

MHD - 5/18/17
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Bruce Jefferson



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May 18, 2017

Dear Mayors Garcetti and Garcia,

My name is Bruce Jefferson and for the past 3 years I've been working for the California Cartage Warehouse that sits on city property at the Port of Los Angeles. I work there with my younger brother Ernest. I have 3 children and 6 stepchildren, and have been with my partner for the last 15 years. I share an apartment with her and 3 of my stepchildren in Long Beach. I'm proud to say one of my sons is a Marine currently stationed in Afghanistan. He's been there working hard to keep this country safe.

When I started, I worked inside the warehouse loading and unloading containers full of every item imaginable, such as toys, clothes, tools, BBQ pits and patio furniture for companies like Sears, Kmart, Amazon, and Lowes. Every year we handle a big shipment of equipment like military equipment, generators and trucks for the United States military that goes overseas.

Now they have me working outside the warehouse as a tire chocker. A tire chocker is someone who places stoppers behind the wheels of these very heavy containers so they do not roll and hurt somebody.

Working in a warehouse can be dangerous, so we try to make sure the company follows all of the government's safety laws. Last year, one of my co-workers suffered from the high heat conditions in the warehouse. He lost consciousness and was laying on the dock in the sun, when we told the supervisor his response was to cover him with cardboard boxes and he sent the worker home. They were completely unprepared to deal with heat illness. Unfortunately, the company cuts too many corners. The machines we operate are ill-maintained. The company didn't provide us proper safety equipment like steel-toe boots. It gets dangerously hot inside the warehouse. The roof leaks causing slippery concrete floors that turn into flooded hazards. We have to be careful not to fall or trip on the big potholes that are all over the place. Dust and dirt pollute the air that chokes us. These are some of the reasons we contacted Cal-OSHA hoping they would come and inspect our facility. A couple of years ago, a government investigator inspected the warehouse and found a lot of problems. California Cartage was fined and told it had to make changes in order to comply with work safety law.

But the company was slow to make any changes so my co-workers and I filed a complaint again with Cal-OSHA last year. When the Cal-OSHA inspector came to check up on California Cartage, the inspector found the warehouse was still breaking safety laws and fined the company again for being unsafe. Things have gotten somewhat better only because they now give steel-toe boots to all workers, but we know that if we let our guard down, the company will start cutting corners again and go right back to the way things were before.

As I said, I have worked at this warehouse for 3 years, but the company still tells me that I'm a "temporary worker". Before I was a tire chocker, every morning, California Cartage would make me stand in line with hundreds of my fellow temp workers to see if one of the supervisors would pick me. Sometimes I would be standing around half an hour before being picked to work or sent home and it was time that I wouldn't get paid for. This is something that still happens every morning to my co-workers. Every day we face the stress of whether we are going to be chosen to work or sent home. We have a saying that if you are a African American worker then you are the last one hired and first one fired. It's degrading and reminds me that we still have a long way to go in this country before all workers, regardless of skin color, are treated with dignity and respect.

I wanted to tell you my story so you would understand why I've been organizing with my fellow warehouse workers to become union and win justice for us and our families. We have testified at Port of Los Angeles Harbor Commission meetings about what is going on at the warehouse. We have also met with city councilmembers in Long Beach. We filed a lawsuit against California Cartage because the company pays most of us below LA's Living Wage Ordinance. We have gone on strike to protest our unfair treatment and disrespect. Now we are even organizing with the port drivers at California Cartage and making plans to go on strike again because we recognize that we are stronger together.

It does not make sense to me that a company like California Cartage that treats its workers like it does and has repeatedly broken the law, should get the privilege of leasing public property from the Port of LA. If I don't follow the rules in my lease, my landlord might try and evict me and my family from our apartment. Since you are the company's landlord, please get California Cartage to follow the rules or get a tenant that will run the warehouse safely and treat us workers with respect.

Sincerely,



Bruce Jefferson

