

London bus drivers condemn dismissal of David O'Sullivan

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London bus drivers continue to call for the reinstatement of London bus driver David O'Sullivan, sacked in February for warning colleagues about the spread of COVID-19 at Cricklewood garage in northwest London.

At the Golders Green bus terminus last Saturday, members of the Socialist Equality Party spoke with drivers and distributed the statement, *Reinstate London bus driver David O'Sullivan: For a safe workplace against COVID-19! No to victimisations!* It was well-received by drivers at Metrolink and RATP Group bus companies.

A London transport worker for three decades, O'Sullivan was suspended on January 11 after citing his rights to a safe workplace under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act. While Covid infections were rampant across the UK in December and January, Metrolink, Transport for London (TfL) and the Unite union concealed the spread of infections at garages, leaving bus workers defenceless.

On Saturday, drivers expressed widespread hostility towards management for not listening to their safety concerns, describing the unions as useless and doing nothing but take dues. Some called the unions "a mafia" because of their collusion with management.

Drivers who knew O'Sullivan said, "He's a good man" who "fought for his work colleagues", while Unite did nothing to protect lives and safety. Some took batches of leaflets to distribute at their garages with many saying they planned to donate to his defence campaign.

"How can they sack him if what he's done is legal? We need to fight this," a driver told campaigners, adding "The companies have been treating employees extremely harshly."

One driver broke down in tears as he spoke about his

experiences. He lost someone close to him, who died at just 36-years-old in his mother's arms.

Drivers at Cricklewood garage were incensed that Unite had failed to make workers aware of O'Sullivan's case which they described as emblematic of the situation facing drivers throughout the pandemic who have been kept in the dark.

A driver on route 139 said, "I totally disagree with what the company did, and they did it with the help of the union as well. Because the union is on the side of the management. We haven't been properly protected during this pandemic. We've been left to fend for ourselves.

"Whatever the company did was just the bare minimum. We were promised anti-viral cleaning products, which they were not. We were promised proper seals, but we worked for half a year without proper seals on the buses. The company was dragging its heels in implementing this because it meant extra costs for them.

"I think the sacking was completely unfair. They didn't bother to listen. David's concern was not just his. A lot of us had those concerns. David was the one that voiced them, and he paid a price for it."

Describing current conditions and the lack of safety for drivers, he added, "Every summer we're struggling with the temperatures in the buses. We've got to drive at 40-degree temperatures. We're getting threatened if we don't drive. You're getting called in by the manager because you called in sick, so they give you a warning for that.

"They put some fans in the buses which don't help at all. There's no air conditioning in the buses. In the winter you're shaking because it's cold, in the summer it's too hot. And the company's always been caught off-guard. They're always being surprised by the

temperatures, and they don't maintain the air conditioning, and this is what happens. It's all cost-cutting. Cost cutting at the expense of safety and the concern of citizens.

"You're not allowed to transport animals at these temperatures, yet we've got to work for 10 hours a day carrying people and you've got to smile, you've got to be professional, you've got to help people. But at the same time, you're sweating here like you're in a sauna, or shaking in the winter."

A Metroline driver explained how he lost his best friend, a fellow driver, to Covid-19, "We used to call him Majesky and I was very close to him. He was from Nigeria like me. He died of Covid at the beginning of the pandemic. We didn't know that he had died because he hadn't come to work for about two weeks. He died alone in the house. It was very sad to learn that later. I was very close to him. I used to go on holidays with him and everything like that.

"It was a result of lack of protection. We were not protected at all at the beginning."

Commenting on O'Sullivan alerting workers at Cricklewood about the spread of infections, he said, "Yes, absolutely. He was right to alert the workers. If something is wrong, it is wrong. It is his duty as an employee to alert the workers that something is wrong."

A driver on the 183 route also voiced solidarity with O'Sullivan, "I hope he wins his case and I hope he gets his job back. Just fight all the way mate."

Asked whether it was right for O'Sullivan to raise the alarm about infections at the garage, the driver replied, "Yeah, of course. Definitely. In this situation, as bus drivers we're just a number, as I said. They don't care about us and our safety and well-being. They don't care. They get someone else and replace us.

He described the unions as a "waste of money. I'm not in the union. They're working for the management—they don't help the drivers. Not one bit. They're supposed to be there to help us. They're different people. They don't help their drivers."

The driver agreed that bus workers had died due to a lack of safety protections and expressed interest in the London Bus Drivers Rank-and-File Safety Committee that was formed by drivers last September after their bitter experiences during the first wave of the pandemic, "PPE came in too late for us. All this shield

protecting came in when people were dying. Why wasn't it done before? We didn't get hand sanitisers. Face masks? Go buy your own. I hope Dave wins."

A crowdfunding appeal for O'Sullivan has been launched to finance a legal claim for unfair dismissal against Metroline. The appeal, launched on the CrowdJustice platform, has raised more than £11,600. It must raise £20,000 to cover legal costs associated with an unfair dismissal claim. We urge workers and youth to support the campaign.

Please donate here and visit the campaign page here.



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