, and a hand protecting your grin won't go amiss. This is a bit of an article in our new regular column written by a team of the wives and girl friends of offshore workers. This column is going to tell you how it really is when we're away, and not how most of us out there would like to believe it is. These women are no shrinking violets. As we were told in no uncertain terms: 'We're 100% behind the men out there, but we're not here to be wipped, tortured, or be humiliated. We're not going to let them know that we're not as scared as they think.'

The women on our list are all 'out of the closet' and who are urging everyone to tell us of their experiences. They will be featured in a separate column in the future.

THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN

This year the rate of divorce that my husband would be eligible for offshore is Christmas for my friends. This is where the problem of divorce and the separation of the sexes begins. This is the time when we are all thinking of our families and friends, but also of our own needs and desires. We are all trying to be the best we can be for ourselves and our loved ones.

TV Dispatches Channel Wed Feb 14 8.30

There's an excellent documentary on safety in the North Sea coming on our screens in February. This will be the first of a series looking at the problems of the offshore industry. It will cover the problems of the workers who are employed in the industry, and also the problems of the families who are left behind.

Abraxis Productions has been commissioned by Channel 4 to make a programme about the safety regime in the North Sea, for the hard hitting Dispatches series. Director David Hobbs and researcher Nick Ayling made four trips to the city to talk to lawyers and workers. The research was filmed in London during the winter months.

Although reluctant to reveal too much about the programme's content, Hobbs told Blewitt that they would be asking whether offshore operations have really been more dangerous in safety terms since Piper Alpha. "Other programmes have looked at evacuation procedures," he said, "but it seems to me that it's all a bit late if you have to leave a lifeboat or jump over the side. Abraxis will be asking why there's so many close calls in the first place."

The programme, which will also feature the safety records of contractors, will be broadcast on Wednesday 14th February at 8.30pm, on Channel 4.

Keep an eye open for this programme. If you're going to be offshore, try and get someone to video it for you. It's only as good as the reports suggest it will be. As a big step forward for offshore workers, it will also, as they say, take more than one swallow to make a summer. But to stay with the bird antics, maybe a more journalistic perspective is about to break a duck on this one.

The V.O.S. KIDNIN WHO

By Wille Warr

Billy Fraser was an ordnary kind of punter, just one of the real lads. The only unusual or exciting thing about him was his enthusiasm for Portobello Boys. To us, this was a new, exciting group of people who had taken over the market for our attention. They were the real thing, with a combination of style and attitude that was missing from the rest of the market. We admired them, and this wasn't just about the music.

When you were looking up, you were part of something special, you could speak to them, you could speak to them. They were real, they were human. Among these people, I found that I was at the same time as the group. We were all part of the same group, and this was how we became close friends.

The V.O.S. KIDNIN WHO

By Wille Warr

Billy Fraser was a very good young man. He had been a very good young man when he was on the platform at the show. He had been a very good young man when he was on the platform at the show. His friends and family were very proud of him.

Oil to host City of Culture event

We had intended to host a week of Mozart by the Berlin Philharmonic in Glasgow's new concert hall, but the authorities have yet to build it. Pavlovic has already been invited over to do his thing. So we proudly announce:

Dance & Buffet in the Central Hotel, Central Station, Glasgow on Friday 16th March 7.30pm licenced till 1.00am Price £15.00 per head

In fact the last two days of my leave are _________ miserable, just thinking about it gives me goosebumps. She's got a new man, and I'm just a part-time in the area. Trip in trip out, I can't get a rest.

I used to see her with a guy or two, but I didn't realize it until one day when I went to the market. I saw her with a guy and I thought, 'She's got a new man.' She told me she had left him, and I was surprised. But I was happy for her, and I thought she was doing the right thing.

The Bulletin will be open between 2.00 and 7.00 pm, and Gill Todd and the T.I.S. will provide the music. Tickets can be obtained from The Offshore Information Centre, 62 Guard Street, Aberdeen. Tickets will be sent out on receipt of cheque or postal order. Accommodation at reduced rates can be negotiated, so if you want a room include me make sure you contact 0204 2101 18 at a good time.
Safety Legislation
Onshore & Offshore

BY RONNIE MCDONALD

As a consequence of Piper, the offshore industry's safety record is under severe scrutiny, and not just at Lord Cullen's inquisition. The previously disinterested Great British press is showing some interest too. Although to chief wraprapier the Daily Record, the events of the last year and a half might as well have happened on the dark side of the moon.

We have known for years that the safety set-up offshore stinks; no independent safety inspectorate; exemption from vital aspects of health and safety legislation; cowboy contractors; management; the NIRB syndrome, need I go on? The closeness is, it took the deaths of all these men that July night, before anyone listened.

Will it change? Occidental still insist there's no fundamental problem exists. The Piper Alpha platform, they say, was well managed, in great nick, and had 20 years of profitable life ahead of it. But for the sakelessness of two contractors employees, they say, they would not be in the dock, but in the docket, and standing beside them is the entire offshore oil industry.

It seems inconceivable that this industry has been able to operate offshore exempt from the full rigour of all the UK health and safety legislation. What has been the motive of successive governments in allowing the offshore safety regime to develop? This is the first in a series of articles in Blowout which will examine in detail those aspects of the offshore safety regime which make it different from onshore.

Safety Law

The history of government involvement in the regulation of conditions at work goes back to the 19th century at the height of the industrial revolution. Spurred on action by the exploitation of child labour, the Factories Act 1833 was placed on the statute book. It acknowledged that those few employers who would voluntarily allot the lot of children in their employ, were reluctant to do so simply because it gave competitors a commercial edge. Regulations across the board established the "level playing field" principle. Minimum standards would apply to all.

For enforcement, Statute law has since expanded and evolved in proportion to the requirements of a complex industrial society.

Industrialisation has imposed changes in the common law too. In the 1850s two important precedents were established in court which laid down duties of care on employers for the health and safety of their employees. By the late 1960s a vast array of laws, both statute and justice, made up to bring order to the plethora/safety conflict.

Roben's Report

The Roben's Committee was appointed in 1970 to review the legal and other aspects of industrial safety in a comprehensive way. Reporting in 1972, it found that the responsibility for the industrial safety was far too fragmented. A number of authorities with ill-defined areas of responsibility under a number of different ministries or departments, had the burden of enforcing a tangled web of legislation. There was no single body to consolidate, so incomprehensible to the common man that a lawyer was generally required to interpret it. Much of it was obsolete and referred to processes and conditions of fifty or more years ago.

Health and Safety at work act 1974 (HASAWA)

Lord Roben laid out certain cardinal principles as a guide for the formation of future safety policy. "No department", he said, "should be responsible for enforcing safety in the absence of an appropriately appointed Inspector under a single government agency was required. Furthermore, the primary responsibility for improving health and safety lay with those who create the risks and not those who work with them.

The outcome of the Roben's Report was the health and safety at work act 1974 (HASAWA). This was to create a Health and Safety Commissioner/Executive, which took over from the fragmented official authorities which had previously existed. The Health and Safety Executive derives its authority from HASAWA, and is accountable to the Employment Secretary.

Safety legislation which pre-dates HASAWA can be, and often is, improved or repealed where necessary, to maintain or improve standards. It is a subsequent legislation, is subordinate to HASAWA. In fact the '61 Factories Act is largely repealed.

Mineral Workings Act '71

The main instrument of legislative concern in the North sea however is the Mineral Workings (Offshore Installations) Act '71. As the title suggests, it is purpose is to legitimate the exploitation of oil and gas in what is essentially international waters. The Act imposes UK law upon, and 500 metres around installations. Regulations and codes of practice made under the Act are administered by the Department of Energy.

From the point of view of successive governments, vesting control of the oil wealth in the hands of one department has proved a highly satisfactory arrangement. During the early part of the nation's leadership in the mid-70s, offshore development was progressing with amazing speed. Some would say undue haste.

UK economic policy from 1976 onwards was based on the assumption of oil self-sufficiency to 1978. Nothing was to be allowed to impede this development, least of all any nonsense about bringing the offshore safety regime into line with Roben's recommendations. Equally, the Thatcher economic experiment was totally based on maximum oil flow.

One of the most revealing lines of questioning pursued at the Piper Inquiry, has highlighted a serious anomaly regarding these two Acts. With the Health and Safety Executive and the Department of Energy having separate policy areas and separate Acts of Parliament to administer, separate and divergent developments in safety enforcement have evolved. We have been allowed to believe over the years that although the Department of Energy's polices safety offshore, it does so by proxy for the Health and Safety Executive. This is known as the Agency Agreement. This appears to be something of a sham. Officials from both departments, questioned on why certain key elements of safety legislation have never been extended offshore, have failed to provide credible reasons.

C.O.S.H H.

On October 1st 1989, the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health regulations came into effect. Yes you guessed it - but not offshore. Mr Parrett, Director of Safety at the Department of Energy, was asked why. He asserted that his, "understanding is that the existing (offshore) safety regime adequately covered the objectives of those COSHH regulations.

"Which part of the existing offshore safety regime" asked the QC.

"Regulation 4 of course," came Petrie's answer. "...there may be other areas..." he ventured when pressed further.

What a load of crockery nonsense from the Department of Energy's top safety man.

Mr John Rintema, the Director General of the Health and Safety Executive, wasn't taken in by all this talk of an Agency Agreement. He was asked about his department's role in overseeing the Department of Energy. In the tortured language of the bureaucrat being forced to tell the truth, he said that: "...the view and attitude taken by the Department of Energy, has been to the effect that, what is covered by the Health and Safety at Work Act, (offshore), in practice is very limited.

One of the main objects of our six-months last summer was to highlight the safety issue. That we were deprived of the full protection of the Health and Safety at Work Act. The oil industry rolled out the public relations machinery to assure the public our claims were incorrect.

Until all UK Health and Safety legislation is applied offshore, without reservation the safety campaign will continue.

STUC

SCOTTISH TRADES UNION CONFEDERATION

TRAINING FOR
SafetY REPRESENTATIVES

"Training arrangements are the responsibility of the safety committees, not of the oil companies, and in House courses are just not on." (Ronnie McDonald)

The trade unions have, "......considerable experience in training......particularly in the representational role" (Paragraph 77 of the Guidance Notes).

The STUC will be running a series of three day courses specially designed for the offshore safety representatives, in their TREESBANK HOUSE residential college in Kilmarnock.

8 April   module 1   "The Legal Framework"

11 April   module 2   "Improving Safety Offshore"

28 May     module 3   "Safety Reps in Action"

For further information contact Ian Miller, STUC Education Officer, 16 Woodlands Terrace, Glasgow G3. Phone 332-8946
Thanks to all those who have contributed to OILC funds

On the £27,000 that had been contributed by the year's end, £25,300 had come directly from the platforms, while £1,600 had come from various sources, including the 180 meetings held throughout the country.

A detailed account is available for scrutiny at the Offshore Information Centre. Below is a brief resume of how your money is being used.

Last summer's dispute took by far the biggest single amount. Newspaper advertising in Scotland, Tyneside, Teesside and Great Yarmouth cost over £4000 alone. Next came the setting up of the Information Centre. This included acquiring the lease and the usual associated costs, legal fees etc. Second hand office furniture was bought and phones and a photocopier were installed.

Three computers were bought costing over £6,000. A few of these are installed in the Information Centre. One is used for general administrative work, while the more powerful PC is linked to Telecom Gold and Geonet allowing fast access to a vast array of information. This computer also provides full worldwide telephones. £780 has also been spent on a fax machine.

**Round The Yards**

Rab Wilson the convener of shop stewards at Highland Fabricators' yard at Nigg was reminiscing the other day when Blowout spoke to him on the phone. He'd seen a copy of our paper and it had brought back memories of "The Shop Floor" a paper that is well at the yard. John Monrow, had edited some years ago.

We're flattered and we hope that Blowout sits more than memories. Maybe the tradition of writing for a workers paper will be resurrected at the yard and spread throughout the north east side of the industry. We've certainly going to be keeping an eye on what's happening at "Davey" in Dundee, "McDermott" at Ardersier, "Hi Fad" at Nigg, "RGC" at Methil in Fife and at the "Press Houden" yard on Tyneside. As a matter of interest we may be looking at another couple as well soon. There's word that the receivers for the old Howard distillery yard at Kishorn are talking to two prospective buyers. And with the massive expansion in construction work either under way or planned in the near future, there's no way that we can rule out the re-opening of the old Inverness yard at Ammon Point on Lewis. Certainly there's a lot of work about. Already the order books at Ardersier are so full that McDermott are declining to tender for any new work at present. They were recently awarded the contract for Occidental's new Saltire field.

But that's not all. We'll be trying to keep you up to date with what's going on at the oil and gas terminals at St. Fergus in Buchan, Mossmorran in Fife, Flotta in Orkney, Sullom Voe in Shetland and at Nigg Bay. We'll also keep an eye on Grangemouth, where amongst other things, they're busily rebuilding the tops that blew up.

All that remains is to wish the workers on these sites the same Happy New Year that we wish our regular readers offshore, and urge them to keep in touch with what's going on. We have a common cause. Use the letters page if you want to speak to your colleagues whether on or offshore. That's what we're here for.

By the way, if there are any copies of "The Shop Floor" kicking about, please send one off to us.

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**ADVERTISEMENT**

**GET OUT OF SERPS BY APRIL**

You are not going to get the pension that you entitled to. Not if you stay in the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS). If you are a man under 45, or a woman under 40 years of age, it's likely that you'll benefit by, "contracting out".

If you don't do this before April you could lose as much as £293 a year for the next three years, and at the end of the day have a pension that is less than you expect.

Contracting out is likely to benefit you in a number of ways. You should end up with a bigger pension at no extra cost. You'll get a government subsidy (as an incentive) till 1993, and if you change your employer your pension's not frozen.

This needn't cost you extra. The government will redirect part of your existing National Insurance contributions from the state scheme to your own Personal Pension Scheme. You can however add your own money to boost your pension.

But you must apply to transfer from SERPS... If you want further information, details or an application form, contact John Dixon or Alex Irvin on 041-332-7799 or c/o the Offshore Information Centre 52 Guild Street, Aberdeen.