

“They’re going to lose their livelihoods”: Protesters blockading Port of Oakland speak out against new state legislation which would eliminate independent truckers

Our reporters
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Are you a port trucker? We want to hear from you. Contact the World Socialist Web Site to tell us about your working conditions and what you’re fighting for. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

Hundreds of independent truckers continued their protest Thursday outside of the Port of Oakland in northern California, blocking the entrance to one of the largest container ports in the United States.

The demonstrations have taken place in opposition to California State Assembly Bill 5 (AB5), which reclassifies many contract workers as employees. While AB5 was passed in 2019, last year a federal appeals court ruled that the law applies to the roughly 70,000 owner-operators who own their own rigs. The law stipulates that contractors can only be hired for work if it “is outside the usual course of the hiring entity’s business,” effectively making it illegal for owner-operators to be hired to work at the ports in California. This would force owner-operators to either sell their trucks and become direct employees of a company, move out of state, or start their own independent businesses and cover substantial administrative and insurance fees and paperwork.

Mainstream news outlets have largely reported that a central demand of the truckers is to meet with Democratic governor Gavin Newsom, and for AB5 to be modified to provide an exemption for truckers.

A WSWs reporting team was greeted warmly by roughly 200 truckers blockading the Matson terminal at the Port of Oakland. “I used to love Newsom,” explained Augusto, a trucker with 21 years of experience stated. “I supported him since he was a city

councilor, then when he became mayor of San Francisco, then governor. I was going to support him for President. Now he’s backstabbing us.”

He added, “20 years ago, we got a check and most of it went to the bank. Now there’s no money for the bank. The ports are already shut down. Down south, the same thing is going on. Hopefully this is going to make an impact.”

A young worker, who works for his father—an owner-operator, said about his fellow protesters, “Most of these guys are Punjabi, they came from Punjab [India]. These people, they’re not bad people, they’re good people. Lots of these guys, our parents were truck drivers. The first thing we did when we came to this country was driving trucks.”

Explaining the potential impact of AB5, he continued, “They’re going to lose their livelihoods. They’re going to have to move out of state. They have to go two, three months without seeing their families. We need to protect them. I want to see my family. Obviously, we want to protect the Uber drivers and the Lyft drivers [who are supposedly protected as employees under AB5] but we need an exemption. Because there are grown men crying. This can’t work. The whole port is in agreement. But unfortunately, no one else really knows. That’s the problem.”

Speaking in solidarity with dock workers, who have refused to cross their picket line, he continued, “We’ve helped them and they’ve helped us, so we’re going to keep on helping them.”

Asked about life for truck drivers, he said, “Especially with COVID, things were even harder.

There was a lot of job insecurity. It's just tough. It's a tough job to begin with. We drive an hour and fifteen minutes each way every day to get to Oakland [a city most truckers cannot afford to live in]. All my family members, they drive a truck. I grew up looking up to them, but they always told me you gotta be something better. It's just tough to see how they're being treated. I just want every worker to be treated to be certain level of respect.

"Look around. People wouldn't be standing in the sun for 12 hours a day if they weren't treated like this."

In the course of a political discussion, he expressed that he was concerned right wing media outlets like Fox News would try to manipulate the demonstrations. He added, "We're all vaccinated, and we all wear masks. We all voted for Gavin Newsom. He doesn't care. The politicians just want the votes."

A WSWS reporter and member of the Socialist Equality Party was invited to address the crowd, which listened with interest. "I don't have to say much to convince you that the Democratic Party does not have your interests at heart. The Republican Party does not either," alluding to the recent picket line visit by Republican gubernatorial candidate Brian Dahle, whose apparel several demonstrating truckers wore.

"Your allies are workers," the speaker continued, "dockworkers, teachers, health care workers. We are fighting to build a socialist movement of the working class and you have taken an important step here today in helping build that movement. For it to succeed, it has to be completely independent from the Democratic Party, the Republican Party, and the trade unions."

"These committees need to be formed among dock workers. The International Longshore and Warehouse Union has been keeping them on the job without a contract since July 1st and has been working with the Biden Administration to keep the ports open, in large part because they don't want any disruption of materials going to war in Ukraine, and they are planning escalations of war with China.

"The working class has no interest in the Democratic Party's wars. Ultimately, what we have to do is to fight for a workers' government because there is no party outside of a party of the working class that is going to support our interests. I call on you to reach out as broadly as you possibly can to other sections of the working class. To the dock workers that you know, to

health care workers, educators, other logistics workers to help form this movement.

"I urge you to review the *World Socialist Web Site*, study the program of the Socialist Equality Party, and take up the fight for socialism."

The demonstration of truckers is taking place as roughly 22,000 West Coast dockworkers have continued to work without a contract since the start of this month. In June, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) and the Pacific Maritime Association (PMA) issued a joint statement vowing that neither side would be organizing a strike or a lockout. The ILWU International Vice President Bobby Olvera, Jr. has also issued a statement claiming to support AB5.

Olvera's statements are in sharp contrast to the views of many dockworkers, who are supportive of the truckers and oppose the continued silence of the ILWU about negotiations.

A casual worker in Portland, Oregon told the WSWS, "I didn't [know about the truckers' protest], I'm glad they are to prove a point. I get all my updates from you since they keep us in the dark."

Another in San Diego, said about the demonstrations, "It's a great cause. Honestly just became familiar with the legislation they're trying to pass regarding their issue. Seems like the worker is becoming depreciated daily."

Truckers expressed determination to continue their fight as long as it takes, with plans to continue the occupation at least through the weekend.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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