

Southern California dockworker defies ILWU and calls for joint action with protesting port truck drivers

Norisa Diaz
4 August 2022

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Nearly a week ago, the City of Oakland and the Board of Port Commissioners filed an intimidation lawsuit against truck drivers in California who have been carrying out a determined fight for exemption from California State Assembly Bill 5 (AB5). The aim of the lawsuit is to illegalize the truckers' protests and send a message to 22,000 West Coast longshore workers that they would face the same treatment if they struck.

The International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) has kept dockworkers on the job for more than a month since the expiration of their contract and is urging its members to cross the truckers' picket line. The ILWU is working closely with the Biden administration, including U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg to prevent a strike.

An emergency injunction would allow city officials to order mass arrests on protesting truckers. Concerned that such a crackdown would provoke wider opposition by port and other workers, Alameda County Superior Court Judge Delbert Gee declared Monday he would need more time before he made a final decision, *FreightWaves* reported.

The transportation industry publication also reported that over 100 dockworkers refused to cross the picket lines in an act of solidarity in defiance of the ILWU.

George, a nine-year ILWU member, told *FreightWaves*, "We are working without a contract right now so we support the owner-operators and understand what they are trying to do."

Videos by the *World Socialist Web Site* circulated on

TikTok calling on dockworkers to defend the truckers have been viewed nearly 19,000 times. Workers left comments, including "united we stand," and "There's no truckers without port workers, and there's no port workers without truckers. They need to join each other and fight!"

The *WSWS* spoke to a casual longshoreman in San Diego who is also going by the pseudonym Jose to protect himself from retaliation.

Jose expressed solidarity with the striking truck drivers and denounced the lawsuit. "That's stepping on your First Amendment rights. Protests are a man's God-given right. The way America is going, you know, I don't think they want to uphold that particular amendment."

Pointing to the punishing legal fines workers would face if the lawsuit was granted, Jose said, "They are putting them through a court battle, you know, but you don't have the money fight it. The little man doesn't have any money to fight for litigation."

Democratic California Governor Gavin Newsom and state Democrats are pushing AB5 ostensibly to protect workers "misclassified" as independent contractors, such as Uber drivers. But the measure also threatens the livelihoods of 70,000 trucking owner-operators who haul the vast majority of freight from the state's ports. They would either have to form their own companies at immense personal expense or become employees of a trucking company. The vast majority are immigrant drivers, and many are the sole providers in their households.

The Teamsters union, which has long colluded with the trucking bosses to roll back the conditions of unionized drivers, is backing AB5 only because they

cannot unionize “independent contractors.”

The bill was introduced by Lorena Gonzales, who recently resigned from the California State Assembly to become head of the California Labor Federation.

The Teamsters are “trying to reel in truck drivers,” Jose said. He called for the unity of dockworkers and truckers and for them to build independent rank-and-file committees to unify their struggles. “Drivers should be organized so that they can’t be tugged every which way.”

He denounced the tiered employment system accepted by the ILWU, which reduces casuals to the status of at-will employees with no guaranteed hours, job security or workplace rights.

“The daily work for a casual is a gamble. Most are not routinely trained and may have not operated particular machinery, such as large tractors, for five years. You can get fired for making one mistake.”

Jose called on fellow longshore workers to support the truckers, particularly casuals who are hyperexploited. “We really have all the power as casuals because we are the ones who go out and do the majority of the work.”

Tens of thousands of workers have been exempted from AB5, including manicurists, lawyers, writers and rideshare drivers. But Newsom has doubled down on ensuring that truck drivers do not receive an exemption.

Independent truckers face very difficult conditions, including constant pressure from shippers to reduce costs, longer working hours and higher diesel prices, insurance and loan payments. But the Democrats’ legislation has nothing to do with improving their conditions.

On the contrary, the sole purpose of AB5 is to put drivers under the control of larger companies—and most importantly, the corporatist trade unions—to impose labor discipline on drivers who play crucial roles in the supply chain. This is particularly important as the Biden administration escalates its reckless military confrontations with Russia and China.

Truckers have repeatedly displayed solidarity. Last year, they waged a powerful defense of Rogel Aguilera-Mederos, who faced a vindictive 110-year jail sentence for a tragic highway accident caused by brake failure on his semi-truck. A wildcat strike by drivers halted virtually all commerce in and out of Colorado, forcing

the judge to reduce the sentence to 10 years. Preventing similar disruptions is certainly on the minds of the proponents of AB5.

The *World Socialist Web Site* calls on longshore workers and truckers to join forces and organize independently of the trade unions, which are beholden to the corporations and bound to the Democratic Party.



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