

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

repos [repossessing collateral], because these guys are going out of business left and right.

EIR: Yes, the economy is shutting down. You know that Lyndon LaRouche is saying that the big blowout is here, this is the crash.

Bates: Well, I tend to agree with him. But the steamship lines continue to post a profit. They had it on the Internet a couple of weeks ago. Every one of them across the board is 17, 19% better than they did last year. They continue to turn a profit. They're able to control their rates. If they need to increase their rates with increased operating costs, they just go to the customer and say, "Okay, this is it." They just raised their rates two weeks ago from \$450 to \$750 on shipping an over-seas container.

But we don't have the power to do that. Because we have to abide by the anti-trust laws in America, according to the FTC [Federal Trade Commission], because each of us, as they say, is an independent business, because we're independent contractors.

EIR: Has that always been the case?

Bates: Yes.

EIR: And now the Teamsters want to organize you as part of the union, but you have to change who you are?

Bates: Yes, we've got to be employees. In order for us to have any protection under the Constitution, or any of the NLRB [National Labor Relations Board] protections, we've got to be classified as employees. Right now, we don't have any rights.

EIR: So, how do you get that?

Bates: We do exactly what you're doing. Putting pressure on the government to change it. If it comes down to it, we're going to have to get America involved. We're going to have to shut America down.

EIR: When I last talked with you, it was Oct. 4, the day of the nationwide protests, and you said, "This is just a warning of what's to come. If they don't straighten it out, and the government doesn't get involved, they're going to see a collapse of the whole thing."

Bates: Sure they are, and it's coming on. It's like a freight train and it's coming downhill. If somebody don't wake up—Gore or Bush, or whoever the hell they're going to put in office—you haven't heard a mention of that. They're too busy talking about Medicaid and prescriptions for old people.

EIR: They aren't talking about the economy, except to say it's wonderful.

Bates: They aren't talking about the truckers. We had a big rally in Washington on March 22. We got a bill before the [South Carolina] House, H.R. 1525. We got 102 Senators

sponsoring that bill. Everybody should be behind that bill. All the steamship lines are foreign-owned. These are foreign countries coming over here, controlling all of America's trucking. That's not good!

EIR: Realizing all of this, what LaRouche has said is that, unless his policies and what he stands for gets power in this country, soon, we're not going to have a country.

Bates: Right.

EIR: You look at the Middle East, you look at the real state of the U.S. economy, which truckers represent, you know that's true.

Bates: We're the bottom of the food chain. We're where it all begins. It begins with the farmers, then the farmers depend on us to get it to market. The farmers are hurting just as bad as we are, but at least they get some kind of government subsidy. We don't even get that. The railroad gets it, the airlines get it. But the truckers just get dumped on.

EIR: Are the independents preparing more protests now?

Bates: I don't know what our next move is. I know today that they're meeting with the AFL-CIO to get some organizing money, to help with this drive. The reason they had the protest in Savannah—Monday, Tuesday, and today—was because the state port of Georgia implemented a new \$4 million computer system, container-tracking system, that doesn't work. So, these guys were backed out on the road for four to five miles, trying to get in the gate of the Ports Authority. These guys get paid by the bump, by how many trailers they pull. They were only getting two and three trailers a day.

How do you live on that? You can't support a family on that, and it was all because everybody uses us as a guinea pig. Those guys working the gate, working the port, and the bigwigs in the office with the suits and ties, they get their check every Friday, no matter what happens. We don't. We have to work to get our money. And we do all the work. We are forced to do free labor in the ports, which is a form of slavery. Anything that you do for free, you're forced to work for free without compensation, look it up in the dictionary, that's slavery.

We're forced to do that every day. We have to take the steamship line equipment to the repair to get it fixed, to make it roadworthy. We've got to sit there and load the box for free. We've got to sit in line for free. This is hours and hours of unpaid time.

EIR: You're being reduced to the level of the Third World, which is now the pride of globalization.

Bates: It's unbelievable, that the truckers of America are treated like this in the year 2000.

EIR: It's time to rise up.

Bates: We are rising up. This has been a 15-year process

for me. I have personally been involved in it, working with different associations and trying to get these guys together. Three years ago, I realized that one port couldn't do it by itself. Because every time we tried to do something in Charleston, they'd just divert the ship somewhere else and the next port would have a heyday. They would get all the work and we'd starve and then after we all went back and didn't have no money, then they'd bring the ships back in.

It took me three years and a computer to put together the leaders from around the country, to get in touch with these guys, the different leaders of each association as I have in Charleston—little guys that are tired of the crap and want to stick together and say, "Look, enough is enough."

When I contacted these guys around the country, from Baltimore, Jacksonville, Savannah, Virginia, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Seattle, and Houston, I called a meeting of all the leaders from different ports around the country.

EIR: When was that?

Bates: This was Dec. 4, 1999. That will be a day, when, once all this happens, that will be our birthday. That will be the day we started all this. These guys flew in, drove in, whatever they could do to get here. When the Teamsters heard that we were having that meeting, they called me and they said, "Let us come to that meeting. We think we could help you." Of course, we were excited about that.

That's what it's going to take, all the ports working together to get these steamship lines to raise their rates, get the Federal government to change our status from independent contractors to employees.

EIR: But, you know, if the whole economy goes the way the Internet stocks are today, there won't be anything to organize.

Bates: That's true.

EIR: That's why we're saying, find out what the policy has to be at the top, at the same time that you organize.

Bates: Exactly.

Interview: Jim Stewart

The Port Is Trying To Starve the Drivers Out

Jim Stewart heads the Savannah Port Truckers Association in Savannah, Georgia. He led a protest of independent port truckers, who shut down the Savannah port over a labor dispute beginning on Oct. 23, which is ongoing as we go to print.

Stewart is also a board member of the Maritime Workers Advancement Association. He was interviewed by Marianna Wertz on Oct. 18.

EIR: I understand you've shut down the Port of Savannah for several days.

Stewart: For the first couple of days, there was very little of anything in here, just a few company trucks and some out-of-state trucks that were coming in, but they had used a lot of those last week, because it was so backed up with the new computer system. The lines were three to four miles long outside the port gates.

EIR: Because the computer system wasn't functioning?

Stewart: Exactly. It's still messed up.

EIR: What is wrong with the computer?

Stewart: They spent almost \$4 million on a new system. They did this once before, when they spent a million or so and the system never ran right and they had to finally scrap it. This system gives the port control over what everybody is doing in the ports. It's the port system, not the steamship line system. They implemented something without properly training everybody on it. Instead of working the bugs out of it, or starting with one lane, or one line, or bringing it in when the freight slacked down, they just implemented it.

They knew what it was going to do. We had a protest rally here, along with 15 other ports on Oct. 4, and they had bragged to the media about the new system, which was going to start Oct. 2. Just as soon as they found out we were going to have the rally on Oct. 4, they announced on the news that there had been a glitch in the system, and they decided not to start it Oct. 2. They knew, if they started it that day, and we had a protest rally on Oct. 5, with the trucks backed up for miles, it would have blown up in their face then.

EIR: What are you demanding?

Stewart: What we want is for them to do something about it. They did something about it when they introduced this thing. They should back off of it or go back to handwriting, or do something until after the peak season is over with. The first of the year, freight slows down out of the port. At least wait until then, if they want to implement this new system.

EIR: Have they been responsive?

Stewart: No, they will not talk to the port truck drivers. Their smug program all week has been to starve the drivers out. They've been so boisterous and smug, about how there shouldn't be more than 20, 25 radicals out there Monday and it will probably be all over with by lunch. So they didn't expect to see all the drivers that they've seen out here, picketing the port.

EIR: How many people do you have out there?

Stewart: We've had almost 200 at one time. Now, we're doing a different program now. We made an announcement this morning, to let the drivers go back to work who want to work, the ones that want to stand out here, stand out here. We're going to do a rotation system. We're putting placards and picket signs, on the side of the trucks, and letting the trucks go into the port. We're taking the protest into the port, and to the customers across town and everywhere else.

EIR: Are you tying this to the question of the gas price, and the fact you can't make a living anymore?

Stewart: Oh, yes, it all ties into it. Even before they implemented this program, last week, the guys couldn't make it off what they were making. The freight rates are so low, and the waiting times were ridiculous even before this started. It is at the point where everybody is just about to lose everything they've got.

When they implemented this, that was the straw that broke the camel's back. You cannot sit out here for hours waiting to get one box in and one box out.

EIR: What do you get for a box?

Stewart: They're getting anything from \$20 to \$35 a box to go into port and to take a box out of the port. One of the guys right here now, he just pulled up, and he's been in there four and a half hours, to get one box in and one box out.

EIR: In Mr. LaRouche's paper, and what he's saying is that this kind of thing is part of the breakdown of the whole financial system that's going on worldwide. The stock markets are dropping drastically all over the world.

Stewart: I just caught something about that on the news. We're all in this for the long run. Everybody from all over the nation.

EIR: How are the drivers doing?

Stewart: There are several girls that own trucks out here. One has three kids, she's three months behind in payments on the truck. She didn't need this to start last week. We've got public opinion on our side. We told everybody this morning to bring pictures of your kids. We're going to put them on poster boards and put them on the side of this motor home we have parked on the side of the road. We want people to see what this is affecting. We want to put a face on it.

These people will get their big executive check on Friday, they'll be in Jacksonville, Charleston, who knows?—for the weekend, playing golf. These people, here, are going to be trying to figure out, over the weekend, what they can put on the table to eat, and what's going to be repossessed next.

EIR: That's America today.

Stewart: And that's disgusting. That's why I'm in this, and I'm in it to the end.

LaRouche: Financier Takeover Would Be Tantamount to Treason

The following letter was sent to Lyndon LaRouche by Camden, New Jersey City Councilman Ali Sloan El, Sr. Councilman Sloan El is leading a fight against the attempted takeover of cities in New Jersey under State Senate Bill 1507, also known as the "Municipal Rehabilitation and Economic Revitalization Act." The letter, and LaRouche's response, were read at a rally there, on Oct. 19:

I am writing today to discuss with you New Jersey State Senate Bill 1507, pending before the New Jersey Legislature, and to officially ask for your written position on American democracy and the right of a municipality to choose its elected representatives. Senate Bill 1507, as it is currently written, effectively abolishes representative government in New Jersey and renders the citizens' right to vote for their local elected officials worthless. Gov. Christine Todd Whitman has decided that the American citizens are unfit to govern and must be subjected to colonialization. This bill undermines the precepts of the Declaration of Independence and the United States Constitution, and, if passed, promises to establish policy that will eat away at the fabric of democracy.

The effects of this bill can be seen in excerpts from the bill as follows:

"... The governing body shall act as advisers to the Chief Management Officer (CMO). . . . The CMO . . . may at any time abolish the position of municipal auditor, attorney, business administrator, or other chief administrative officer, department director, or a member of any board, agency, commission, or authority of any entity whose members are appointed by the governing body, mayor, or other chief executive. . . . The Chief Management Officer may abolish positions in the municipality . . . at any time."

According to the landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court of 1801 in the case of *Marbury v. Madison*, it was determined that the Constitution of the United States is the supreme law of the land and must prevail over any other law, Federal, state, or local, which conflicts with it. In this instance, the state is not only attempting through S-1507 to override the Constitution by usurping the vested powers of local elected officials (therefore surreptitiously overriding the citizen's right to vote), but it is also attempting to establish policy that forbids the citizens through their representatives