

As support grows among London bus drivers: Unite sabotages fight for Judith Katera's reinstatement

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Support is growing for the reinstatement of Judith Katera, a health and safety rep from Battersea bus depot who was sacked by transport company Abellio after she found evidence of corruption by a former full-time Unite trade union convenor.

Unite is suppressing news of her case and is sabotaging the fight against her victimisation and sacking. Details about Katera's case can be found [here](#).

Last Wednesday and Thursday, Unite held a "consultative" ballot at Battersea for Katera's reinstatement. They promised a follow-up strike ballot if a majority voted Yes. But the ballot was a cynical exercise in damage control. It was aimed at smothering the substantial support for Katera at Battersea and preventing any broader campaign in her defence.

Unite rep and Socialist Party member Moe Manir claimed the union's ballot would "launch the campaign to get Judith Katera reinstated". But more than five days after the ballot was finished, Unite has still not reported the results to its own members!

Last week's ballot was held with just 12 hours' notice, virtually guaranteeing that many drivers were unaware it was being held. The ballot automatically excluded the vast majority of the garage's 650 drivers because only Unite members could vote. According to some drivers at Battersea, Unite now covers less than half the workforce. Drivers have quit in growing numbers, disgusted with its record of management collusion, its refusal to defend their conditions, safety, pay and even their lives throughout the pandemic.

Katera was a driver at Battersea for nearly 20 years, she was elected health and safety rep in 2017, and is widely liked and respected. At Metroline, GoAhead, and RATP, workers are sharing news about her case and want to fight for justice.

The groundswell of support for Katera across the garages must now be organised in direct opposition to Unite and the transport companies. She must not be left to fight alone! Bus and transport workers in London and beyond should organise resolutions at their garages and depots demanding her immediate reinstatement, with full compensation for the loss of pay and stress she has endured since Abellio suspended her in July.

Judith Katera was sacked less than three weeks before Christmas. Unite, which sits on assets of £269 million, has refused to provide her with a penny of financial support. Meanwhile, Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey enjoyed an annual salary and expenses of £96,095 in the 2018-19 financial year.

Last Thursday, a petition by the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee was launched on [change.org](#), calling for united action for Katera's reinstatement. An accompanying statement by the committee was published on the *World Socialist Web Site*, explaining the facts of the case. This has begun circulating on social media, along with the petition.

Comments left by signatories include, "This action is totally out of order, I am ashamed of the Union for not standing by their workers. This woman has to be reinstated immediately.", "Unite union are corrupt with the companies", "this is unjust", "Repercussions against workers who show leadership to ensure safety is wrong" and from a bus rep in Devon, "she deserves justice and the union to fight for her".

The union will not fight for Judith Katera. They have no interest in reinstating a rep who has exposed the cosy relations between Unite officials and Abellio. Her reinstatement can only be won by the united action of bus and transport workers themselves.

The petition for Katera would have gathered thousands

of signatures by now if it were not for the actions of the fake left Socialist Party and its coterie of local reps and “union activists”. They have intervened to suppress the truth and conceal Unite’s role in getting Katera sacked.

Moe Manir has led frantic efforts to oppose any independent campaign in Katera’s defence. He has blocked the petition for Katera on the Bus Drivers in London Facebook Group—an account he controls with Unite London Branch Secretary Joanne Harris. His censorship has ensured the group’s 4,500 bus drivers cannot see the petition and decide for themselves. The same anti-democratic methods have been used by “union activist” James Rossi on the London Bus Drivers for Action Now Facebook group.

Beyond London, the Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers union (RMT) has blocked the petition on social media forums in the south west of England. A local RMT rep attacked the petition as “anti-union” but failed to refute a single fact about the role of Unite in Katera’s victimisation.

The political agenda behind these efforts is shown in a video posted last week on Facebook and Twitter, “Reinstate Judith Katera. For a fighting union on the buses”. It features Rossi and a handful of members of the Socialist Party standing outside Battersea depot, wrapped in Unite flags, and calling on bus drivers to join the union. “The union is about change, the union is about moving forward”, Rossi claims, promoting Unite’s phoney industrial ballot at Battersea. SP member Andy Beadle tells the camera that Katera’s sacking is a case of “deliberate anti-union activity”. In reality, her sacking is a direct outcome of Unite’s collusion with Abellio.

As the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee wrote in its statement last Thursday, Katera’s victimisation affects every driver, “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.” This must be opposed.

Several bus drivers have spoken to the WSWS, backing the committee’s call for a united campaign to secure Katera’s reinstatement. As the pandemic spirals out of control, with London at its epicentre, bus and transport workers are once again being placed in acute danger. Two drivers from Battersea depot are reportedly in hospital with COVID-19.

A driver from Park Royal garage, owned by French transport company RATP Dev, told the WSWS that other drivers and reps had been suspended or sacked for

exposing safety breaches during the pandemic, “It seems there was corruption [at Battersea depot] and Judith wanted to do something about it for her members. Sadly, she was victimised, isolated and targeted by the union itself. It is deplorable.”

The driver was scathing about the “ridiculous” allegations of racism used to sack Katera, “I don’t believe it at all—that a brown skinned driver would be racist toward another brown skinned driver from the same continent. Both are African. If the accusations were true, why didn’t they involve the police?”

RATP Dev operates 1,100 buses in London, employing 3500 staff. The driver said he had shared information about Katera’s case at his garage, and hoped his colleagues would support her, “As the late Martin Luther King stated, ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere’.

“All drivers should be aware of the campaign to reinstate Judith and oppose the bullying by union reps and management against her. I believe drivers in every garage should put up information about this. We should all stick together.”

Ozan, a driver at Metrolink’s Cricklewood garage, has shared news of Katera’s sacking at his own garage, “It’s extremely disturbing to hear a driver has been treated in this manner, especially someone who was just doing their job and wanted to make sure all employees at her garage were safe. However, it does not surprise me that the company and union would treat a driver or employee like this.”

Sheree, also from Cricklewood, agreed. She explained, “It’s a disgrace, the union set her up. Judith must have stood on a few tails and the union doesn’t like that it upsets the apple cart between the union and the managers.”

A railway worker from the south west of England told the WSWS, “The way in which the union has treated Judith Katera is shocking, this is a disgrace. If they can do this to one of their own reps, they can do it to any one of us. The union cannot be trusted.”



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