

Reinstate London bus driver Judith Katera! For united strike action to fight victimisations!

**The London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee
16 December 2020**

London-wide action must be organised by bus workers to demand the reinstatement of sacked Battersea driver Judith Katera. According to workers at the Battersea depot, the former Health and Safety rep was sacked last week by Abellio after she exposed alleged fraud by a former Unite convenor who was reportedly close to management.

Battersea depot is expected to deliver an overwhelming vote for strike action in defence of Katera in a “consultative” ballot held by Unite this week, on Wednesday and Thursday.

Workers can place no faith in the union. Unite would have preferred the entire matter be swept under the carpet, but they have been forced to feign concern due to the mounting anger of workers.

Unite officials, experts at holding meaningless “consultative” ballots, have no intention of waging the necessary campaign for Katera’s reinstatement. Even when bus drivers deliver a massive strike vote, our demands for action are shelved. This was the case with the London-wide ballot on driver fatigue in February and the same story has been repeated in ballots on COVID payments, driver pay and remote sign-on.

Abellio has sacked Katera just three weeks before Christmas, based on frame-up allegations by a former Unite convenor, two former union branch secretaries, and one other person. They allege that Katera, who is from Uganda, was racist toward a Somali bus driver—accusations which she vigorously denies. Katera has a long record of struggle for justice and equality for workers and opposes all forms of racism.

Drivers from Battersea say Katera has been set-up because she has evidence of wrongdoing by the former union officials. She was sacked by Abellio on

December 4 but was only informed on December 7. Extraordinarily, it was drivers who told her, not management. A grievance procedure by Katera against her accusers was dismissed by the company despite a mountain of evidence. Management sided 100 percent with the former Unite convenor. A subsequent appeal was also rejected, and Katera was sacked without due process—she was not even informed of the appeal decision against her. As one Battersea driver said, “even a murderer gets more justice than this.”

This must not be allowed to stand! Katera has been a London bus driver for 20 years. She was elected Health and Safety Rep at Battersea in 2017 and has fought to protect drivers’ welfare during the pandemic. She inspected buses to ensure they met cleanliness standards and demanded extra funding from management for cleaning communal areas. She kept in touch with workers who were off sick and delivered shopping to a driver with COVID-19.

But not even the most energetic local rep could overcome the damage done by Unite’s collaboration with Transport for London (TfL) and the bus companies. Drivers were left with no protection. In April, Nicu Enciu, a 52-year-old driver from Battersea depot, became the sixteenth London bus driver to die from COVID-19, leaving behind a wife and two daughters. Abellio refused to allow workers to pay their respects to Enciu with a drive-by at the garage. It was workers at the depot who organised money to send Enciu’s body back to Romania. A fire-fighter in his home country for two decades, he was buried there with military honours as a mark of respect for the lives he saved, but in capitalist Britain, Enciu’s life was deemed worthless by the companies.

The victimisation and sacking of Katera takes place in a definite context. The coronavirus pandemic is out of control. Infections are rising exponentially in London, with hospital admissions and deaths mounting. Last month, the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee submitted a Freedom of Information request to TfL demanding to know the number of Covid infections and deaths among London bus, rail and underground workers. TfL has now confirmed the scale of the disaster, with 98 reported COVID-19 cases among bus workers in October and 170 in November. On the London Underground there were 33 positive tests in September, 122 in October and 121 in November. According to TfL's figures, two more London bus workers lost their lives to COVID-19 in October and November, and one London Underground worker. But TfL is refusing to divulge the garage or depot location, leaving workers in the dark about the threat of workplace transmission.

Unite the union is letting the companies and TfL get away with murder.

Unite has only called a "consultative" ballot over Katera's sacking to try and prevent independent action. The union is suppressing information about her plight. They have issued no public statement and made no appeal for support from London's 25,000 bus drivers. This is doubtless because the issues surrounding her case raise uncomfortable questions about the role of Unite officials.

It should be mentioned that while Katera is sacked, all three former Unite officials are still on the company payroll. Katera is planning to appeal her dismissal, but her case cannot be left in the hands of the company and union lawyers and managers. The London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee urges all workers to take up Katera's defence. We urge drivers to convene meetings at your garage and pass resolutions demanding Katera's immediate reinstatement. Sign our petition calling for her unconditional return to her position, with full compensation by Abellio for the loss of pay and stress she has endured throughout her four-month ordeal and suspension.

The attack on Katera is an attack on the rights of all bus drivers. This goes way beyond Battersea. At Walworth garage, Unite Health and Safety Rep Moe Manir has also been suspended. A regime is being established in which drivers who speak out on safety

and conditions or who challenge the union's collusion with the companies, are being targeted and driven out. An injury to one is an injury to all! As a Battersea driver told us this week: "If the company can sack Judith like this, it means they are going to do whatever they like against you. It's up to you. We have to fight."

Sign the petition for Judith Katera here :



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