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Port truckers stay off work to protest labor conditions

Posted by Mike Lindblom

Short-haul truckers along the Seattle waterfront are starting to organize and act politically, after years of merely grumbling about their low pay and working conditions.

This week, about 200 drivers have stayed off the job instead of delivering containers to the BNSF Railway yard in Sodo, according to several participants in the slowdown. At least some work has continued using other drivers.

Waterfront truckers are typically classified as "independent contractors" and paid \$40 to \$44 per load. After spending money to insure and maintain their aging trucks, drivers average around \$30,000 a year net income. They are not allowed to use restrooms at the port gates, and say they are sometimes called the N-word or animals.

"It looks like Alabama -- this is in Seattle, West Seattle!" said Aynalem Moba, a leader in the new Seattle Port Truckers Association.

Meanwhile, the Legislature is considering [House Bill 2527](#), to make shipping companies responsible for any defects in chassis and containers, instead of the truckers -- who are cited for safety violations in sweeps by the State Patrol. Dozens of truckers stopped running cargo to attend a committee hearing Monday in Olympia.

The truckers, many of whom are immigrants from east Africa, are part of a national controversy. The Teamsters are trying to either organize them or seek changes in federal law to improve working conditions; some 400 truckers gathered at a Tukwila union hall Wednesday night, according to truckers and Teamsters representatives.