

London bus drivers speak out against smears and censorship of WSWS by defenders of Unite

Our reporters
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The pay dispute at Arriva London South is being followed closely by bus drivers across London from the standpoint of launching a long overdue fightback.

Opposition has continued to grow against Unite's attempts to foist a below-inflation pay cut on Arriva south drivers. After last month's strikes, Unite re-entered pay negotiations only to recycle a below inflation 3 percent offer which drivers had already rejected, with the proviso it is backdated and with the addition of an insulting £750 lump sum.

Unite's actions refute the claims by a group of so-called union "activists", defenders of Unite and promoters of its General Secretary Sharon Graham, that the union has been reformed under her leadership and will fight the corner of bus workers against the companies.

The "activists" responded to the growing exposure of Unite by attacking the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee, opposing its fight to organise bus and transport workers independently of the pro-company unions. The "activists" called for censorship against the *World Socialist Web Site* demanding drivers stop posting its articles on social media.

Their smear campaign followed publication of an April 13 article, "'Activists' promote Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham in Arriva London South pay dispute."

Unable to answer WSWS politically, the activists responded with a pile-on slandering WSWS as liars and saboteurs, seeking to create maximum confusion over Unite's 2021/2 pay claim and legitimise its below inflation deal. They resorted to anti-socialist red-baiting.

This was answered in the article "Arriva London South pay dispute: Fact versus fiction" which, along with "Unite blocks joint action by bus drivers against pay restraint", attracted widespread readership and support among bus drivers on social media.

In their comments on social media, drivers condemned Unite. They described the union as being "in the pocket" of Arriva, called for a no-confidence vote in the union, and

insisted on a pay demand of no less than 9 percent and up to 15 percent.

As we wrote, "It is critical that drivers speak out and oppose the unprincipled efforts to silence the WSWS. Political censorship sets a dangerous precedent. It is a direct attack on drivers' right to know information being suppressed by the mainstream media, the bus companies and Unite the union. It is aimed at blocking a politically conscious fightback by the working class."

Bus drivers have responded to this appeal by explaining their reasons for following and sharing the articles from the WSWS and the importance of the fight taken up by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee.

An Abellio driver said, "We are all following the strike at Arriva and were surprised to see that Brixton drivers had to work during the strike. Now we know that they could and should have joined the strike. That the legal case against them was a fraud is another example of the way the union separate us. I spoke to drivers on the 137 from Brixton and they all supported the strike and wanted to join it.

"Our wages and conditions are very bad," the driver continued, explaining that they had changed the union in their garage and hoped they would see a change. Describing how drivers were leaving for another London company with better pay, they asked, "Why can't we have London-wide pay negotiations?"

"A petition was being circulated here and in Camberwell garage to get rid of [Unite Regional Officer John] Murphy and the other full-timers but not Graham as it's said she is different, but we have not seen any change at all. They are all the same. Why is it that it's the same union that does the negotiations, but we end up with completely different wages and conditions?"

Speaking on the censorship of the WSWS the driver said, "So the attack on you is because you let drivers know what is happening in the different companies which the union keeps quiet about. I pass the WSWS articles on to our

WhatsApp group so bus drivers can read the WSWs articles at the garage. So it gets around and the union knows this. That is what they are reacting to; their behind-closed-doors deals are being exposed. It's important that you keep this up."

A former RATP Dev driver victimised over COVID-related health and safety concerns told us, "The truth will always hurt. The word 'unite' means just that, but in Unite The Union it means to divide and conquer.

"When RATP Dev bus drivers voted to go on strike over a year ago many of these RATP garages then became, overnight, with the blessing of Unite, different subsidiaries. WSWs exposed this and many dirty tactics of the companies, with the union having their hand in it too.

"For example, Stamford Brook garage was prevented from going on strike with Park Royal and Shepherds Bush but all are RATP Dev-London United garages. Unite and RATP said Stamford Brook did not have a majority to go out on strike. Utter rubbish when it is Unite members who voted overall in favour of strike action across the garages."

An Arriva driver said, "I have no trust in Unite based on experience, they have been useless. They should not be pushing 3 percent at Arriva which drivers have taken strike action against. The cost of everything is going sky high.

"During the pandemic we were described as key workers but our safety was not taken seriously by the company or union. We made sure the NHS workers got to work and all those who were essential as well. During last summer we worked in 43-degree temperatures as there was no air conditioning in the cabs. The management were not bothered as they were in their air-conditioned offices.

"Speaking to David O'Sullivan and the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee I became more aware about the dangers with COVID in the workplace and all the measures that could be taken to prevent infections and drivers losing their lives but which were not being taken. It was shameful how he was treated for trying to change things.

"We have to raise our voices now and act together and unite regardless of which company we work for. It is not believable when they claim they do not have the money.

"We do have the power to change things. If London Underground can be shut down why can't this happen on the buses. They will not listen to us otherwise.

"I did not know about the struggle of bus workers in Maharashtra [India] until Dave made the appeal and I read about it on the *World Socialist Web Site*. Such an important fight over the most basic rights. We do need to look across national borders and see we are part of a wider struggle."

A Metroline driver explained, "I think those who are defending Unite are worried about the facts you have exposed because of the outcomes and reaction of bus

drivers.

"The union is worried about the knock-on effect of the Arriva strike because they want to minimise all the pay disputes across London. We got around 2.5 percent for a two-year deal last time. The union rep at the garage is saying they are pushing for 10 percent in our pay talks this year but they have never discussed this with the drivers, it is a made up figure. They are keeping drivers in the dark about the other pay disputes like at London United.

"Unite has failed to deliver on a long list of issues—health and safety over COVID, pay, and terms and conditions. We voted to strike against Remote Sign On and this was not honoured, they do not respect our views.

"The election of Sharon Graham has changed none of our circumstances, this does not change with a new name at the top of the union. The rank-and-file committees is a logical alternative to the union/management alliance, which is a poisoned mechanism, it's a sick system.

"The WSWs publishes the facts about our concerns which the union tries to silence. Unite has been covering up about COVID and then sided with the company when David O'Sullivan and the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee fought for action to protect drivers lives.

"It is laughable to say there is no connection between pay and the broader issues. Everything is about profit, 100 percent, especially with the privatised buses. Workers are the main force in society. Without us there is no profit, but we have to fight for a pay rise just to make ends meet.

"This is part of an international fight as the struggle by bus workers in Maharashtra, India shows. It's a different country but the same issues stemming from the system of capitalism which puts profits first. Workers need to be informed and gain knowledge against the propaganda and lies of the media."



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