

Supply Chains in the Transport Industry

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The road transport industry is characterized and impacted by multiple supply chains and contracting chains which often lead to pressures on margins that can leave transport workers unable to exercise their fundamental rights at work.

Road transport workers in road freight and passenger transport, both intercity and urban, have some of the highest injury and fatality rates.

Thousands of people die in truck-related crashes each year around the world. This is because low cost contracts by wealthy retailers and manufacturers are putting pressure on transport operators and drivers to speed, drive for longer than is allowed and overload vehicles. We must stop this carnage now and the way to do it is tackle the pressure from the top.

Customers at the top of the transport chain are the ones who set rates and conditions. There is a need to hold them accountable for safety along the entire transport supply chain.

The ILO Tripartite Sectoral Meeting on Safety and Health in the Road Transport Sector in Geneva on 12–16 October 2015, was an encouraging first step towards realizing this goal.

Employers, governments and trade unions at the International Labour Organization have backed a resolution focusing on safe and fair pay rates for transport workers as a way to protect them and other road users from death and injury. Employers, governments and trade unions agreed to develop an international code of practice which uses the Australian Safe Rates legislation as a model.

What is this model? In 2012, the Australian Transport Workers' Union (TWU) was successful in passing landmark safe rates legislation. It was part of the TWU's Safe rates campaign to address problems faced by members in the trucking industry.

How did they obtain such a result?

In Australia, many truck drivers drive long distances for up to 17 hours a day legally. They suffer from the same long hours and lack of sleep that affect truck drivers all over the world.

In Australia, truck drivers are 15 times more likely to be killed while they're working than the average worker. More than 330 people are killed each year in road crashes involving trucks.

Over the past 20 years of globalisation and deregulation, the cost of road transport has declined. Low rates are paid to transport operators by the major transport customers at the top of the chain. These low rates translate to even lower rates of pay for drivers.

The move to drive down rates, and pressure from employers for unrealistic route times that demand long hours and narrow delivery windows, puts transport operators and drivers under tremendous pressure, and result in incentives to:

- o speed
- o overload trucks
- o neglect vehicle maintenance

- o drive while fatigued

TWU particularly targeted the mega-retailers and other major transport customers which have the economic power to drive rates down, which puts transport operators and drivers under tremendous pressure and results in incentives to speed, drive while fatigued, and forego vehicle maintenance.

The TWU mobilised and trained members and delegates to fight for the passage of Safe Rates legislation, called the Road Safety Remuneration Act. Through member lobbying, bargaining pressure, go-slows, blockades, public protest and activity – and through a focused and comprehensive campaign over a number of years – in 2012 the TWU was able to win the necessary support to pass the legislation from major transport companies, industry associations, unions, members of government, and the broader community.

What the Australians achieved, and what we need, is to hold the customers at the top of the transport chain, who set rates and conditions, accountable for safety along their entire transport supply chain.

Through legislation and trade union action, we could obtain that when rates are determined for road transport, driver safety and the safety of all road users is the starting point.

Australia is not the only example in France also the law on the fight against the fraud in posting of workers and against illegal work of July 2014, made the contractor jointly responsible towards unfair social practices of direct as indirect subcontractors.
