

# UK lorry driver speaks ahead of strike: “The Labour Party and the unions have done nothing”

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*The WSWs spoke with a UK lorry driver with 16 years’ experience on the road about the exploitative conditions which confront workers in the sector, exacerbated during the pandemic. The driver works for a large blue chip company distributing sports wear and other goods including food products to supermarket retailers. He agreed to speak anonymously, and we have used the name Alan for the purpose of this interview.*

**WSWS:** Are you aware of the “stay at home” day that is being organised for August 23 to protest low pay and poor working conditions?

**Alan:** I have heard about it, and it is being talked about. I know it’s unofficial, but not sure who’s organising this at present and some people are saying it is something the media are building a storm over. I don’t know who’s organising it. I don’t think the unions are organising it. I agree there should be action taken as in other industries.

**WSWS:** Could you inform our readers of the problems that drivers face in their job as this is not common knowledge—particularly hours worked and health and safety issues?

**Alan:** We are having to work more unsociable hours. You cannot plan your working day. You have to start early and don’t know what time you will finish. They think you can give a driver any work with no thought about how it will affect the families of drivers.

This has worsened with COVID. A depot I have attended has said that workers there cannot take holidays because there are no staff to cover holidays. Some companies only pay 20 days holiday and drivers need time off to recover.

You are still pressurised and told to do this, even

though you are a bit tired, coerced into working with sick pay only being paid at 60 percent of your pay. I lost out when I had to take time off sick with COVID and trying to look after my son and my partner. I was only paid at 60 percent. I lost out on about £3,000 last year even though the company made over £40 million profit after tax.

They didn’t even top it up, or put me on furlough, even though I had COVID once and had to look after my young son who was isolating—someone in his nursery had it.

They made £40m after tax and never paid a single bonus to the drivers and we had no pay rise. We are in discussion about the pay rise, but they will not backdate it, even though we had come up to the pay negotiation time last year September, but they will not backdate it.

I am earning now probably less than I was fifteen years ago. The job has to come first over family life, and we have to work the hours whatever they are and however long it takes to do a job. One day you start at three, the next day at six, the next two or three, so your body clock is constantly going up and down.

The start times can be different each day with very little warning. You cannot plan your social life, you just come back and they say, ‘this is your job’.

We don’t have a weekly rota and the job can be made difficult because of road conditions. Some drivers can end up being stuck out at night with no food and nowhere to rest. You have a bed in the truck, and they have ended up on a busy lay-by that is noisy.

Last year in the pandemic many places were shut and there were very few places to get food. You could get food in garages, but it was at ridiculous prices that they charge.

Over the last ten years or maybe more, companies have not been putting the wages up in relation to inflation or the cost of living, so I am earning now probably less than what I was doing fifteen years ago.

You have restrictions as well. We have tachograph cards (digital cards) and if you do anything wrong you can end up getting fined or lose your license. Then we have to secure loads on a truck or you can get fined or lose your license. Companies now are putting cameras on trucks, so if you have a crash they will scrutinise that even though it might not be your fault, but because you are a professional driver, they will blame you or say you should have done better.

**WSWS:** Can you say anything about the effect on the supply chains and has this impacted on drivers?

**Alan:** This has impacted on some drivers and drivers are not able to take holidays and being expected to work more, loads of drivers are saying they have had enough.

**WSWS:** Drivers you meet, what are they saying about the situation?

**Alan:** Many drivers are looking for other jobs, less skilled jobs, saying they cannot put up with what is going on, they have had enough. Throughout the pandemic many drivers were coerced to carry on working. You either work or you go home.

**WSWS:** You mentioned many drivers have set WhatsApp groups—what's being said on these groups?

**Alan:** Drivers are saying they will leave and look for other jobs or try to move to places where the terms and conditions are better.

**WSWS:** Has anything changed since the government ended lockdown measures?

**Alan:** Things are still the same as before. You go to depots and there are people not wearing masks and there is less hand sanitiser. Drivers had to work through the pandemic. When I went to an Aldi depot no one was wearing a mask. The government has done nothing about these big companies.

I think one of the main things is wages and conditions at work and the attitude of management and how they don't understand that people have a life outside work, and this shouldn't be dictated by the employer.

**WSWS:** What do you think about the unions, are they doing anything?

**Alan:** Both the Labour Party and the unions have

done nothing, if anything they have stepped aside on everything. I have not seen any “humph” from the union. They have not stood by us. When you put questions to them, the answers they give back seem to work more in favour of the company, or the government.



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