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## **Port Truck Drivers Start Strike in LA to be Employees Not Independent Contractors**

(Associated Press)

Los Angeles, April 28 (EFEUSA) - Truckers ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach (California), most of them Hispanic, today began a two-day strike to be considered employees and not independent contractors.

Truckers accuse transport companies wrongly classify them to avoid paying the benefits they would as employees.

"They want us to be contractors to ignore the costs of maintenance and repair of vehicles and legal benefits that would accrue to us as employees," said Dennis Martinez, a spokesman for the truckers.

The drivers, most of them Hispanic, complain that the classification as independent contractors results in them earning less than they should with salaries close to minimum wage.

However, Transport companies argue that behind the protest is the interest of unions to affiliate to independent contractors.

"There are literally hundreds of unfilled vacancies for drivers in companies throughout Southern California," he said in a statement Alex Cherin, executive director of the Association of Transportation trucks Bay.

"If a driver prefers to be an employee rather than an independent contractor, he or she can do so," argued Cherin.

However, groups argue that this form of payment has led to a reduction in income and create a base of low-wage workers.

"Like many jobs in the United States that have deteriorated, drive a truck was once a stable job and unionized middle class," argued Justice For Port Drivers.

The organization argues that with this system of independent contractors, wages of these truckers are down 30% from 1980 to 1995.

According to data presented by the same entity, a contractor has a net income 18% less than that of an employee, two and a half times more likely to not have health insurance and has three times less likely to have some kind of retirement benefit.

This strike comes after last November; Truckers at three companies of the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach realized another 36-hour strike to protest the same working conditions.

The Port of Los Angeles lived another strike, in this case eight days after employees at the port complex and the company reached an agreement to eliminate outsourcing services to other ports in the U.S., as well as better pay and contribution to pensions.

Los Angeles has the largest container port traffic in the country, with traffic in 2013 the equivalent of 7.9 million 20-foot long containers, followed by the Port of Long Beach, with 6.73 million in 2013.