

# TRUCKERS UNITED

Newsletter of the Motor Transport Workers Industrial Union 530 - Volume 1 - Issue 1 - Summer 2008

## Stockton Truckers Call Out the Industry with 400 on Strike

by: J. Pierce with Adam Welch

Independent truckers in California's San Joaquin Valley shut down their rigs on Friday, May 2nd declaring an open-ended strike. At \$4.80 a gallon, sky-rocketing diesel prices top the list of grievances. As their main demand, drivers insist on doubling the rates paid for hauling a container. The second biggest demand is a fuel surcharge of upwards of 55%. The brokers currently pay surcharges varying from 30-40%. If drivers can keep the trucking bosses from stealing it, the increased surcharge would help place the burden back on those who can afford it.

"We're fighting for survival." That's how Gerardo Cordoba explains the struggle. He's been driving for 10 years and raises a seven year-old on what he brings home after costs. The rates haven't seen an increase in a decade and most truckers bring home less than \$30,000 year. In fact, when asked how much an average driver earns, Dewey Obtinalla, a Filipino driver who regularly does long haul up the coast, replied, "If you're making \$30,000, that's good, *very* good... With fuel, insurance, and registration, I don't know a lot of people who are doing that well." Brave strikers don't need to look far for others willing to fight.

On the two or three lively picket lines thrown up by the crowds of striking drivers, one converses with Latinos and Chicanos, Punjabi Sikhs and other Indians, Laotians, Cambodians, Filipinos, and a handful of white, Black, and truckers with other backgrounds. Huge pots of food are shared communally and supporters are welcomed as comrades.

"The most exciting thing about this strike is the unity amongst the drivers," says Mubarak Kahn, who lives in Stockton and has been driving for seven years. "We've seen good times and bad times and that unity keeps us going." When asked how the picket line

looks, Kahn commented simply, "Well, I see a lot of people sitting and not too many driving... Its great to meet so many drivers from other companies. I'll be next to someone who's been doing this for 10, 15, 20 years. And I can learn



a lot from them." Often times drivers don't get the opportunity to socialize as they rush in and out of the rail yards. Thus a genuine trucker community re-emerges with every strike as drivers greet familiar faces from years past.

The two rail yards in Lathrop and Stockton were ghost towns for two weeks when compared to the bustling container traffic on a normal day. A handful of truckers from a couple companies chose not to strike and crossed the picket lines of their fellow drivers. Rail management for Union Pacific

and Burlington-Northern & Santa Fe enlisted staffing agencies to provide scab drivers to cross picket lines - all to the jeers, foul language, and middle fingers of fed up owner-operators. When asked about truckers who've gone back to work

and experiences talking to scabs, drivers seem pretty sympathetic to the situation these people are facing. "Some of these guys are coming from Pennsylvania, Chicago, Florida...I don't blame them for doing what they're doing," says Cordoba. Obtinalla repeated the same generosity by saying, "They got to pay bills too... We can't question that." These forgiving words contrast dramatically against the gauntlet of verbal abuse hurled over hand-held mega

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## Southeast Drivers Say 'Enough!'

NORTH CAROLINA - Fuel prices continue to soar, and your next trip to the gas pump will probably cost you a pretty penny -- especially if you're one of the many truckers here in the east.

It costs some of them more than \$1,000 to fill up their tanks with diesel fuel -- and Thursday, truckers here said they've had enough of high gas prices.

So they staged a strike on Highway 17 in Vanceboro.

"They strike all over the world, but this is the first time that I know of they've ever

struck on the east coast," said strike organizer Roy Toler.

Instead of putting the petal to the metal, he and 17 other truckers are putting their foot down against high diesel prices.

They put their trucks in park for two hours Thursday -- hoping to send a message to both oil companies and lawmakers.

"Fuel prices now are right at \$1200 just to fill up one truck," Toler said. "It used to be \$600. And pay, it ain't raised up much."

And that's what has truck drivers so

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# Oakland Drivers, Police Clash

OAKLAND — About 80 striking truckers from Middle Harbor Road at the Port of Oakland were ticketed and dispersed Tuesday after some of them committed vandalism, police said.

Some drivers had damaged a truck's window while the driver was operating the rig, Sgt. Peter Lau said.

Nevertheless, the protesting truck drivers who own and operate their own rigs vowed to continue demonstrating at the port for the rest of the week. They say motor carrier firms have been underpaying them for diesel fuel.

"No Stopping Anytime" signs are posted along Middle Harbor Road. But on Tuesday the port's main artery was lined with protesters' automobiles and some truck cabs.

"Yesterday (Monday) was peaceful," Lau said. "There were agreements among the officers here that we would let them (the strikers) use their First Amendment rights. However, the port's traffic was not going to be obstructed and people were not being hurt."

Now that is all changed.

Police will be there in force for the rest of the week, and will enforce the area's parking rules, Lau said.

The crowd on Tuesday was highly agitated. At one point, five police officers surrounded and detained a man driving a station wagon, then ordered him to depart.

The crowd then became extremely vocal. Several strikers said police should support them, not oppose them.

Driver Kibraab Weldaad was among those who said the motor carrier firms -- which act as brokers between shipping lines and customers -- have not been reimbursing drivers for the rising cost of diesel fuel, as



Oakland Truckers on the Picket Line May 2nd.

stipulated in an agreement struck four years ago.

"It costs me \$700 to fill up the truck," he said. "In a week it cost me \$1,200 because I only get 7 miles to a gallon."

Jerry Philips, a partner of Impact Transload & Rail, said his firm and the other major motor carrier companies serving the Port of Oakland pay drivers fairly. This week's unrest was organized, according to him, by truckers from the Central Valley who serve railroad carriers.

Traffic at the port has slowed considerably, Philips said.

"We are at a dead standstill," he said. "A few drivers managed to get some stuff out before picketers showed up."

Port officials said they would not know the impact of Tuesday's disturbance on traffic until today.

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upset.

"The prices of fuel are getting so high, that it's hard for truckers to maintain," said Levis Lane. "So if the truckers go out of business, then I'm going to have to look for me a job to support me and my family."

These truckers have to buy their own fuel, and with gas prices on the rise and wages steady -- they're having to choose between putting diesel in the tanks or food on their tables.

And they think they know what's fueling the price spikes.

"I believe it might be something called greed," Toler said. "I'm not really for sure, but that's what I'm thinking."

While most of the truckers here say they're probably taking a bit of a financial hit by making this statement today, they say they'd rather make a stand now than face the possibility of losing their jobs in the future.

"I'd much rather take a hit now, than be broke and can't afford to take a hit," Toler said.

But with the way prices are rising, these guys say that might happen sooner rather than later.

And while the truckers say they had a decent turnout for their strike, they hope the word will spread -- so they can raise more awareness and hold bigger strikes in the future.



NC Truckers Show Solidarity



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# LTL, Company Drivers Singing the Diesel Blues

There has been much reporting in recent months about how the increasing diesel prices are affecting owner operators. Little has been reported on how the out-of-control energy market is affecting the drivers of LTL trucking, as well as company drivers from other types of trucking. Even though company drivers usually don't pay for their fuel, the companies are starting to transfer the costs onto drivers by other means.

Of course some companies are just throwing in the towel completely, like Jevic, an LTL carrier who ended operations May 20, 2008. Others are making operational changes to cope.

A few days after Jevic freight announced it was going out of business, in part because of the fuel costs, another large LTL carrier told its drivers it would be altering operations to save fuel and "gain the competitive edge."

The operational change is only directly affecting line haul drivers at certain terminals, although the effects could spill over into the P&D operation. The company claims increase diesel costs are forcing the company to rethink how it moves freight.

All two-day relay runs that are able to be changed to longer one-day runs will be changed. Before, two drivers would meet and turn, each 5.5 hours from their home terminals. Now, one driver will be taking the double or triple trailers to the final destination in 11 hours. This is possible because the original freight routing plan was developed before the hours of

service regulations were changed to allow 11 hours drive time from 10 hours.

In other words, this isn't saving fuel. It's a speed up with more forced unpaid overtime. It may be saving some fuel to avoid a middle point away from the main route and just continue to the final destination, but the real savings here are the labor costs. Offering wages and benefits to one driver instead of two affords the shareholders extra value. Not to mention that overtime is not offered to LTL line haul drivers who are paid by the mile. The company's incentive to push the drivers to take long hours may increase fatigue and cause an already growing number of fatal road side accidents - all in the name of saving cash.

Meanwhile there are a lot of rumors about certain companies going out of business or merging with others. It is difficult to determine which is fact and which is fiction. One of those is a very large company whose employees are represented by the IBT. Many drivers around the industry are speculating what the effects would be if this company were to collapse. Some say drivers of other companies would be required to work extra hours to cover the newly acquired market share. Others say that employers in the industry would have to hire the former drivers of the other company.

There is a buzz in LTL now that wasn't as pronounced as before. The effects of the rise in diesel prices do not discriminate. The many problems that have long existed in all parts of the trucking industry seem to only worsen as the fuel shortage and driver shortage continues.



## From Page 1 - Stockton

phones at strike breakers on a daily basis. Despite exceptional unity between drivers, frustration and impatience are killers to the collective morale.

The leadership of this multi-ethnic strike movement is entirely Punjabi Sikh. Ajit Gill Singh, a confident and sharp-dressed owner-operator, emerged as the main organizer for the strikers. "Gill has a handful of people dealing with negotiations and working with him. They'll talk to the companies and relay that back to us," says Kahn. Gill's morale-boosting updates from the back of a pick-up are one part in a series of inspirational offerings given mostly in Punjabi during the long days on the line. Amid food and folk songs, truckers do their best to keep each others' spirits up while negotiations continue.

The Stockton truckers know that they can't win without widening the struggle. A strike delegation, dispatched to the Port of Oakland, pulled drivers out on strike to join them in fighting for the same improvements. Strikers in Oakland have an up-hill battle that comes in waves. Despite the tradition of militancy in the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach, reports say that the strike movement hasn't made it down there yet. Obtinalla, an IWW supporter who participated in the campaigns of 2004, wants to see Oakland and Los Angeles drivers join the effort in full force. "We have the unity, but its not enough... To get the attention of the government and the whole country...we need to send a message. There's not enough machinery with us yet. We need the whole trucking industry." To that end, IWWs have been frequenting the picket lines and offering our solidarity.

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Stockton Truckers Demand Fuel Surcharge Increase

# Stockton Drivers Lead the Way

Once again a step ahead of intermodal truckers across the US, Stockton truckers, led by the majority Sikh drivers, launched a strike over the issue of fuel prices on Monday, May 5, 2008.

While many truckers participated in various protest shutdowns on either April 1st or May 1st this year, the 300-400 Stockton truckers working out of the Union Pacific and Burlington Northern-Santa Fe railyards have shut down their industry until their demands have been met.

Rather than demand the fuel surcharges paid by shippers but often pocketed

by companies rather than passed along to drivers, the Stockton truckers are asking for a dramatic increase in the rates paid in order to keep up with increases costs such as fuel.

On April 26, 2004 Stockton intermodal truckers, inspired by rumors circulating of an LA port trucker shutdown, were the first to join what became a strike of west cost port truckers on April 30, and by June had spread to most southern and eastern ports as well.

The issues were largely the same then with increasing fuel costs coupled with rates that had not increased for sometimes over a decade. The 2004 strike was settled successfully

after only six business days into the strike rail yard officials announced an embargo on all container shipments to California to prevent a major rail system backlog from occurring (See The Record, May 4 and May 7, 2004).

This speaks to the power of intermodal truckers to halt the movement of goods at the crucial bottle necks of ports and rail yards.

Following the April strike up to early 2005 the leadership of the Sikh drivers began working with the IWW and during that period several hundred Stockton area truckers became members.

With the current strike members of the IWW are working to show their support and solidarity.

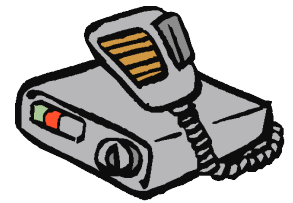


## A Look at the Wealth We Created for our Bosses this Fiscal Quarter

Selected Trucking Stocks- As of May 30, 2008

Name	Symbol	Last price	Change	Mkt cap (in millions)	Volume	Open	High	Low
Arkansas Best Corporation	ABFS	37.16	0.38	936.8	714638	36.8	37.35	36.5
C.H. Robinson Worldwide, Inc.	CHRW	64.5	-0.23	11008.1	3195844	65.28	65.7	64.47
Celadon Group, Inc.	CLDN	11.4	0.44	249.09	154295	11	11.5	10.75
Con-way Inc.	CNW	48.81	2.51	2225.54	2175868	46.76	48.88	46.3
Expeditors International of Washington	EXPD	47.08	0.02	10041.9	1246574	47.15	47.39	46.51
FedEx Corporation	FDX	91.71	-0.46	28435.97	1859811	92.07	92.68	91.5
Forward Air Corporation	FWRD	37.05	-0.05	1068.07	213295	37.11	37.49	36.94
Heartland Express, Inc.	HTLD	15.4	-0.1	1480.83	1021117	15.53	15.58	15.32
Hub Group, Inc.	HUBG	36.08	0.35	1357.88	301008	35.9	36.22	35.51
J.B. Hunt Transport Services, Inc.	JBHT	34.84	-0.73	4345.38	3739288	35.28	35.57	34.6
Knight Transportation	KNX	18.26	0.04	1562.4	1386694	18.2	18.47	17.97
Landstar System, Inc.	LSTR	55.72	0.02	2938.55	835702	55.91	56.91	55.11
Marten Transport, Ltd	MRTN	17.92	0.37	390.03	87583	17.63	18.3	17.16
Old Dominion Freight Line	ODFL	30.18	1.47	1125.25	752625	28.94	30.2	28.34
P.A.M. Transportation Services, Inc.	PTSI	14.66	-0.34	142.34	33802	15.19	15.19	14.66
Pacer International, Inc.	PACR	22.46	0.56	779.1	552312	22	22.58	21.69
Saia Inc.	SAIA	13.91	0.09	187.07	61285	13.86	13.96	13.66
United Parcel Service, Inc.	UPS	71.02	-0.58	72501.25	4534415	71.67	71.72	70.86
USA Truck, Inc.	USAK	12.78	0.43	130.55	4152	12.34	12.78	12.25
UTi Worldwide Inc.	UTIW	23.76	0.39	2364.53	813523	23.56	24.06	23.27
Vitrans Corporation, Inc. (USA)	VTNC	14.85	0	200.22	76524	14.85	14.9	14.64
Werner Enterprises, Inc.	WERN	18.94	0.2	1333.19	1078989	18.78	19.06	18.63
YRC Worldwide Inc.	YRCW	17.46	0.66	996.82	1393709	16.61	17.68	16.6

# CB Soap Box



## Midwest LTL Truckers Get No Respect

By GearGrinder

Early in December of 2007, drivers at my company were required to attend a mandatory meeting held by the terminal manager. Drivers learned at the meeting that its purpose was to discuss the recent heavy volume of complaints to the boss about his dispatch team and other supervisors, whose continued impossible demands and recurring follies have caused great stress to the drivers.

So the boss asked us to hear him address the issue to each shift. We met in the employee lounge. I was part of the 9 a.m. shift, which is the largest. Taped on the wall behind him was a green 8.5x11 sheet of paper with what seemed random multiplication problems written on it in black marker. This caught the attention of the drivers and probably indicated what was discussed at the earlier shift meetings.

At first he sounded sympathetic. He said that he has been getting drivers in his office every morning complaining either about the supervisors, or the dispatch decisions, or the forced overtime, or the lack of lunch breaks, or the lunch breaks forced to be taken at the end of the day, or the heavy volume of business making it difficult for the drivers to keep up, etc. And said that he appreciates our concerns and sympathizes with us. He said that from then on he would be meeting with his dispatchers every day at noon to determine where problems are occurring and how to remedy them.

"This is it," we thought. The boss is finally seeing things our way and making an effort to make our lives better. Then he said, "but its a two way street isn't it gentleman?"

"Oh here we go," we must have all been thinking.

"A lot of the reason why dispatch seems to be unfair with you guys is because their backs are against the wall. And their backs are against the wall because of this. We need to go faster. And when we say go faster we don't mean driving beyond the speed limit or jeopardizing safety. We mean this..."

He diverts our eyes to the green paper on the wall.

"On average we put 27 drivers on the street each day. Each morning, I see guys coming in here punching in and walking at a snail's pace to their paperwork. Or talking while they wait for their loads to finish instead of helping the guys on the

dock, or signing all their delivery receipts in the lounge while talking to other drivers. Forgetting your bags in the lounge or in your car, so you have to walk back and forth three times thus wasting time. Our average gate departure time is way beyond the rest of the company's. It should take no longer than a half hour from punch to gate and its taking us nearly 15 minutes longer than that."

$27 \times 15 = 6.75 \text{hrs}$

"That's how much time we kill every day before we even leave the yard. That's almost one full-time shift.

"Then, when you are at your stops, you chat it up we your buddies on the customers' docks. If each driver takes 5 minutes at three stops a day to talk, its 15 minutes per driver per day. Multiply that by 27 drivers and you see again how it adds up.

"When you arrive at the yard at the end of the day, I see guys talking to each other in the yard or chatting with the girls in the office and before you know it another 15 minutes is wasted. Multiplied by 27 equals another 6.75 hours.

"All this added up is putting us in dispatch against the wall. We'd like to give you more time to make your appointments, but we're up against the wall. We'd like to let some of you go home earlier, but we're up against the wall. We'd like to give you guys lunch times between your third and fifth hour, but we don't have time. We need to move faster.

"Some drivers take their time signing their bills in the morning. If I was a driver, I'd tell him to get moving 'I don't want to work overtime tonight.' To those who walk slowly, just say 'let's go! I want to go home!'"

The look on the drivers' faces was priceless. I was in the back of the room so I could see everything. I especially liked Brian's face which had shown absolute disgust with what he just heard.

"So you see guys, the little things we do add up."

I tried to make sense of what he was saying in my head: "so if we go faster we get to go home earlier? That's funny I've been in this industry four years, and every time I work faster I am rewarded with more work and longer hours." No doubt the other drivers were thinking the same.

In other words we were just told "thanks for all the complaints the last few months, I thought them over, and have decided its your own fault you're so miserable. You're not going fast enough."

Nothing was said about our shortage of drivers or dispatch's constant mistakes, just "its your fault." The drivers were disappointed if not surprised. How would they respond?

Well, the rest of the week was fantastically light-hearted. Every driver made fun of it. I was inspecting my vehicle before departing and another driver drove by me with his window open and yelled sarcastically "let's go! I wanna go home." In the lounge, a Polish driver walked in and said in his broken English, "your all moochers!" One of the office girls said hello to a driver as he walked in at the end of the day, and he said "I can't talk to you." She said why. He said "27 drivers saying hello adds up to 2 and a half minutes. That's time we cannot afford." Every one was soaked in a comforting satire. No doubt the boss overheard some of this. Nobody was shy with their disregard for the lecture of the boss.

The very next day following the meeting, I worked slightly faster than usual, just to test my theory that faster work is rewarded with more work. I ended up working twelve hours with no breaks. It was the first twelve-hour day I had in months. Thus giving no incentive for the drivers to work faster.

No problems have been solved regarding the suggestions of the drivers and so the wheels keep on rollin'.

**Got a Story about  
your Company???**

Send your submissions to

**CB SoapBox**

C/O MTW IU530

PO Box 274

Waukegan, IL 60079

# Join the IWW

*And Improve your Life at Work*

The Motor Transport Workers Industrial Union of the IWW is committed to building one big union of truckers across the globe.

The IWW has been organizing in transportation since its founding in 1905. We currently have members on four continents. Unlike other unions, MTW organizers also work in the trucking industry, so they understand the conditions that affect you. There is still a lot of work to be done and we welcome any help. We need your knowledge, skills, and creativity to help us improve the trucking industry for all.

MTWIU members are building a proud, member-run, fighting union willing to stand up for their fellow workers in the trucking industry. We know that improvements at work can only be realized when solidarity reigns among the workers of our industry. We invite you to join the IWW and to let other transportation workers know about us.

## Joining the IWW Means

- ✓ *Solidarity across the industry and beyond*
- ✓ *Members across the globe willing to take action for your struggle*
- ✓ *More members yield stronger negotiating position*
- ✓ *Already a presence in the transportation sector*
- ✓ *Large network of experienced people willing to help you*
- ✓ *Skilled organizers to assist you*
- ✓ *Free legal consul*
- ✓ *Free Trainings*
- ✓ *Structures to give us the most freedom locally and most power globally*
- ✓ *100% democratic decision-making in our affairs*

## What We can Accomplish Together

- ✓ *100% fuel reimbursement*
- ✓ *Respect from our companies*
- ✓ *Pay Increases*
- ✓ *Paid wait times*
- ✓ *Paid overtime*
- ✓ *Sensible scheduling*
- ✓ *Voluntary overtime*
- ✓ *Protection from Firings*

If you are interested in joining please request an application at:

**mtw530@IWW.org**

or write to us at:

**Motor Transport Workers IU 530  
PO Box 274  
Waukegan, IL 60079**

Visit us on the Web:

**<http://truckers.IWW.org>**

The Motor Transport Workers IU is an affiliated union of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).



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