

London bus drivers launch crowdfund appeal for family of murdered French bus driver: “Help the family of Philippe Monguillot!”

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Bus drivers in London have launched a fundraising appeal for the family of Philippe Monguillot, a 59-year-old driver who was murdered in France after asking passengers to comply with new laws on wearing face masks.

Monguillot was attacked in the French city of Bayonne on July 5. Prosecutors say he was dragged from his bus and kicked repeatedly in the head after he asked four men to wear face coverings to protect passengers from COVID-19. Three days later, he was declared brain-dead. His family made the harrowing decision to switch off life-support.

An outpouring of sympathy followed Monguillot’s death. In Bayonne, his wife Veronique and their three daughters organised a protest. After word spread on social media, more than 6,000 people filled the streets of the city on July 8, wearing white shirts in the driver’s memory.

In Paris, Bordeaux, Strasbourg, and other cities, drivers observed one minute’s silence. Monguillot’s colleagues at the Chronoplus company struck that week demanding greater protection, hitting services across Bayonne, Anglet and Biarritz.

London bus drivers launched the crowdfund for Monguillot’s family two weeks ago. The text of their appeal explains, “This tragic death hit especially hard, considering the fact that Phillippe Monguillot was just doing his duty, trying to comply with local laws and trying to do his job properly for his passengers’ safety.”

It concludes with a call for international class solidarity, “This fundraiser is not only personal, but I hope that bus drivers all around the world could unite on this. We can show our support for the family of the late Phillippe Monguillot and how we are in this together.”

Wednesday’s attack on a bus driver in Bournemouth, in the south of England, shows the common problems facing drivers internationally. The driver was attacked by a passenger who tried to board without a face mask. He hit the driver in the head with a beer can, knocking him to the ground, before fleeing. Luckily, the driver received only minor injuries, but without a conductor or any other assistance, many drivers are fearful.

Anti-social behaviour against drivers has grown in the past

decade, fuelled by deepening inequality and social distress, including mental illness and substance abuse. But coronavirus confronts drivers with a far greater threat, as their lives are deliberately sacrificed to protect the profits of the major transport companies. Drivers have been forced to work without basic personal protective equipment (PPE), with no regular testing or contact tracing. In London, as bus workers began dying in record numbers—33 were killed in April and May—Transport for London (TfL), the transport companies, and Unite the union blocked vital safety measures and concealed information.

As the Johnson government’s return-to-work agenda proceeds, these dangers are growing. The crowdfund appeal for the family of Philippe Monguillot is a sign of the growing resistance of the international working class. The text of the appeal includes a link to the *World Socialist Web Site* article on the death of Philippe Monguillot that was published in French and English. The WSWs is being read by growing numbers of workers because it provides a global socialist strategy for the working class to fight, breaking through the sectional and national divisions created by capitalism.

The London bus driver who launched the appeal (who wishes to remain anonymous) spoke to WSWs about why he started the appeal.

WSWS: Why did you start a crowdfund appeal for the family of Philippe Monguillot?

RS: When this happened it really hit me. This bus driver was only doing his job, and if this happened to me, I would want people to help my wife to at least pay for a funeral and help my family. I just wanted to start an appeal to help the family through this hard time.

WSWS: In the crowdfund appeal, you wrote that bus drivers around the world are “in this together.” Could you explain this?

RS: I’ve worked in different countries in Europe as a bus driver. For example, some of the companies in Poland try to make the drivers clean up the buses after they have finished their duties, without giving them proper PPE and cleaning stuff. Companies don’t care about the drivers and they create a hostile environment for drivers to work in.

In Philippe Monguillot's case, they told him that he is responsible for passengers not wearing a face mask. And when the passengers beat him up, they probably would not have faced any consequences, if not for a huge protest in Bayonne following his death. That is a huge problem.

WSWS: Could you explain more about what happened following Philippe Monguillot's death?

RS: Two days after he was admitted to hospital, his family raised a protest. They called in their friends and these friends called their friends, and finally a lot of people joined to protest in the streets. It was in front of the police department in Bayonne, a huge protest with people wearing white shirts in memory of Philippe Monguillot. When this went to the media, the police finally began to search for the attackers.

From a Facebook group of Polish bus drivers, I know that news of Philippe being killed for trying to ask passengers to wear a facemask, went off with a huge bang. Some of the drivers in Poland went on strike and were very vocal for the companies to enforce face masks with proper staff. So, his death sparked international outrage.

On the London buses we don't have any help. Transport for London issued a press release about one month ago saying that proper staff, such as transit officers and police officers, would enforce wearing masks. I haven't seen them once on my bus. If you go on the buses, sometimes there will be an announcement that TfL and police are checking buses for wearing face masks, but I haven't seen them, not even on a really busy route. It's dangerous for us and the passengers.

WSWS: TfL claimed there would be limits on the number of passengers to ensure social distancing. What has happened with that?

RS: They said we can't enforce that. It's impossible for us. Sometimes when I try to enforce passenger capacity, the passengers become angry. I've been assaulted a few times, luckily only verbally, but TfL doesn't do anything about that. They tell us to report what they call "heavy loadings" to our bus controllers, but they just say, "don't pick up any more passengers." And when you go to the next bus stop because people want to get off, some people just ignore you and will get onto the bus. TfL doesn't bother about passenger capacity, so it's only the drivers' problem.

WSWS: What is the sentiment among bus drivers about the situation they are being forced to work in?

RS: Most of the drivers are not really happy about what's going on. A lot of us think it is huge BS they're telling us. One day they are saying, "masks are not needed" and the next day they are telling us that we should wear masks. There is no consistency. I feel threatened for our safety.

WSWS: Since the resumption of normal rosters, have you heard of any workers who have become ill?

RS: Management is trying to hide this from us, but we know that some workers got sick. The situation is really grim. At Holloway garage, anecdotally we hear there are many drivers

off sick. They are checking temperatures for every driver at the entrance of the garage. This has been happening since Monday. If they start doing that, it means something, because Metroline is not known for reacting fast about anything.

I read the WSWS article about the concealment by the company of the deaths at Cricklewood garage [in April and May] and I was really shocked.

WSWS: What is your attitude to the unions?

RS: When I reported to our union representative in April that our buses are not cleaned properly, he told me to just fill out a bus defect card. Even though I reported it, nothing changed. The next day it was messy in the cabin. I had to clean it myself. Now they are leaving disinfectant gel in the cabin and telling us that we only have to spray it once and everything will be okay.

They were telling us that PPE was not required. Every driver knew this was a complete nonsense. Nine out of 10 drivers bought PPE for themselves and some of the drivers were told by managers they shouldn't be wearing facemasks because they strike fear in the passengers. So, there's a huge pandemic going on and they are telling us that we are striking fear in the passengers and not caring about our health, or anything. The union was compliant with this. They said the managers were right about that. It's criminal behaviour.

WSWS: What would you like to say to drivers about why they should donate to the crowdfund campaign?

RS: Basically, everybody could be in the position of Philippe Monguillot. I think it is our responsibility to show that we drivers are one group and we face the same problems every day. Even though our companies try to tell us that Metroline drivers should be against Arriva drivers, Arriva drivers should be against London United, it's not like that. It's us versus them. That's what I want to say to the drivers. Just open your hearts and help the family of Philippe Monguillot.

*To donate to the crowdfund appeal please visit:
<https://www.gofundme.com/f/fundraise-in-memory-of-philippe-monguillot>*



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[wsws.org/contact](https://www.wsws.org/contact)