

# Transporters, Unite!

Truck drivers are the lifeblood of the U.S. imperialist economic machine. Without truckers, the market does not function. Are you a long-haul trucker? *You are an integral part of the capitalist production process.* As any worker knows, without the job you do, there would be no profits for the capitalists. In the case of transportation, it is usually one of the final stages of production. A commodity isn't really "produced" until it's sold and realized for value. This means that, in order to realize the value of their commodities, capitalists have to have those commodities transported somewhere where they'll be bought. So you, the trucker, are a productive worker and vital to the process of production.

As capitalism develops in its final, moribund form,, the individual capitalists continue looking for ways to maximize their profits through the twin efficiencies of centralization and socialization. Through socialization, the benefit of combining work from many different workers is realized. Through centralization, the more work that can be administered by fewer people, the more the capitalist can expand production and increase their profits.

Storage has been historically a factor for the transporter, the merchant who arranges for the shipping of a commodity or block of commodities. These merchants once had huge warehouses of storage where commodities would wait until they were needed. While they are stored, commodities generally degrade in potential value; even if they don't, the producer or distributor loses value by being forced to rent the warehouse space.

One of the methods of centralization has been to break down the old practice of having warehouses at every distribution center. This has been largely replaced by the Japanese-developed "just in time" (JIT) system. This was developed in the 1970s at a Toyota plant in Taiichi Ohno. The "philosophy" of this transport system is that commodities should not sit, idle, decaying in value, taking up space, at the point of sale. Rather, using scientific analysis of commodity needs, the distributor should be provided with **ONLY AS MUCH** as they will sell during that supply period. This is usually, for places like grocery stores, as short as a week.

This is how Shop Rite and Stop & Shop, for example, are stocked. JIT supply enables these companies to cut down on their wastage, on their storage costs, on the staffing needed to retrieve items, and so forth. We've seen the decay of these JIT supply lines during the pandemic. Like all capitalist centralization, this new technique makes transport **CHEAPER**, but it also makes it more **FRAGILE**. Supply lines are narrower, interruption, even for short periods, is much more disruptive. Global shipping has reflected a general breakdown in the modern transportation industry over the past few years, with insufficient truck drivers (JIT is more labor-intensive for the transporters), lower driving rates, cargo piling up on docks, and so forth.

Where is all this going? 71.6% of all commodities in the U.S. Empire are shipped by truck. Of the U.S. imperial economy (\$1,298 billion), trucking accounts for \$791.7 billion - nearly 4% of the total economy. Without the drivers that move goods from their point of production or import to their point of sale, the capitalists can't make money. If you're a truck driver, you are just as much a worker as the semi-slaves toiling on the farms — here, in the U.S., or in Latin America where U.S.-backed gunmen force labor levees — or the clerks that work at the McDonald's where that food is eventually sold to the public as hamburgers and chicken McNuggets. All workers have interests directly opposed to the capitalists, the owners, because all workers are exploited by the same grinding, violent capitalist production machine. The capitalists cannot make their money without you. The food would rot on the ground, the cars would rust in their lots, the money of the bosses would be worth no more than the paper it was printed on.

## The Owner-Operator and the Fleet

The median pay of heavy and tractor-trailer truck drivers in 2021 was \$48,310 for that whole year — \$23.23 an hour, assuming that you work the legal limit (70 hours every 8 days). But *not all truck drivers are workers*. Some of the people who drive trucks (or who call themselves truck drivers) are owner-operators. Others are fleet owners. In other words, some people who call themselves "truck drivers" are actually petty business tyrants or big business owners. Roughly 9% of all "truckers" (because these people are not really truckers at all, but truck-owners) are owner-operators.

Owner-operators made roughly \$165,000 in 2021, or \$80.43 an hour. The top ten percent of owner-operators make around \$250,000 a year. The Cargo-Transport Alliance, an owner-operator front group, boasts that owner-operators take home around \$2,000-\$5,000 *weekly* and fleet owners — that is, people who merely own trucks but don't drive any of them personally — make \$500-\$2,000 *weekly per truck they own*. These owner-operators and fleet owners are your bosses in the trucking industry, who control the wages of every trucker in the United States.

Long-haul trucks are not cheap. There's a reason that 91% of truckers work for fleets or owner-operators. These machines cost as much as a small home, and workers, especially in the collapsing economy of today's day and age, can't afford to own their own homes, let alone trucks that can cost in excess of one-hundred-fifty-thousand dollars. That's not to mention the upkeep, maintenance, gas, facilities, garages, and so on. This means that most truckers, by far the greatest portion, work for people who own the trucks already. They get paid wages by these bosses.

You, the trucker, have an irreconcilable difference with your boss. The fleet owners and owner-operators make their money by short-changing you. They have an interest in paying you as little as possible so they can take home the difference between what they

get for the contract and what they pay to you. Oh, sure, they keep a little aside to repair the truck and keep up the facilities, but they're living high on the hog even after that. Obviously, your interest is the interest of the worker the world over: to get paid the value of your work.

Owner-operators and fleet owners control the wages paid to all regular fleet drivers. They own the machinery to do the job — no machine, no job. The trucks, the cabs, the garages, are all in their hands, because they're too expensive for regular workers to own. They are purposefully kept out of the reach of working people, and when they do appear to be in reach it's only through finance — that is, a bank loan from the big monopoly capitalists — which bears down on the driver and acts like a mortgage, a sword hanging over their head that they hope doesn't fall. The owner-operators and fleet owners like things this way. They can manage the entire workforce. They do this because they own the *means of production*.

## Bucking the Owners

Because of the vulnerability of the U.S. markets to supply-line interruption, because 72% of all goods within the U.S. markets flow along the trucking routes, truckers are uniquely positioned to exert collective power.

The expression of this power comes through solidarity and mass action - the organization of the entire transportation industry into forms capable of fighting back against the owner-operators and the big fleet owners. Right now, because the industry is relatively unorganized and relatively liberalized (or, rather, non-radical), the bosses exert a great deal of control. They can fire troublemakers, and with this power they can collude amongst each other to blacklist them. They can strike directly at the capability of each individual trucker to make money, to live, to feed their families.

How can the workers, the truckers, fight back? The same way, for instance, the longshoremen do: by the organization of the trucking and transport industry into militant councils. Sure, you have the Teamsters Union, of which you may or may not be a member. That's a good start! But that's not the end of the equation. The unions are captured by the bosses too, in this case the political bosses who work for the general class of capital. While they may be willing to go to bat for you, it's only in a limited way: the unions won't risk a showdown with the bosses that could sweep away the whole damn system — and why should they? They're getting paid out of this arrangement, too.

Should a trucker be fired and blacklisted, they have no recourse on their own. But if they are organized - ah! now their siblings can strike back at the owners who refuse to employ them! They can support their sibling with a small portion of their paychecks until the bosses give in. Eventually, they can become so powerful that they can force the bosses themselves to turn over the cabs and garages to the fleet drivers, they can take ownership

of those very expensive trucks, they can take the means of production into their own hands!

## Running a Meeting

The first step is to hold meetings. You're reading this because you've already realized that there's something wrong with the way society is structured, or because someone you trust has given you a copy. You are the first ingredient in class-consciousness among the entire shipping industry. But how do you take what you felt, and now know, and turn that into broad class-consciousness among all your co-workers and all truckers in the whole industry?

If you're in a union, you start by using the channels the union has already provided. Being unionized means that folks have at least a basic understanding of the incontrovertible differences between workers and owners. While they may not be ready to take the final steps toward self-organization and confronting the bosses, being involved in union work helps people radicalize so long as they are continually driven forward by an already-radical friend or ally. Agitate inside your union to bring the union into ever-more-open conflict with the owners. The goal is to position the union against the bosses in such a way that the union *must* seek a fight and *can't* back down. When you're unionized, the *structure* of how you're going to organize people is already partially provided for you! You need merely to show them that the *leadership* is not prepared to win the fight, but rather to delay it indefinitely and live off of the life-support for the movement.

Alright, but let's say you don't have a union, or your fleet isn't unionized. What do you do now? This is a much harder task, but one that must be done. The first thing you do is talk to your fellow drivers. You have to slowly work them up to the position that the bosses are the source of all of their economic problems — they are. They're also the source of many of our social problems: it is the structure of society, the way the bosses have chosen to structure it, that creates social oppression.

For this approach to work, you'll have to study broadly. You'll have to become familiar with answers to common questions about socialism, about organizing, about capitalism, and about the corrupt heart of the United States Empire. It's not enough just to tell your fellow workers that their lives will improve once the bosses are gone, that everyone will own the trucks in common. You'll have to have many long conversations about the evils of capitalism; you'll have to dispel long-held beliefs about Communism that we're all taught from the cradle to keep us from organizing.

Then, when you believe you have enough people sufficiently interested, you have to *hold a meeting*. This is the critical moment. You have to call workers, and they don't just have to be from your industry but can be from adjoining industries as well (mechanics,

road crews, whoever you can get), and you have to talk about *what you can do to solve your problems*. How do you call this meeting? Here are some ways:

- Word of mouth is always the easiest. Tell people about it, email them, text them.
- Put up flyers, but make sure you do it in a way that won't piss off the bosses.
- See if a union will help you organize it by sneakily pretending like you want to join them and you need support.
- Internet forums are a great place to send out information about organizing as well.

You should lead the meeting along with whatever comrades you have that understand the goal is to build ever more concrete forms of organization that can challenge the bosses and the state itself. When you start the meeting what you want to have is:

- You or one of your comrades should be the M.C. and make sure to moderate the meeting — don't let reactionaries say things unopposed (for example, "this is all the fault of the Blacks" or something).
- You then solicit answers from the audience to your questions: simple ones include "what would make your life better?" and "why don't we each own our own trucks?"
- Make sure to provide the meeting with food and coffee, if you can.
- Make sure you're meeting in a space where people feel secure and safe to speak.
- If you don't know everyone there, go around and introduce yourselves first so people feel more comfortable talking to you.

That's the goal. Organize among your fellow drivers. These meetings can be transformed from simple grievance sessions into discussions about *exactly how* and *exactly when* to do *exactly what* that will bring you all closer to the day when you don't have to drive a truck for the owner-operators and fleet owners. Does that mean a strike? Maybe. Could that mean going into the street to join anti-state protests? It could.

Educate them about the way the world could work, about the power that's in their hands. Listen to their grievances and air your own — agitate them into ever-more organized forms. If you can bring down the bosses of the trucking and transport industry, you can bring down *all the bosses all over the United States*.