US truckers stop work to protest skyrocketing diesel costs

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Truckers: Tell us what you think about rising costs and about the October 1 action by filling out the form below. All submissions will be kept confidential.

Truck drivers across the United States parked their rigs on October 1 in response to skyrocketing diesel prices brought about by the US war against Iran, alongside ballooning insurance costs, low freight rates, and inaction on broker transparency.

Posts from truckers online as well as interviews with truck drivers by the WSWS indicate that primarily owner-operators participated in the strike and were also joined by smaller trucking companies who also shut down for the day. The full scale of Thursday's action remains unclear, but it is likely that hundreds, and perhaps thousands, took part.

Calls for action had been circulating on social media for the past two weeks. The mainstream media dismissed them as an online "hoax" based entirely on the fact that it lacked official sanction from the trade unions or other official organization, who refused to support it once calls began to circulate. But the spontaneous character of the action, organized by truckers themselves over social media, makes this action more significant, not less. Drivers also utilized AI to assist with organizing, generating flyers that made calls to action and highlighted demands.

The independent and spontaneous action is a significant development in an important section of the working class. Truckers move cargo valued annually at $10 trillion in America, or roughly 70 to 71 percent of all domestic freight by weight

Thursday's action comes just weeks after 300 Mexican drivers blockaded the commercial ports of entry at Mexicali, Mexico and San Luis Río Colorado, Mexico in protest of the mass revocations of some 25,000 B-1 visas by the Trump administration over the past year. Their actions held up an estimated $800 million per day in cargo and sent Washington and Mexico City into crisis mode. The blockade was organized on WhatsApp by 1,024 truckers, without the involvement of the unions, companies, or the Morena party of Mexico.

Online, a driver under the handle **Bear Bear** emphasized why he was striking: "Everyone knows why prices are high. We need to start at the source. $7 for diesel is ridiculous. Especially for the first year owner operators that are trying to really make some cash… Without trucks the world basically stops moving. 90 percent of the world freight is moved by trucks… We need to stand up."

Other drivers went further than the fuel prices, calling on unity and a fight for higher wages. John S. wrote on social media, "It's not just the ridiculous fuel prices. It's the fact that these rigs are way more expensive than they were 10 years ago. And the fact that these companies don't pay their employees well. So it's not just one thing it's more than one thing. And I don't disagree with you for drivers in general need to come together, not just on fuel prices on everything."

Rick M. said he was parked October 1 because, "Trucking isn't what it used to be, you know we have DOT (US Department of Transportation) breathing down our necks, we have these terminal managers hell bent on making a profit for themselves, and they're forcing a lot of you drivers to more or less choose between maintaining your trucks and paying your bills."

Truckers also called for their coworkers to reject the divisions between drivers, including between company drivers and independent owner-operators.

Keepitrealkc urged: "Please don't behave like the old head, super truckers and try to differentiate yourself

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from other drivers over irrelevant details, like company vs. owner, manual vs. automatic, etc. We are all doing basically the same job, and anybody, Driver or not, can support a strike if they want to."

Shaydell F. weighed in to those seeking to divide the truckers, "You don't think company drivers deserve better either?? Its about everyone.. its not just about fuel and owner ops.. it principle.. were all tired of cheap rates, pay, the bs.. we ALL deserve better.. there companies need to understand that!"

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters and the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association (OOIDA)—have confirmed that they are refusing to organize, authorize, or endorse any strike action.

OOIDA Executive Vice President Lewie Pugh stated in an interview with Overdrive: "While strikes can be very effective if they work, there are many difficulties associated with such an action." He added: "Besides the obvious difficulty in getting hundreds of thousands of drivers to all agree to shut down, the greatest obstacle involves anti-trust laws and illegal boycotts. Legally chartered unions made up of employees for the purposes of collective bargaining enjoy certain exemptions under the labor law that allows them the option of strikes and boycotts under specific legal guidelines. It is not possible for OOIDA to organize such an action because of the makeup of our membership."

In other words, OOIDA rejects as "impossible" any action by truckers because such action would threaten their own institutional interests within the "labor law" framework established by corporate politicians. As for the Teamsters, they have spent decades channeling truckers into toothless "stunt strikes" and into reclassification campaigns whose purpose is to convert owner operators into company drivers paying union dues.

Meanwhile, the Teamsters bureaucracy is completely integrated with management. At UPS, they are helping the company eliminate tens of thousands of jobs without opposition; in 2023, they stood by idly while trucking company Yellow went bankrupt, destroying more than 30,000 jobs.

On Thursday, however, the truckers themselves acted. Whatever the size of this initial stoppage, it demonstrates that the way forward is through independent organization by workers themselves.

There is historical precedent for truly nationwide action to shut down the entire industry. In 1970, truckers launched a 12-week national wildcat strike in defiance of the Teamsters bureaucracy, in which the central issue was a contract offer which failed to keep pace with the skyrocketing cost of living. Workers organized roving pickets to enforce the strike, defied federal injunctions, back to work orders by the Teamsters leadership, and even a National Guard deployment, before winning wage increases 70 percent higher than the initial offer.

In 1973 and 1979, during the infamous oil shocks which caused diesel prices to skyrocket, independent truckers organized national strikes using CB radios and other informal methods, with convoys circling Washington D.C. and barricading major freight hubs.

Most recently, in 2022 port truckers blockaded the Port of Oakland to protest a California state law which stripped them of their independent status. At least some dockworkers, who had been strung out without a contract by the ILWU, refused to cross the picket line.

The next step after Thursday's action is for truckers to begin organizing to prepare the ground for broader action. The WSWS urges truckers to establish rank-and-file committees, controlled by workers themselves and not officials from the Teamsters or OOIDA, and begin holding meetings to determine a common set of demands and strategy.

Such committees, democratically elected by the rank and file, must unite truckers of all nationalities—company drivers and owner-operators, immigrant and native-born—in a common struggle against the cost of living, the war, and the attacks on democratic rights.

To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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