

Support builds for victimised London bus driver David O’Sullivan’s reinstatement

Our reporter
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The campaign to reinstate London bus driver David O’Sullivan, sacked for demanding workplace safety during the coronavirus pandemic, has received strong backing over the past week, with more than £1,000 donated to his CrowdJustice fund appeal.

O’Sullivan has submitted a claim for unfair dismissal against bus company Metroline, owned by global transport giant Comfort DelGro. He has raised £12,707 since May and needs to reach £20,000 by November 24 when his preliminary hearing is scheduled. Readers of the *World Socialist Web Site* can donate here .

The campaign is tapping into growing opposition in the working class to the preventable deaths of more than 160,000 people in the UK and 5 million globally. The lives of key workers, the elderly and vulnerable have been treated as collateral damage in a herd immunity agenda that has prioritised profits over scientifically-based public health measures to eradicate the virus. The world’s 2,365 billionaires grew their wealth by 54 percent (£2 trillion) during the first year of the pandemic.

Bus and transport workers have left messages on the crowdfund site in recent days. “I drove a London bus for five years,” wrote Steve. “The cabs were uncomfortable, and the heating blew exhaust fumes from traffic or re-circulated air from the passenger compartment into your face. Covid-19 made a bad situation worse. The companies know this, which is why Dave was sacked. Support this campaign!”

Chris donated £15 and wrote, “Best of luck with your case, I also work in public transport and know the danger many drivers face from exposure to covid. Solidarity.”

Fellow bus driver Larry donated £35, while Sara donated £10, writing, “I fully support you in your

campaign. Bus drivers have been treated really badly and basically left to die—it is awful.”

Messages and donations have come from around the world, including the United States, Spain, France, Australia and Ireland. Brian, a toolmaker from France, wrote, “All the best in your struggle against this injustice brother David. I had a similar experience, in the 1970s, as a shop steward and works convenor, sacked on spurious grounds and then blacklisted and left out to dry by my trade union. I've been following your struggle on WSWs and I'm in full agreement with their campaign in the working class to build the international rank and file committees. I can see no other way forward. It's up to us now to reorganise society in the interest the vast majority, the working class.”

O’Sullivan’s fight is resonating with other key workers. Penny, a retired NHS worker, sent a message to O’Sullivan’s defence campaign, describing his case as a “damning indictment of London transport, London Mayor and our government that put transport workers in the frontline of risk, denying them any means of protection and refusing to accept responsibility for the massive number of deaths. They showed absolutely no concern for people and perpetrated deliberate culling of the most vulnerable and millions of deaths. May you win justice for yourself and all those who died and their loved ones.”

On Thursday, O’Sullivan sent a message to donors via the Crowdfund site explaining:

Support for the campaign is growing.

Last week I was interviewed as part of a hard-hitting BBC radio 4 program, “Occupational Hazard: the bus drivers who died from Covid”. It aired evidence of widespread negligence towards the health and safety of bus workers during the pandemic.

The BBC cited evidence proving my concerns about a cluster of Covid infections at Cricklewood bus garage were correct. Yet I was sacked for trying to warn co-workers and for claiming my legal rights to a safe workplace under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act.

My fight against unfair dismissal is not just about me, it's a test case for the rights of key workers during the pandemic. At least 69 bus workers have died from COVID-19, and the pandemic is far from over. You would never know from the media that more than 1,000 people are dying each week from Covid in the UK and more than 50,000 globally.

A driver from Stamford Brook garage, operated by RATP subsidiary London United, highlighted the ongoing dangers faced by bus workers in the pandemic. The driver caught COVID-19 in March this year. Last week, he outlined his concerns in a survey circulated by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee. He explained that none of his co-workers were informed about his illness, placing their own safety at risk.

“We asked the manager how many people were off sick with Covid. His reply was, ‘I don’t have that figure’. He was the staff manager.”

The driver explained that health and safety at the garage is virtually non-existent, “Facemasks have been not bothered with for a while now. If you don’t wear one in allocation where all management are present, no one will tell you to wear one.

“In my opinion, far too little was done to protect drivers during the pandemic, even to the point of not telling us who was killed, who was off sick and who we had been in contact with. People were going off duty with Covid—even collapsing at the bus station. But what about all the drivers who had been in contact that day? Nothing done.

“Our union rep is the health and safety rep, yet during the pandemic he had not yet done any health and safety courses and was on furlough anyway as [were] most of management too. There was no one to take your concerns to. I believe the whole thing about operating buses during the pandemic was all about money. In the first lockdown buses were operating a Sunday service, longer duties for drivers but paid at [lower] Monday to Friday rates.”

The driver said he was opposed to his colleagues being victimised and sacked for upholding their rights

to a safe workplace under Section 44 of the Employment Rights Act. He said that his own safety concerns during the pandemic were “rarely” followed up by Unite the union and that he would support industrial action in defence of health and safety during the pandemic.

O’Sullivan’s defence campaign is spearheading the fight for a policy of COVID eradication and to push back against the intensified attacks on the conditions, pay and basic rights of the working class all over the world. We urge workers to support the campaign and attend the October 24 online meeting, “How to end the pandemic: The case for eradication”, called by the *World Socialist Web Site* and the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees.



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