

Vanderbilt Students of Nonviolence

vandynonviolence.com

Taxi Driver Movement Update

by Braden C.

NEWSLETTER - October 2008

edited by Isabelle M.

Taxi drivers in Nashville are some of the lowest paid workers in the entire country. After accounting for all of their expenses, their



hourly wage comes out to \$2.40/ hour, barely one-third of the federal minimum wage of \$6.55/hour. This is possible due to an exploitative system in which drivers are technically not employees of the taxi companies, but are classified as "independent contractors." Because of this loophole, the taxi companies are not required to assume many of the risks inherent to the taxi industry, such as liability if a driver is injured in an accident. While the taxi companies cover the passengers, the drivers are personally responsible for their own health insurance, providing and maintaining their own vehicle, and car insurance. Each cab driver must pay their company a \$175 weekly fee for a city-issued permit that includes a Utah-based dispatch service (which drivers are responsible for maintaining) and the right to put the company name on their vehicle. This same permit costs the cab company \$235 annually.

Did you know?

The average driver's workday is over 13 hours, earning a gross income of only \$105.77 (this includes tips)

If a driver works 365 days each year and an average of 13 hours a day, his or her total income would still be less than \$12,000

75% of drivers do not have health insurance, and only 32% of drivers' families are covered

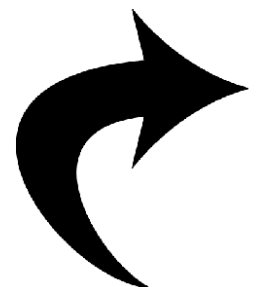
These statistics are not simply the inevitable result of the free-market; they are the result of a grossly unfair government-supported system in which drivers are forced to bear all of the risk inherent in the industry, while the taxi companies make a guaranteed profit off of a city-issued license. The Vanderbilt community can no longer ignore this economic injustice.

Why Should I Care?

by Lauren M.

So, taxi drivers in the city of Nashville make on average \$2.40 an hour. That's horrible, but how is that really your problem? The taxi service in Nashville is absolutely essential to the infrastructure of the city. If this system of transportation were not in existence, can you imagine what our city would be like? A major metropolitan area like Nashville, with an airport and large businesses and quite a few colleges, would absolutely fall apart without the taxi service. Besides that, imagine your own life for a moment without the taxi service. Think about how hard it would be to escape the Vandy-bubble if you couldn't call a taxi. It certainly seems safe to say that taxi drivers provide an essential service in Nashville. Surely we all agree that they ought to be paid accordingly. And if they aren't being paid accordingly, then something ought to be done about it, right? Of course!

But why should you personally step up and take action? Because it is our responsibility as citizens of this world to take action when we see that an injustice has occurred. When we live in America, a country where we are guaranteed "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness," it is important that every threat we see to these basic rights be acted upon. When we see that someone else's rights are being taken away, we have a responsibility to help them if we are to be deserving of the rights that we have. When Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was in jail in Birmingham, he wrote that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." The suffering of another human being, whether they are halfway around the world or sitting in a taxi right outside our dorm, has a very real impact on society as a whole. We must therefore step up to right the wrong.



What does VSN stand for?

In a year when it is fashionable to belittle the importance of community organizations, Vanderbilt Students of Nonviolence is determined to prove the contrary.

We are organizing students to resist injustice by utilizing the tactics and philosophy of ahimsa, or nonviolence. Far from being just another leftist-letter writing campaign, VSN is committed to building a sustained activist infrastructure here in Nashville. Our focus is local, as we feel that change must begin at home.



In keeping with that vision, VSN spends much of its energy organizing our community. That means developing leadership among the student body. That means networking and building relationships with power brokers in Nashville. That means strategizing campaigns with the same dedication and discipline that underwrote successful social movements in our nation's past.

VSN understands the impact that college youth can have. Our access to resources and the hopeful attitude that characterizes our demographic is *potential energy* waiting to be expended in cause of social justice. Our mission is to utilize that energy by reversing the culture of apathy many associate with Vanderbilt. We have met far too many good hearted individuals that have used that excuse as a reason for their own inaction. The only way to change the culture of the community is to first change yourself.

This is not a pipe dream. Every year, Vanderbilt students demonstrate their commitment to the betterment of their community, by donating hundreds of thousands of dollars to charity. Our philanthropy is a testament to our willingness to devote time and money to those in need. VSN hopes to make use of this good will, not through philanthropy, but through the support of social justice reform. **As Martin Luther King Jr. said, "True compassion is more than flinging a coin to a beggar; it is not haphazard and superficial. It comes to see that an edifice which produces beggars needs restructuring."**

Far from a radical concept, nonviolent reform has a history at Vanderbilt. Juniors and Seniors will remember the Living Wage movement in 2006. A group of activist students organized to pressure the Vanderbilt administration to come to the table and drastically raise the wages for Vanderbilt's employees. This campaign succeeded in educating and energizing the student body, proving that we do have the environment necessary to sustain a social justice campaign. Although the living wage movement did not achieve an inflation-anchored living wage for Vanderbilt workers, they did help build an infrastructure necessary to continue the struggle for justice in Nashville. VSN has teamed up with the Living Wage group to advance the cause of fair wages for Vanderbilt workers.

Our main focus right now is supporting Nashville's Taxi Drivers, who are also organizing for higher wages. We intend to raise the consciousness of fellow students to the plight of the drivers whose services we often depend on. Hopefully, education will lead to action, and the Vanderbilt community will prove their capacity to come together in the cause of social justice.

Meetings:

Wednesdays, 6:30-8:00pm | Sarratt 110

www.vandyonviolence.com

vandyonviolence@gmail.com