

Trump issues executive order requiring English proficiency for truckers, escalating attacks on immigrant workers

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In a barrage of executive orders issued last week, including one late Monday afternoon targeting so-called “sanctuary” cities, President Donald Trump launched a naked attack on the democratic rights of immigrants and the working class as a whole. Among these decrees was a second executive order directly aimed at the nation’s transportation industry, requiring strict English proficiency for commercial truck drivers and mandating that those who fail to meet the standard be immediately placed out of service.

The order, framed by the White House and Secretary of Transportation Sean Duffy as a “commonsense safety requirement” and an effort to “protect America’s truck drivers, drivers, passengers, and others,” is nothing of the sort. It is a discriminatory measure that weaponizes a decades-old regulation against immigrant workers, exacerbating an existing labor shortage and ignoring the real, pressing safety issues plaguing the trucking industry.

While the core requirement for commercial drivers to read and speak English has existed since the Interstate Commerce Commission (ICC) introduced Motor Carrier Safety Regulations in 1936 and established Federal Motor Carrier Safety Regulations (FMCSRs) in 1937, its enforcement has varied significantly over time. The original regulations stipulated the ability to converse, understand signs, respond to inquiries, and make report entries. By 1970, the focus was refined to reading and speaking, acknowledging strict writing rules could unfairly disqualify drivers.

Enforcement saw a significant shift during the Obama administration. In 2014 and 2016, the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration (FMCSA) issued guidance that effectively relaxed the strict application of this rule. While the regulation remained law, inspectors were advised *not* to place drivers out of service solely for

lacking English proficiency during roadside inspections. This allowed for the use of interpreters or translation apps and focused enforcement on safety-critical communication rather than conversational fluency. This change led to a sharp drop in Out of Service (OOS) orders for English violations.

Trump’s latest executive order directly reverses this policy. It instructs the Department of Transportation (DOT) and FMCSA to rescind the 2016 guidance and revise OOS criteria so that failing the English proficiency requirement *will* result in a driver being placed out of service.

The stated rationale is safety concerns due to communication barriers. However, this claim collapses under scrutiny. As far back as 2008, a preliminary study by the U.S. Department of Transportation’s Volpe Center highlighted the lack of a nationwide standard or test for English proficiency, noting that the breadth of the regulation could conflict with civil rights protections. More recently, the FMCSA itself acknowledged in 2018 the absence of comprehensive data directly linking English proficiency levels to commercial motor vehicle safety outcomes.

This fundamental lack of evidence exposes the order’s true purpose: it is not about road safety, but about targeting immigrant workers as part of Trump’s broader, fascistic assault on the democratic rights of the whole working class. The order follows an earlier executive order designating English as the official language of the United States, a move with no constitutional foundation.

Advances in technology have significantly bridged the language barrier for workers across industries, particularly in transportation and logistics. Real-time translation apps, voice-to-text software, and multilingual GPS navigation systems now enable non-English-speaking workers to

communicate effectively, follow safety protocols, and complete tasks with accuracy. These accessibility tools are widely available across many platforms and reduce the reliance on conversational fluency by offering immediate language support.

The impact on the trucking workforce will be significant. There are 3.5 million truck drivers in the US. Approximately 18 percent of employed truck drivers, or about 630,000, are foreign-born, according to the National Association of Truckstop Operators.

The industry is already grappling with a substantial shortage of drivers, estimated at around 60,000. Implementing strict, potentially subjective, English proficiency testing and immediately placing drivers out of service based on these criteria risks removing a significant portion of the workforce, worsening the shortage and impacting the supply chain.

Eduardo Delgado, civic and advocacy coordinator for Migrant Equity Southeast, states, “This executive order is essentially going more towards anti-foreign sentiment. This administration, rather than making language and information more accessible to everyone in the country, they prioritize this English-only narrative.”

He adds that removing drivers will exacerbate the shortage, noting that “Immigrant workers benefit in our country, interstate. And they take up a lot of the jobs that are needed...At any rate, less CDL drivers means that we’re worsening the shortage.”

While focusing on language proficiency, the Trump administration deliberately ignores systemic issues that genuinely undermine road safety. Industry experts and advocates emphasize that failures in training, oversight, and risk management within trucking companies remain primary contributors to preventable tragedies on the highway, highlighted by recent crashes.

Furthermore, the subjectivity inherent in roadside determination of “sufficient” English proficiency itself raises concerns about consistent enforcement and the potential for discriminatory application across different jurisdictions. Advocates argue that broader challenges like improved driver training and real-time compliance monitoring have a greater impact on safety than English proficiency.

This attack on truck drivers is not an isolated incident. It is part of the criminal attack on democracy and the working class set in motion during Trump’s first 100 days. The trucking EO was issued concurrently with orders threatening legal and financial consequences for sanctuary cities and states that Trump deemed to be

engaged in “insurrection” against federal immigration laws.

This administration has fraudulently characterized immigrants as an “invasion,” invoked the Alien Enemies Act, conducted mass roundups, and launched an unprecedented assault on the judiciary, including the arrest of a Milwaukee County judge for allegedly obstructing immigration enforcement.

Trump’s policies, including this trucking order, represent the brutal agenda of the criminal financial oligarchy that rules the United States. This ruling class is waging a massive social counterrevolution against the working class, cutting social safety nets, attacking public health and education, and dismantling environmental protections. Democratic forms of rule are incompatible with the extreme concentration of wealth and the policies needed to maintain it.

The fight for genuine road safety is inseparable from the fight for decent wages, regulated working hours, comprehensive training and the full democratic rights of all workers, regardless of origin or language. This latest executive order must be met with determined opposition from the entire working class.

The actions of the Trump administration over the past 100 days have profoundly shocked working people and youth across the United States and around the world. But no section of the political establishment or union bureaucracies offers a way forward. The Democratic Party is not a force for resistance to dictatorship, rather it is a facilitator. They, no less than Trump, serve the ruling oligarchy. There is no “future” without a ruthless break with the Democratic Party and the entire framework of bourgeois rule. There is no future outside of the struggle for socialism.

Massive battles are on the horizon: against dictatorship, against war, against social inequality. The urgent tasks are the mobilization of the entire working class and the building of a revolutionary leadership to guide these struggles. This is the central aim of the International Workers Alliance of Rank and File Committees.



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