

# UK: Stockwell garage bus driver dies from COVID-19: “There is no protection at work”

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Workers at Stockwell bus garage in Lambeth, south London, have taken up a collection for the family of bus driver Cesar Augusto Cardenas who died from COVID-19 on September 30.

Cesar was just 46 years old. He reportedly leaves behind a young family, including a son with special needs. He had worked at the garage for more than 20 years. A collection box in the output area where drivers sign-on for duty features a photograph of Cesar inscribed with the words “In Loving Memory”.

On Thursday, driver David O’Sullivan from the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee visited Stockwell garage and spoke with drivers. O’Sullivan is currently challenging his unfair dismissal by bus operator Metroline after he blew the whistle over the spread of infections at Cricklewood garage and called for urgent safety measures to protect lives.

Stockwell drivers told O’Sullivan they were not informed by the company of Cesar’s illness and only discovered he had COVID after he had died. The garage is operated by the Go-Ahead Group which is listed on the London Stock Exchange with a market capitalisation of £341.53 million and net revenue of £3.96 billion.

Go-Ahead has the second highest number of drivers who have died from COVID-19 during the pandemic. Between March 2020 and May 2021, nine Go-Ahead drivers died in London, according to information released by the office of London Mayor Sadiq Khan earlier this year. Only Metroline had recorded a higher number of deaths in this period with 15 of its drivers killed by the virus.

There were 52 cases of COVID-19 at Stockwell garage between October 2020 and the start of August 2021, according to information obtained last month via a Freedom of Information request. Across London bus

garages, 2,665 COVID infections were recorded during this time. The bus companies have routinely concealed information about infections to minimise staff absences and protect mileage and profits.

A driver from Stockwell told O’Sullivan he had himself caught COVID in February, “I was not vaccinated and was off sick for weeks. I was very lucky that I was able to return to work and I now have my two doses [of the vaccine].

“The problem is that there is no protection at work. We get very little PPE. We only get a pack of hand wipes once a month, and we have to be very careful how we use it, as it’s very difficult to get more. I do not believe the buses are cleaned daily, there are too many and not enough cleaners. I myself do it on each bus—I have my own spray and spend time cleaning the cab before I go out. I do not know how spare drivers cope as they may have to drive a number of different buses in a day.

“The union does very little if anything for us and we have very little information about what is going on, you always see them having tea with the managers.

“I will read up on these leaflets and read about your case. We are not told anything at all about this, or what you told us about the increase in COVID infections among children. We have to drive them to and from different schools. I am off this Sunday and could be interested in the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee, we have no-one who speaks for us and we have to.”

Another driver at Stockwell garage who stopped to speak with O’Sullivan said, “I remember you from last time. COVID is still around and is frightening. It’s very important what you are doing as our lives are on the line every day and who cares for us? No one does.

“The union is not what it should be. Why aren’t we

informed about these drivers dying in London? 56 drivers' deaths, this is a lot—but even this is kept away from us, and the unions do not even get us PPE. I didn't read the leaflet last time you came, but I will definitely this time.”

The untimely and preventable death of Cesar Cardenas underscores the ongoing threat to workers' lives from the pandemic. Just one day after Cesar died, Jean Sebastian Maludi, a 67-year-old retired bus driver from Ashford, Surrey, died from COVID-19 despite being double jabbed. He had no underlying health conditions.

Maludi's daughter, 21-year-old Dora, told *Surrey Live*, “We didn't even contemplate he would pass away. We were scared initially, but we thought he was going to make a full recovery”. She continued, “He was a bus driver for a long time after he moved to this country. But before he arrived here, he took loads of photos, he was an aspiring photographer and documented life wherever he went.

“He loved writing and was working on a lifelong dream of opening a film studio for people in his native country, the Democratic Republic of Congo, to teach and train people about the culture of film.”



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