

Manchester Trades Council's Ian Allinson reveals British pseudo-left's role in betrayal of Go North West bus strike

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Ian Allinson is the industrial strike co-ordinator of Manchester Trades Union Council (MTUC) and a member of the RS21 splinter from the Socialist Workers Party, Britain's largest pseudo-left group. He has published his latest comment on the dispute at Go North West buses, which was ended May 17.

Unite the union proclaimed victory after the company agreed to withdraw the threat to impose savage attacks on pay and conditions through a "fire and rehire" policy.

Allinson's comments accompany a video, "Interviews with Go North West bus strikers," on the RS21 web site. Intended as a political whitewash of the sellout agreement on which Unite has ended the strike, he provides an incriminating account of the mechanics of betrayal—confirming the analysis of the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) and its exposure of his role.

Allinson has been elevated to public prominence at Go North West as a frontman for the trades council and political stooge of Unite's local representatives. In this role he dutifully posted the press release issued by Unite, declaring the outcome of the dispute a "huge victory". But he is fully aware of the anger and sense of betrayal felt by many drivers and was obliged to acknowledge this in an attempt to smooth things over.

He does this by portraying the vote in favour of Unite's rotten agreement with Go North West parent company, Go Ahead, as a considered decision of the drivers, rather than the tragic result of Unite's deliberate isolation of the dispute and drivers being presented with a fait-accompli—all with the vital assistance of Allinson et al.

"All the strikers recognise that this wasn't an unqualified victory," he declares. However, "Most accepted the logic that they had to make concessions to ensure the viability of their employer..."

Most drivers "accepted" the concessions agreed by Unite because, after heroically waging the longest running industrial dispute held in Britain this year, they were told

again and again that there was no alternative—and because everything was done by Allinson and the local Unite reps to neuter drivers' opposition to the deal, including mounting a slander campaign against the Socialist Equality Party (SEP) for the crime of telling workers the truth of what was being planned.

The local reps and Allinson told Go North West strikers to toast an imminent victory and await the successful outcome to their dispute, after Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey stitched up an agreement behind their backs in consultation with Go Ahead chief executive David Brown, agreeing massive cuts. While strikers were kept in the dark, Allinson had the inside track and had seen the agreement that the reps were tasked with imposing.

He made limited disclosures, admitting that Unite had made "substantial concessions," and explained that the cost cutting advocated by the union prior to the industrial action—totalling £1.3 million of the £1.4 million demanded by Go North West—had been incorporated. But he then insisted Go North West strikers should still put their faith in Unite, based on its promise to help claw back the concessions in two years' time!

Allinson levelled his fire solely against the SEP and the *World Socialist Web Site*. Warnings that the union was preparing a sellout were met with hysterical denunciations of the SEP as "scabs" and purveyors of company "lies" that a deal had been struck, despite knowing full well this was true. An attempt was made to ban SEP members and WSWS readers from posting on the Facebook page of Manchester Left-Wing Forum.

The deal pushed through on May 17 following a mass meeting and ballot was in all essentials the one signed off between Brown and McCluskey, confirmed by the *Manchester Evening News* as early as May 8, and then reported by the WSWS.

Allinson and his various accomplices denied these facts so that Unite could mount a concerted effort to browbeat and

isolate the opposition among Go North West strikers.

The vote on Monday was nonetheless opposed by a significant minority of strikers. Allinson admits, only after the fact, “Last week, when Unite officers tried to push members into balloting on the offer, there was strong opposition, forcing the ballot to be delayed while rostering concerns were addressed in further talks.

“Even this week, there was a 21.5% ‘No vote’. There was huge pressure from the Unite apparatus to accept the deal, leaving strikers unconfident that they would get the support they needed if they fought on and most concluding that this was the best deal they could achieve.”

Allinson’s article has an accompanying photograph of a large pie, with the words “Vote No” on its crust, served in the catering tent on the picket line at the Queens Road depot the week before the vote.

In its report of the deal, local media outlet *The Meteor* also notes that bus drivers initially rejected voting on a deal over the issue of rotas. Drivers with 20-years-service were previously guaranteed a Monday to Friday roster, but during the strike the company was awarding this rota to scabs with as little as 15 months employment. The *Meteor* article also cited one driver, Marianne, asking, “What are we voting for... How can we vote on something we have not seen?”

This raises the question, “Where were you Mr Allinson? What did you do to alert the working class to what you admit was Unite’s ‘huge pressure’ on Go North West strikers, and to offer an alternative?”

While the WSWS was raising the alarm, Allinson, as MTUC industrial strike co-ordinator, announced the cancellation of a planned solidarity protest outside the Queens Road depot May 13 so that strikers could “study the documents” presented by Unite!

There is one other significant admission by Allinson. Stating blandly, “There were steps that could have been taken to put more pressure on Go Ahead,” he explains, “But the Unite apparatus discouraged strikers from visiting other bus depots to build solidarity.”

In short, Unite was intent on isolating and selling out the dispute, while the political police of the pseudo-left and the local reps were trying to silence the SEP, harassing our members, urging strikers not to talk to us, and whipping up misplaced anger with cries of “scab”.

Despite his polite critique, Allinson celebrates the strikers having beaten “fire and rehire” and “the worst of Go Ahead’s attacks”. What he does not say is that Go Ahead did not need “fire and rehire” to push through most of its attacks. It had the services of Unite for that. These include reduced sick pay and the lengthening of the working day, compulsory overtime and unpaid meal breaks.

Jobs will now be lost too. Unite has established a

severance scheme with the company via the arbitration service, ACAS, that targets between 70 and 80 jobs. In Allinson’s video, Colin Hayden, Unite senior steward, explains that the union’s proposed cuts to the company accepted that the depot was “overstaffed” by 30 drivers, while the company wanted job cuts of between 70 and 80.

“We knew the company could not carry that labour cost,” he stated. “ACAS came up with the idea of a severance scheme. That we sort of thought, yeah, that would give the ability of people to leave the business now, without waiting to have their heads chopped off for the slightest thing in the depot.”

Allinson is a typical representative of the “union activist”—invariably low-ranking functionaries and members of various pseudo-left and Stalinist groups, whose activism is carried out solely in the interests of the union bureaucracy’s imposition of the dictates of the corporations and preventing an explosion of workers’ anger getting out of control. Their various newspapers more-or-less dutifully echo the line of Unite. The Communist Party of Britain’s *Morning Star* hails an “historic victory”, the Socialist Party a “huge victory”, directly parroted from Unite’s press release. The SWP proclaims “Fire and hire defeated,” before asking, “at what cost?”

They all insist that the working class must never challenge the stranglehold of the trade unions, epitomised by the SWP ending its belatedly “critical” commentary with extended quotes from McCluskey and their favoured candidate to replace him as general secretary, Sharon Graham.

“Strikes are the best way to win against fire and rehire,” the SWP intones. “But the outcome should not be negotiated cuts.” To which we can all say, Amen.

The real lesson of the Go North West dispute is that workers need to build rank-and-file committees as genuine organisations of class struggle in direct opposition to the corporatist “unions”, which function as junior partners of management and the companies. This is the perspective fought for by the SEP.



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