

In Crisis, Independent Truckers Are Turning to LaRouche for Solutions

by Marianna Wertz

Confronted by an existential crisis in their lives—which is hitting ever-growing sectors of the population— independent truck drivers are today turning to the LaRouche political movement in growing numbers. At truck stops around the nation, drivers are getting out of their rigs to buy subscriptions to *EIR* and *New Federalist* (the weekly newspaper of the LaRouche movement), to find answers to the skyrocketing price of oil which is driving them into bankruptcy, and the working conditions that have reduced them to virtual slavery.

On Oct. 21, a group of independent port drivers in Charleston, South Carolina, led by Robert Bates and Jim

Stewart (see interviews below), invited LaRouche representative Cal Smith to discuss with them what LaRouche is proposing for a global economic recovery, in the face of the global financial collapse. Smith, in the interview below, describes these drivers' hunger for "learning to think" in this time of crisis, as they consider what LaRouche is saying.

These are the same drivers who staged a nationwide shutdown of ports on Oct. 4, in tandem with the Teamsters union. These shutdowns are continuing, as Stewart recounts. A similar protest was held in Long Beach, California on Oct. 20, where 100 drivers stopped work to protest the high cost of diesel fuel, low mileage rates, and unpaid hours and company deductions from their pay. The independents are also seeking the right to unionize, now denied them under National Labor Relations Act restrictions.

As Bates told *EIR*, truckers are "the bottom of the food chain." Yet, without them, almost nothing gets to market. Their economic plight is indicative both of the decimation of the nation's real economy, and of its "fitness to survive," as LaRouche puts it.



Truckers drivers protest their declining standard of living at the Savannah Port on Labor Day.

Interview: Cal Smith

‘These Truckers Want To Learn To Think’

EIR: You were invited to address a truckers meeting recently? What was the meeting about?

Smith: It was a meeting of independent truck drivers, in Charleston, South Carolina, who transport shipping containers from the port to various locations. They are faced with near-term elimination, i.e., bankruptcy, due to high fuel prices and below-cost payment for mileage from the port. I was

invited to speak to the meeting as a representative of Lyndon LaRouche, and to outline LaRouche's proposals for economic reconstruction.

EIR: What did you tell them?

Smith: I discussed LaRouche's approach for dealing with the imminent global financial collapse. I explained that LaRouche alone had been able to identify this crisis, had warned about it for some time, and tried to give them some sense about LaRouche's method that has led him to be right when others have been wrong.

EIR: In Los Angeles, many workers there who are on strike seem to have bought the propaganda that the economy is in unparalleled prosperity, and they just need to get their fair share of the pie. What was the reaction in Charleston?

Smith: One of the organizers of that meeting reported that in 1971, diesel fuel cost about 31¢ a gallon, and now it costs about \$1.60. In 1971, a new tractor for a rig cost \$29,000; now it costs \$116,000. In 1971, they received more than \$1 a mile to move shipping containers; for the same container, they now get 76¢. In 1971, a pair of new front tires cost \$200; today, it costs \$950. One man commented that two years ago, his gross income was more than \$200,000; this year it's barely \$50,000. They're not striking for a bigger piece of the pie; they striking for their survival.

EIR: Why were you invited?

Smith: The reason they invited me was to give them the bigger picture, so that they could situate their fight within a broader global perspective. The most interesting discussions were on the Lincoln-Douglass debates, outlined in the latest *New Federalist*, and, more broadly, what LaRouche means by the nature of physical economy and the nature of man.

They are already in motion; they don't need to be told to move. They want to learn how to think, to be able to defend themselves effectively, and they want to learn LaRouche's method.

EIR: I understand that there was some controversy in the meeting. Was it in response to your remarks?

Smith: The meeting became very passionate over how they could win this fight, and how they had to organize if they were to have a chance to win it.

EIR: Are they prepared to start organizing outside their immediate circles?

Smith: I emphasized that they had to reach out, to talk to other layers of the population: churches, clubs, freemasonic lodges, seniors, farmers. That they have to form alliances.

They don't view any of the current Presidential candidates as allies in dealing with the problems they face. So, many truckers were eager to take a lot of material to get out among other groups.

Interview: Robert Bates

Independent Truckers Are Fighting To Survive

Robert Bates, in South Carolina, is the national founder of the United Container Movers Association. He was interviewed by Marianna Wertz on Oct. 18.

EIR: What are you fighting for in the United Container Movers Association?

Bates: We're fighting for a union contract, with the Teamsters. Our fight is a complicated one. We're fighting to be reclassified by the Federal government, as employees, rather than contractors. Because all that does, is keep us from getting any kind of benefits. Since the deregulation of trucking, it's been a steady downhill battle from that point on. It's gotten to the point now that we're starving to death.

EIR: What are people making as independent truckers?

Bates: When I started in the business in the early 1970s, we were getting \$25 a trailer—we call it "per bump." For each trailer we hook to and move from Point A to Point B, we got \$25 back in 1977-78. Today, we're making \$35 a bump. This is an industry that hasn't seen any kind of cost-of-living increases at all. Everything is skyrocketing around us. Ninety percent of my members don't have health insurance for their kids and their families. There's no guarantees for an independent. You work, or you don't work. If you don't work, you don't get no money.

EIR: How long are you on the road?

Bates: These guys are on the road 50-80 hours a week, to try to bring home enough money to pay their house payment, and for maintenance for their truck on the weekend.

EIR: What has the oil price increase done to you?

Bates: It's killed us. It's literally taken what little profit we were making, if we were making any at all, and just took it away from us. Now, a lot of these guys don't realize what it costs to operate a truck. They're just driving themselves into a hole.

If you call around to some of the truck dealerships, you look at Western Star, which opened up a brand new plant right here in Charleston, S.C., in Summerville. The community gave them tax breaks, to put a plant here and put our people to work. Two weeks ago, the plant folded up. No truck orders. Nobody is buying trucks. The banks are overwhelmed with