

Campaign for reinstatement of victimised London bus driver David O’Sullivan gathers momentum in UK and internationally

Our reporters

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The campaign for the reinstatement of David O’Sullivan, a London bus driver victimised by Metroline for standing up for his safety and that of his co-workers during the pandemic continues to gather momentum in the UK and internationally.

Workers have registered their support through financial contributions to the crowd fund appeal, messages of solidarity and the warm response that O’Sullivan himself and Socialist Equality Party (SEP) campaign teams have received when leafleting bus depots and interchanges in London and Yorkshire.

Following a campaign on June 5 at Cricklewood garage in north-west London—where O’Sullivan was dismissed from—many of his colleagues who pledged support followed through with financial contributions and messages of support on the crowd fund page. Some of these read:

- “I stand with you brother. Sorry my pocket is so small.”
- “Good luck mate. Best wishes from Cricklewood.”
- “Good luck Dave you’re going to need it. Wish I could’ve given more but you know my predicament.”
- “Solidarity Brotherlooking forward to your win. ??????????”

Cricklewood bus drivers recognise that the campaign is on the side of truth and the action which O’Sullivan took in withdrawing from an unsafe working environment under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act was entirely justified.

Another driver from the garage who contributed to the campaign and sent a message stated:

“Metroline know deep down the company has done wrong and is clearly scared to admit the truth, solely because of the consequences involved. Best of luck as it’s a fight for all bus drivers.”

The response of bus drivers at the garage provides important testimony not only against the company, but the union Unite, that participated in O’Sullivan’s dismissal which was aimed at silencing wider opposition. The campaign shows the potential to turn the tables on this corrupt partnership which will succeed through broadening the campaign and deepening the fight against the collusion of the trade unions with private operators and government to deny workers their rights.

The crowd fund appeal to raise the costs to mount a legal appeal raised its initial target of £10,000 with 11 days to spare and is now approaching £11,000.

In a message thanking supporters’ for helping to clear the first financial hurdle of the appeal, O’Sullivan explained the basis upon which the campaign would go forward. He explained that the support the campaign has attracted stemmed from a thirst for a political fightback

“In the words of the *British Medical Journal [BMJ]*, the prioritisation of profits over health and the suppression of scientific advice has resulted in a ‘maelstrom of avoidable harm’, including the deaths of more than 150,000 people. The same agenda has been pursued by governments all

over the world, from the United States and India, to Brazil, France and Germany.”

After drawing attention to the criminal complicity of the Labour Party and trade unions he added, “As the highly infectious Delta variant of COVID-19 is on the rise, with a dangerous uptick in infections and hospital admissions, this legal test case for key workers’ rights to a safe workplace in the pandemic takes on new urgency. Thank you once again, and please continue to do all you can to support this fight.”

These issues were the subject of discussion with bus drivers who O’Sullivan spoke with at Victoria bus station in south-west London.

A Go-Ahead driver from Waterloo garage explained, “When they are asking for your dues money, the unions promise lots of things they will do, but then nothing ever happens. I experienced this as a rail worker, it was the same. The unions don’t do anything anymore. Your case will affect all drivers and their safety. It goes beyond one person.”

A driver for the same company at Stockwell garage took leaflets to distribute in the restroom, “I agree with what you’re saying, you have every legal right to raise your concerns. It’s a terrible situation that the union and the management work together. What can we do?”

He was not aware of the dispute at Go North West in Manchester against fire and rehire, a subsidiary of Go-Ahead which operates one in four of the capital’s buses. This confirms the level of isolation imposed on the eleven week strike by Unite. When he was informed of the rotten deal the union had forced a return to work on, he stated “I’m not surprised at all.” He was eager to hear about the London Bus Rank -and-File Committee and its record of struggle.

A Metroline driver from Willesden garage summed up the sentiments shared by increasing number of bus drivers who have drawn the conclusion that Unite and the trade unions defend the companies not the workers.

“Every time I raise concerns with the union, they do not listen, even about important things like driver’s safety. And it is because of that I have left the union. They don’t fight for us. I’m sorry to hear about your sacking, and I will read the leaflet with interest. Because it is right what you say about the unions.”

Two other drivers from Cricklewood garage who were on the bus stands added their support.

“I know the management and union don’t care about us, they just care about the numbers. Which bus is coming, and how many minutes it is late. You are my friend and I will do whatever is needed to help you.”

Another stated, “They [Metroline] wouldn’t have tried a QC [to oppose O’Sullivan’s case for unfair dismissal] unless they knew it was something significant that needed to be covered up. This is an important precedent for the future.

“Now we know more about Covid and looking back the companies and

unions did nothing. At least the position of the company was understandable, they want to keep things running. From the union, at no point was there a mention of us not coming into work. Yes, this is certainly bigger than you. Companies are riding roughshod over workers.”

In Wakefield, West Yorkshire, an SEP campaign team spoke to drivers at the bus interchange where the main operators are Arriva Yorkshire, First West Yorkshire and Stagecoach.

Steve commented “Why should Dave have had to go to work when he’s got no protection and a vulnerable child at home, risking taking Covid back to them. It’s outrageous.

“The PPE that drivers get given is diabolical. I bought my mask myself as all they give you is a flimsy little paper mask.”

“The first people that should be looked after is the workforce. Never mind the profits, it’s the health of the workforce that’s important.”

“You have the new strain that’s come in from India, the infection rate was climbing and climbing but [Prime Minister] Boris Johnson didn’t shut it down. It wasn’t till it was over here that he finally acted. It is a global issue, you can’t fight it in just one country.”

“I’ve had my jabs, but had a bad time when I got them. The following day I was knocked for six. I told the company I had to go home as I felt really fatigued but they said they didn’t have any replacement so I had to stay working. How I got home afterwards I don’t know.”

Another driver, Matt, explained, “They put in the screens (on driver’s cabs) but there’s a gap all the way round. We are handling cash and can be on a bus up to five hours without being able to wash our hands. We’ve had a few drivers who tested positive. We only found out through word of mouth, the company didn’t tell us nor did the union.”

The campaign has attracted support from other key workers, including at Royal Mail. While the Trades Union Congress organised no action to protect workers during the pandemic, postal workers were forced to take matters into their own hands against the collusion of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) with the company. Royal Mail was the centre of unofficial walks out last year in response to workplace outbreaks and deaths from the virus.

Alan, a postal worker in London endorsed the campaign saying, “I strongly condemn the unjust sacking of bus driver David O’Sullivan. O’Sullivan, one of the founders of the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee, has been a tireless fighter for workers’ rights throughout his entire life.”

“His only ‘crime’ was to warn his fellow workers of the dangers involved in Metroline’s refusal to protect its workers from the spread of coronavirus at the Cricklewood depot where he worked. O’Sullivan constantly warned that Metroline’s callous disregard for safety would lead to workers dying. He believed that workers had the right to a safe working environment as stipulated by Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act. Metroline has flagrantly disregarded this Act and has the blood of bus workers on its hands.

“I also strongly condemn the behaviour of his trade union, Unite, who, instead of defending O’Sullivan, has sided with management which enabled them to move against him.”

“I have known David for well over 30 years and have always found him a tireless advocate of worker’s rights. He has in the past supported postal workers in their struggle against not only Royal Mail management but against the CWU, who have become nothing more than an arm of corporate management. I, therefore, call on all postal workers to support the campaign for the reinstatement of David O’ Sullivan with full compensation.”

O’Sullivan also attended the picket line at Jacobs Douwe Egberts in Banbury, Oxfordshire where the workforce is out on strike against the imposition of fire and rehire contracts. The company issued dismissal notices on June 2 to enforce the inferior terms and conditions which would result in a loss of pay of up to £12,000.

One of the strikers who expressed his support referred to the fact that a member of the union strike committee had been sacked for posting on social media as an act of reprisal by management.

“I am definitely for David’s reinstatement.”

“This should not be like this. This is not what you expect in a period like this. We have also seen one of our colleagues being victimised to intimidate all our striking workers. We are trying to make an honest living. Look at what they are doing to our jobs. I will read your statement.”

The campaign has importantly continued to win support internationally with messages of solidarity sent in from a number of countries.

Laurel, a retired worker from Australia, said, “This is outrageous and unconscionable behaviour by those involved in this action. This man was a whistleblower and trying to do his very important job. An apology and reinstatement please.”

Jim from Canada said, “It is unconscionable that David O’Sullivan pay any price for his stalwart stand on the protection of his co-workers. He must be reinstated immediately and all the proper safety measures to protect against COVID-19 in the bus barns be taken forthwith.”

Most significantly, the campaign received a message of support from Hanne Levien, a worker in former East Germany who was reinstated to her job after she won an appeal at the Berlin Labour Court in 1992. Levien had been victimised for speaking out against planned job losses at her factory on the pretext of “political agitation” and “betrayal of business secrets”. The chair of the factory trade union committee gave evidence against her on management’s behalf and her union did not even provide costs for her legal case. Her campaign was taken up by the International Labor Defence Committee, initiated by the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) which brought her case to the attention of workers around the world.

Levien emphasised the critical importance of an internationally grounded campaign, saying, “I support the campaign for David’s reinstatement for the following reasons. In 1991, I faced similar issues in my company because I had said at a staff meeting that the announced zero-hours, short-time working was nothing more than a manoeuvre. After the end of the short-time working, the workers were told that they would be dismissed.”

“It was when capitalism was being reintroduced in the former East Germany. At that time, the Socialist Equality Party and the *World Socialist Web Site* did not even exist. The sections of the ICFI worked only with newspapers and leaflets. The ICFI immediately started an international campaign for my reinstatement, which was then successful. I thank the ICFI for this and I am confident that David can also be successful when the ICFI and *World Socialist Web Site* stand behind 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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