

Socialist Party's Moe Manir expels London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee leader from Facebook group

By Laura Tiernan
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Miles Driver, a leading member of the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee, has been excluded from the Bus Drivers in London Facebook Group (BDLFG) for opposing the Unite union's collusion with Transport for London (TfL). Unite's corporatist partnership with TfL has resulted in the deaths of 35 bus workers from COVID-19.

Miles was removed from the Facebook group on October 8 by Moe Manir, a Unite safety rep at Walworth garage and a prominent member of the pseudo-left Socialist Party (SP). Manir describes himself on Twitter as a "trade unionist and socialist" who is "down to earth" and "passionate in organising workers collectively."

Manir has refused to provide any public explanation for his anti-democratic actions in expelling Miles from the group. Articles from the *World Socialist Web Site* have been systematically banned by the group's administrators and moderators, led by Manir and Unite London Branch Secretary Joanne Harris.

The Bus Drivers in London Facebook Group was founded by Manir in 2017 and grew rapidly in the early months of the pandemic. As drivers began dying, their colleagues took to social media, sharing information and demanding action. Anger reached boiling point, especially after Unite joined with the bus operators, TfL, and Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan to insist that personal protective equipment (PPE) was "not recommended."

Manir's Facebook group now has more than 4,500 members. He and the Socialist Party have used this platform to bolster their relations with Unite, blocking any political challenge to the union's deadly regime of collusion against bus workers.

Britain's political establishment has given due recognition to Manir's role in preventing a political rebellion by drivers against Unite. He has been promoted by newspapers including the *Guardian*, *Huffington Post* and Rupert Murdoch's *Times*. The *i* newspaper featured an article about Manir with the fitting headline, "The London bus driver who kept London moving throughout the coronavirus pandemic". He is described as a "Unite volunteer" who "became a key middle ground between workers and the union."

This "key middle ground" is occupied by members of various pseudo-left groups who function as a political police force against the working class, identifying signs of militant opposition and working to co-opt or suppress these in defence of the Labour and

trade union bureaucracy. Manir is typical of the "union activists" developed by the Socialist Party: loyal critics of the union bureaucracy who are later rewarded with a well-paid position as a convenor, full-time organiser, or lead official. Former Rail, Maritime and Transport union Assistant General Secretary Steve Hedley, former Public and Commercial Services union Assistant General Secretary Chris Baugh and UNISON National Executive Council member Roger Bannister are examples of this breed. But the SP also enjoys cosy relations with senior union officials, including Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey, a key ally of former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who has worked closely with the Johnson government throughout the pandemic.

The *i* newspaper describes Manir as being "at the helm of implementing important safety measures for bus drivers in London." Manir says, "One of the biggest victories was when we closed off the front doors... We said—look, we're not asking for the network to be shut down, we're just asking for safety measures."

Manir's comments are a tacit admission that he and the Socialist Party worked to suppress strike action against the bus companies' criminal negligence. The suspension of front door fare payment lasted little more than four weeks. It was resumed with Unite's blessing from May 23, as part of the Johnson government's reckless ending of the first national lockdown. Unite supported the return to normal rosters, echoing TfL's lying claims that drivers would be safe. Manir and the Socialist Party colluded with this deadly charade.

In September, Manir also appeared in a *Guardian* feature about the death of London bus driver Mervyn "Mally" Kennedy. Manir told the *Guardian*, "People were saying: 'We need to shut down the network,' ... Some drivers were saying: 'I'm not going to work—I'm off isolating.' There was a panic."

Manir's response to this outpouring of fear and anger among drivers (which he refers to contemptuously as "a panic") was, as the *Guardian* explains, to "redoubled his union organising efforts." The *Guardian* platforms Manir alongside Unite President John Murphy as a crusader for workers' safety. This is the same Murphy who issued joint letters with bus operators and TfL in April insisting that drivers did not need PPE. Seven health and safety reps demanded Murphy's sacking over the letters—Unite's response was to suspend the health and safety reps.

The SP's support for the pro-company unions is slavish. When a

Unite rep reportedly assaulted Manir in 2019 because Manir refused to let an unsafe bus leave the garage, the SP waged no campaign in the working class against this political thuggery. Manir has been suspended twice from Unite in retribution for his activism on safety issues, but the SP has continued its fawning role as political adviser to the bureaucracy, seeking to prevent workers from drawing the necessary political lessons and breaking from these moribund organisations.

In mid-September, Miles posted an open letter on the Bus Drivers in London Facebook Group about COVID-19 infections at Cricklewood bus garage, exposing Unite's cooperation with major safety breaches. Unite London Branch Secretary Joanne Harris responded with a hysterical attack on the rank-and-file committee. "They are a bunch of union bashers driving even more division into our industry," she declared.

Miles replied the following morning, "Joanne Harris says we are creating 'division'—yes, we are challenging Unite's brand of 'unity' with the companies and TfL." He continued, "Last Thursday, members of the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee issued a list of urgent safety demands on Metroline over infections at Cricklewood. Unite's response? Secret tripartite talks with Metroline and TfL with the cover-up of infections ongoing. I appeal to my fellow drivers to examine the facts and make up their own minds."

Unable to answer the committee's arguments, Harris resorted to censorship. She deleted the committee's statement and offered a pathetic excuse for the union's refusal to protect lives. "Unite doesn't have a crystal-ball," she declared. She described the rank-and-file safety committee as the work of "disgruntled" drivers "backed by the WSWs." On October 2, she deleted a follow-up statement by the committee, "For a London-wide strike to oppose the threat to life from COVID-19!"

The Socialist Party immediately intervened to protect Unite and block the growing influence of the rank-and-file committee. On October 8, Manir expelled Driver from the Facebook group and removed other bus drivers who had "liked" Miles' posts.

After the Rank-and-File Safety Committee alerted its members that Miles had been expelled and urged them to protest, the committee received an invitation to a Zoom meeting with Harris and her fellow administrators and moderators to "debate" Miles' expulsion.

Miles replied on October 15, "I have no wish to take part in the Zoom meeting you propose."

He continued, "There is nothing to debate in back-room discussions away from the eyes of your 4,500 members. If you are interested in democratic debate you will overturn your ban against me and readmit me to the Facebook group. Failing that, your Administrator must provide a written explanation for his/her decision to arbitrarily remove me from the group."

Miles called on the moderators to "overturn this shameful ban and reinstate me as a member", concluding, "The bus companies are already carrying out victimisations and suppressing our use of social media, and this must not be emulated on a workers' Facebook group."

The group's moderators and admins upheld their ban on Miles, refusing to provide any explanation for their decision. Manir's

Facebook group acts as a front for Unite, whose cronies, led by the Socialist Party, work to politically control and suppress discussion among bus drivers.

This entire degraded episode has exposed the role of the Socialist Party. After Harris's crude diatribe against Miles Driver, Manir's fellow SP member Andy Beadle stepped forward to provide a "left" gloss for Unite's attack on the rank-and-file committee:

"I'd ask all socialists and all workers—especially those who see the shortcomings in our union—to get active and help us improve Unite. Unite is democratic union and every member has the right to argue their point of view. Unite's biggest failing is it hasn't got enough active members. Its biggest advantage is it can potentially unite all drivers in action."

He concluded, "Please get active and help us fight the bosses. Don't try and build a rival organisation so we fight among ourselves." To which Harris replied, "Well said Andy."

Beadle's designation of Unite as a "democratic union" is staggering. The Socialist Party promotes the dangerous illusion that mass pressure from below can transform the unions into fighting organisations. But in every country the trade unions respond to mass pressure from workers by deepening their collusion with the companies and the state, and by stamping out any semblance of democracy.

The London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee has been established to mobilise the working class in direct opposition to the unions, the companies and TfL. Whereas the trade unions defend capitalism and insist "there is no alternative" to the slashing of wages, conditions and safety, the Rank-and-File Safety Committee is based on the principle that the needs of the working class must take priority over the profits of the transport companies and their major billionaire shareholders.

Since they expelled Miles Driver, the Bus Drivers in London Facebook Group has posted updated rules about "anti-union posts and comments": "Members may have legitimat [sic] concern of the union. Pls raise only constructive legit criticism. Pls do not slag union with the intent to disrupt workers organising as this may cause offence to members."

As far as Moe Manir and the Socialist Party are concerned, the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee is "illegitimate" and "disruptive" because it is organising workers independently of the pro-company unions. Their response to the committee—censorship, expulsion, and lies—are the very methods used by the Labour and trade union bureaucracy against any threat from below. We urge bus and transport workers who want to fight the resurgent coronavirus pandemic to contact the committee.



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