

Bus drivers defend David O'Sullivan: "There has never been any test-and-tracing at the garage"

Our reporters
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The *World Socialist Web Site* will begin publishing interviews and statements by bus drivers in support of David O'Sullivan's reinstatement at Cricklewood bus garage in London.

O'Sullivan, 57, was sacked on February 3 after he sought to alert his colleagues to the spread of COVID-19 at the garage. He asserted his rights to a safe workplace under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act.

Metroline accused O'Sullivan of "disseminating false and damaging information" and of "inciting unlawful industrial action" and sacked him for "gross misconduct". None of O'Sullivan's safety concerns—communicated to Metroline and Unite the union in writing—were addressed. Unite representatives submitted evidence against O'Sullivan at the disciplinary hearing.

At least 60 bus workers in London have died from coronavirus since the start of the pandemic. The current global death toll from coronavirus is over 3.4 million and the more deadly B.1.617 covid variant is emerging as the dominant strain in many countries, including Britain.

Statements and messages of support for O'Sullivan can be submitted here. Names have been removed to protect bus drivers against victimisation.

Statement from a Cricklewood garage driver and member of the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee:

"I would like to express my special support for the campaign to reinstate David O'Sullivan.

"Firstly, as a member of the committee at Cricklewood bus garage, David was a good colleague, always available to support anyone, as well as a good advocate of struggles of bus workers, not just in the garage but all over London. David was dismissed at the peak of the pandemic for the simple reason that he expressed and demonstrated some concerns about the garage's health and safety condition. This was to improve the wellbeing of all of us bus drivers. Most importantly, at that period, two of our colleagues had already passed away with COVID-19, and the number of drivers

infected was increasing significantly.

"It is particularly important for all of us to remember what we have been through. We were being forced on the road without any PPE [personal protective equipment] whatsoever at the beginning of the pandemic for the sake of Transport for London's profit. To date, 60 bus workers have died from Covid-19 since the start of the pandemic. This was preventable but no-one has taken responsibility or been held to account.

"Unite has failed on every count. They do not represent bus drivers, whether it's our pay, terms and conditions or safety. All safety decisions and precautions have been taken by the drivers independently in a bid to save lives. Nothing has come from Unite based upon its initiative.

"The union only pretends that it is working in our interest, but it never delivers. It is all illusory. It goes through the motions and then makes up excuses as to why nothing can be done. We have seen this so many times with the strike mandates against driver fatigue and Remote Sign On.

"We have enough evidence to conclude that the union has systematically failed us bus drivers. This should motivate us to seek alternative representation, one which purely represents our integrated objectives and interests and does not work under company manipulation.

"This is without a doubt the moment and the reason for all bus drivers around London to be together and organise a strong campaign for David O'Sullivan's reinstatement."

Statement from a First South East Counties Ltd bus driver:

"Dear David O'Sullivan,

"I call for your reinstatement to Metroline as a fellow bus driver. I currently find myself working in similar conditions to which you had found yourself.

"At least 15 of my colleagues here at First South East have contracted and survived COVID-19. All we get is statutory sick pay after three days. Even our 'union' wasn't able to get us paid for waiting the time it takes to find out if you're

negative or positive. They were quick to hand out the 58 percent accurate lateral flow tests... I say quick one year later, resorting to emotionally blackmailing drivers.

"I believe you answered the call to protect yourself, colleagues and colleagues' families honourably, with a humanity rarely shown in our line of work. It's an outrage that you have been treated in this manner. It is the duty of care that the employer is bound by, to ensure a safe working environment for all. Humanity is replaced by greed as well as a coldness towards our fellow human beings.

"Your courageous efforts in the continuing fight against COVID-19 are a source of inspiration in these dark times. Those who are supposed to fight alongside us have sold out and are now part of the ongoing struggle, to be able to work in a safe, clean and toxic free working environment in the 21st century. I salute the efforts of the rank-and-file committees and encourage them to continue the impressive herculean, David vs Goliath fight for a better tomorrow. Together we can bring about the driving change for tomorrow which is so desperately needed today!

"I thank you for everything you've done, including the sacrifices you've endured... A well-made sword is tempered in the fire. We will drive on together for a better tomorrow as the temporary traffic lights of greed and compromise are wheeled into the back of the work van of hope. In solidarity and support."

Statement from a driver at Holloway bus garage in north London:

"Metroline has only done the bare minimum required by the government over COVID-19 since the start of the pandemic. Even then, they have not lived up to that. We have not been supplied with the most basic protection. Around October last year we ran out of hand sanitiser and anti-viral wipes at the garage for a week and drivers were expected to bring their own. In February this year, there was no running water in the drivers' toilets for a month while a part was on order, we had to use the engineers' toilets to wash our hands.

"There has never been any test and tracing at the garage. Drivers have asked over the company app Blink about this but never received a straight-forward answer. I know from my own experience it does not exist. I had to self-isolate and all I was asked was to provide medical proof of why I had to self-isolate and when I would be returning to work. I was never asked by management who I had been in contact within the garage.

"For these reasons it is hard to establish how many drivers have been infected at the garage from COVID-19. It is hardly surprising to find out in the appeal to reinstate David O'Sullivan that there have been 46 infections at Cricklewood [between October and January] and Metroline

has one of the highest numbers of fatalities. This information needs to get out there and I would like to know the true picture at Holloway.

"I can fully understand why David O'Sullivan took the action under Section 44 and encouraged others to do likewise. I would have done the same myself. I was heading down that road but was not aware of Section 44. He should have had his concerns addressed instead of victimising him.

"The fact that the Unite official gave evidence against Dave to have him sacked by the company is shameful. They are traitors. There is no way that a union should be able to give evidence against a worker who is standing up for his safety. It is like a father giving evidence against his son. The unions do not protect our interests, they are not representing us, they are policing us for the company.

"The only way we can change things is through an organisation like the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee. The trade unions never meet us halfway, it's always the company's way. You have been ringing a lot of bells, alerting people. It has been the voice of bus drivers when we were unable to find the right words.

"It will be important to have international support for this campaign. We live in a global world and workers face the same issues. The pandemic has further proven this. The scale of death was entirely preventable. They could have taken an approach of 'whatever it takes' to contain the pandemic, but they didn't. It has all been patchwork and that is because of economic factors, profits come first.

"Dave is a great guy. He is professional and he did not take the action he did just to make a noise, his concerns were genuine. He has been singled out to make an example to others to silence them and that is why we must defend him."

Visit here to find out more and join the campaign for David O'Sullivan's reinstatement. You can donate to O'Sullivan's legal defence here.



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