

“I have no trust in Unite. We’re getting stabbed in the back”

Unite suspends Arriva North West strike in UK for second time

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For the second time the Unite union has suspended a planned strike at Arriva North West, as the union and company conspire to shut down yet another dispute with a below-inflation settlement.

On Thursday, the *World Socialist Web Site* was contacted by an Arriva driver who told us that workers had voted overwhelmingly to reject a 3 percent pay offer. He said of the WSWS previous coverage, “Whoever wrote it was brilliant it said the truth from start to finish. I hope you continue to cover the story as we voted overwhelming to strike Monday.”

But before the weekend Unite had worked out a new deal with minor improvements and called off the strike yet again.

No matter how many times Unite members vote down rotten deals worked out behind closed doors, the union has no intention of allowing a strike. This became clear when Unite recommended a supposedly “improved” offer of 3 percent, which was in fact worse than the previous 2 percent offer as it eliminated bonus pay for Saturdays. After massive opposition, including over 100 comments denouncing the deal on Unite’s Facebook pages, the union has provided the company with a fig leaf by recommending a deal which includes additional pay for Saturdays from January, but still only provides a 3 percent pay rise, well below 5 percent RPI inflation.

The driver who wrote into the WSWS has told us that the latest deal was barely an improvement at all: “That’s two strikes they’ve called off now. [The deal] looks good on paper, but in reality it’s not. People just have to do the maths. Effectively, after all the things have been taken out, you’re left with about £6 a week. About a pound a day.”

He added, “By the time you look at National Insurance going up next year, then you’ve got fuel, council tax—you won’t even cover the extra expenditure.”

WSWS reporters spoke with workers at Arriva depots in Liverpool, who were angry at Unite’s betrayal. One told us “I have no trust in Unite. We’re getting stabbed in the back”, and another added, “The pay offer’s a joke.”

A driver expressed disappointment that the unions had abandoned the fight for pay parity, saying, “I think all bus drivers should be on the same wage.” Another related Unite’s recent betrayal to the role it played at Go North West buses in Manchester, telling us, “I’d heard about Go North West. They got screwed over.”

Many other drivers on social media pointed out that the second deal was no better than the first, accusing Unite of “selling us drivers down the road.”

A driver wrote, “It makes you wonder who the union are working for.” Others pointed out that the insulting offer came after they had worked throughout the pandemic, with one writing on social media, “They think we’re bloody stupid [We] put ourselves and our families at risk to get Joe Public to work including nurses to be handed 39p an hour after we’ve just rejected the same 39 bloody pence rise”.

Unite responded to criticism with a slanderous attack on its own members. Regional officer Alison Spencer-Scragg said on Facebook “hopefully the majority commenting here aren’t Arriva members involved in this dispute”. Spencer-Scragg told drivers that they should be grateful Unite had not stitched them up as badly as their colleagues, as, “The majority of Arriva depots have already settled months ago and the 3% that

has been achieved is the highest in the group.”

The union bureaucrat made the absurd claim that it would be undemocratic to carry on with the strike that workers voted for instead of endlessly balloting, as “surely you cannot argue against democracy and everyone having a say? One member, one vote is the only fairest way I know”.

An official from the Manchester Trades Union Council and member of the pseudo-left RS21 group, Ian Allinson, chipped in to reassure workers, “Don’t forget that if you don’t think the offer is good enough, you can vote it down.”

Allinson says nothing about Unite recommending the deal or calling off the strike. While posing as a left critic of the union leadership, Allinson libeled the *World Socialist Web Site* as “scabs” when we warned that Unite would betray the 12-week strike at Go North West.

Despite hypocritical appeals to “democracy”, Unite has not called members’ meetings at Arriva North West. Drivers at Arriva North West depots in Liverpool told WSWs reporters, “There was no meeting with the members to say ‘what do you think we should go forward with?’. It was closed doors, and that was it.” Another told us, “I can’t believe the union are doing what they’re doing.”

Workers have no confidence in Unite’s militant rhetoric about “standing together in unity”. One driver told the WSWs, “The only reason Unite wanted us to take that second offer is because they then wouldn’t have to pay the £70 a day strike pay they offered us.” When one driver asked on Facebook “what’s the point of being in” Unite, another replied “to pay their wages”, and another posted “Unite has sold us out so to save £70 a man.”

The corporatist role of Unite in enforcing the company’s deals was neatly summed up by one worker who said, “The employer wants Unite to be the union in this workplace.” Another added, “What do you expect? Unite are trying to make the company profitable at our expense.”

Unite’s betrayal over the pay offer goes hand-in-hand with their refusal to fight for better working conditions. One driver told us that as far as he knew, Unite had focused negotiations entirely on pay. “But if you look at the older drivers like myself, it’s a case of terms and conditions now, because you’re on a timetable that’s

unrealistic. You’re picking up a full busload of passengers in only three stops. Then you’re getting abuse from passengers because the bus that should be in front has no driver.”

He added that going long periods without a toilet break causes health problems among many drivers: “There’s one duty we do at night that’s eight trips, but there’s no access to toilet facilities for that driver.”

Poor working conditions and pay had led to many leaving the profession. Several raised that pay for bus drivers had fallen far behind that of lorry drivers. One said he wanted to fight for pay parity with lorry drivers, and another told us “People are leaving left, right and centre, so it doesn’t matter however much you pay, there’s not enough people to do the job.”

The experience of working through the pandemic, only to be told there was no money for a pay rise, has opened many workers’ eyes to how they are viewed under capitalism. One worker said, “The rumour has it that the Arriva CEO just got a fantastic pay award for working through the pandemic. I got sod all.”

Despite orders from the German parliament’s budget committee to not pay any bonuses this year, and claims that it could not afford a decent pay rise during the recent train drivers’ strike, in March *Der Spiegel* reported that Arriva’s parent company, Deutsche Bahn has agreed a huge pay rise for its board members. From 2023, three members of the board receive a 10 percent pay rise, taking the pay of CEO Richard Lutz from €900,000 euros to nearly a million.

As the experiences of workers pushes them to the left, the unions are moving rapidly to the right in response, becoming more and more hostile and treacherous. The way forward for the working class requires a break with what are now company syndicates, and the formation of independent rank-and-file committees.



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