

La Opinion/El Despertador Mexicano
Drivers at the Port of Los Angeles Begin Strike

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Today, more than 100 Los Angeles and Long Beach Port Truck Drivers, mostly Hispanic, initiated a 48 hour work stoppage alleging labor-related mistreatment.

These drivers work for at least three trucking companies whose offices are in Carson, Compton and Long Beach, although it is expected that in the late afternoon some of them may move their operations to certain access terminals in San Pedro and Long Beach, without their operations being affected.

“These are drivers and professionals who transport imports for companies such as Wal-Mart, Ikea and Home Depot, and are on the front lines of the fight for a fair day’s pay for a hard day’s work”, says a statement from the ILWU, longshoremen who are fighting to integrate the guild.

“Without waiting for a law-less industry to transform, the drivers are rising up to improve their jobs and rebuild a diminishing middle class”, they added, citing a press conference that took place in Wilmington at noon. Dozens of drivers filed a wage theft lawsuit against these Port Companies for supposed wage theft and denial of benefits, and are demanding to be recognized as employees and not independent contractors.

Some of the companies with these type of complaints against them have denied violating the drivers’ labor rights and ensure that the independent contractors system has been maintained by the economic crisis. “The Big Rig Overhaul”, a study conducted by LAANE and Change to Win reveals that the Port Truck drivers’ working situation has not improved within the past few years due to being misclassified as independent contractors.

The analysis, which was published a few weeks ago, indicates that this allows the companies to have an advantage over other companies who do comply with the rules. The study quotes, “It paves a worse way in terms of job quality”.

To date, about 400 complaints have been filed by drivers with the Division of Labor Standards Enforcement in California (DLSE) for wage theft related to this misclassification. In 19 cases, fines equivalent to an average of \$ 66,000 per driver have been extended.

Four drivers who filed a lawsuit against Seacon Logic Inc with the Superior Court of Los Angeles won \$107 million. They had signed a contract in which the company leased a truck out to them and forced them to provide their own insurance and take care of the unit through a payroll deduction. “We conservatively estimate that the Port Companies in California are responsible for wage and hour violations from \$787 to \$998 million dollars a year,” is stated in the analysis.

Port Truck drivers who are independent contractors work an average of 59 hours per week, but just barely earn \$29,000 thousand a year, which is \$6,000 less than those who are employees.