

Bus drivers at Cricklewood and Kings Cross garages support call for reinstatement of David O'Sullivan

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Members of the Socialist Equality Party held leaflet distributions at bus garages in London over the weekend finding overwhelming support for the reinstatement of London bus driver David O'Sullivan.

The 57-year-old bus driver was sacked in February for upholding workers' rights to health and safety during the coronavirus pandemic that has claimed the lives of more than 60 bus workers in the capital alone.

O'Sullivan's fellow workers at Cricklewood garage, owned by Metroline, expressed their outrage at his dismissal and condemned the actions of management and their accomplices in the union, Unite. Many indicated they are following coverage of his campaign on the *World Socialist Web Site* and said they would contribute to the Crowd Justice fund to cover O'Sullivan's legal costs at the Employment Tribunal.

Drivers took hundreds of leaflets calling for O'Sullivan's reinstatement. Some took batches of leaflets to share with colleagues and spread the word.

Many drivers described David as a "good man" and a "good driver", who "alerted the workers about Covid safety" and "stood for all of us." They described the Unite union as a "part of the management", which "did nothing for our safety" and was a "waste of money".

Dozens of workers stopped to speak to campaigners and express their solidarity with O'Sullivan. Many were happy to hear that O'Sullivan is standing up to the company's victimisation and intimidation tactics. They criticised the bus companies and Transport for London (TFL) for putting their lives and those of their families at risk during the pandemic.

Dozens of drivers spoke to SEP campaigners. But to avoid reprisals from Metroline management, the names of bus workers who spoke to us at Cricklewood and Kings Cross garages are being withheld.

A Cricklewood driver who knows O'Sullivan said: "Dave should be reinstated immediately. I am pleased to hear that he is challenging his dismissal in an Employment Tribunal. He should not give up fighting. Wish him the best!"

Another driver who worked with O'Sullivan condemned management for sacking him. "Dave stood for everybody, and he said the workplace wasn't safe. It is very difficult to physically prove when the drivers became positive that they got it at work. But I think most of them did get infected when they were working. The worst period for us was before the first [March 23, 2020] lockdown. That was because the virus was everywhere, the network was running full-on, and buses were packed. And that was when lot of drivers got ill. I think it was four weeks before the main lockdown.

"There was no information and there were no safety measures in place. We tried our best to protect ourselves and our families. We did the right things as far as we could. Even in the very early days we were asking for security screens and those kinds of things. We did them by ourselves. Unions were not proactive at all. They were not talking to us, nor were they demanding that measures be put in place by management. They didn't do anything.

"I agree that the unions were complicit in this. Our union rep, to be honest, you don't hear an awful lot from him anyway. We had union reps in the past who actually engaged with the drivers. But he tends to hide in the office and if you speak to him, he will give you a little bit of time. Other than that, he will stick to his own. I'm lucky that I live on my own currently. My risk in terms of family is very low. But plenty of guys are really worried. I am on a very busy route. Buses go fully packed at peak times. We have been having this for the last four to six weeks. The whole network is like this because schools are

open, and more people work in central London.”

A female worker at Cricklewood said, “I do not agree that Dave was sacked because he raised concerns about our health and safety. We all have the right to work free of risks. They should reinstate him immediately. I will read your articles about this and contribute to the crowdfund appeal. I am happy that he is fighting his case in an employment tribunal.”

Another driver who has worked at Cricklewood for several years said, “Dave told us things which we need to know about the spread of the virus. I don’t know why they sacked him for that. Is it a crime to tell your colleagues that the workplace is not safe when it is not safe at all? We all need to help him now.

“What the Metroline management are doing is totally wrong. I wish him success in the tribunal, and I will definitely give a donation to the crowdfund.”

At Metroline’s Kings Cross garage, drivers recently voted down a rotten deal between the Unite union and Metroline management over Remote Sign On (RSO). Workers reacted with enthusiasm to the fight for O’Sullivan’s reinstatement. RSO will lead to longer hours and cuts to pay as drivers will be forced to meet their buses at locations away from the garage. Across London, drivers repeatedly voted for strike action against RSO, but Unite’s deal with the management—which it declared a “victory” —cancelled strike action based on a meaningless promise that RSO will not be rolled out prior to December next year.

A Kings Cross driver who has worked there for over a decade was angry to hear about O’Sullivan’s dismissal for raising concerns over the health and safety of drivers, “Metroline should not have sacked Dave. TfL and the bus companies put our lives in danger because they do not put proper safety measures in place.

“Well, I want to say that TFL is taking one big piss at the bus drivers because since the pandemic not even one revenue officer came to my bus and asked if they [passengers] were actually wearing a face mask or not. There’s a high volume of people on my route not wearing a mask. They even have a problem when you ask for one. And it’s a joke.

“They’re risking my life and they’re risking other people’s lives. And no one is actually taking care of that. Not even one official from TfL. Not even one. They are supposed to be on the bus every day because it’s about life. Where are they hiding now? What is their role? They gave people links so they can go online and apply for a stupid badge because they are exempt from wearing a face

mask. I understand that some people cannot wear it, but if they cannot wear it, they are not supposed to use public transport with other people!

“They need to solve this problem. It doesn’t make sense. Because these people who are applying for those badges, they don’t even have reasons for that. It’s because they don’t want to wear a face mask. And old people are asking me on the bus, ‘driver, why aren’t they wearing a mask’ because they are scared. I’m helpless. I even receive [customer] complaints because I ask for a face mask. It’s one big joke. TfL is not doing their job at all.”

A young driver at Kings Cross garage said, “Well, I’m not sure how he did that [inform bus drivers of their rights under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act]. But I don’t think it’s fair to lose his job just for expressing concern and telling his opinion.

“In my garage we are in small cabin rooms. It’s very tight. What they did was add a new cabin room. I don’t know about other places. But obviously, there is always more to do to avoid the spread of the virus.

Another driver who has worked many years at Kings Cross garage said, “I am struggling to understand why the unions are not defending Dave. The union should be supporting workers’ rights, honestly. Why do they go against him?

“Sometimes the managers sack people and the union don’t do anything. I have twice had an accident, not on the road, in the garage, and the union didn’t do anything. They only make a big deal about strikes but they are not supporting the workers with anything. In here, two people were sacked, and the union did nothing.”

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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