

Reject Unite's latest sell-out pay deal at Arriva London South bus company! Form rank-and-file strike committees!

Statement by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee
13 May 2022

Unite the union has suspended next Monday's 48-hour bus strike at Arriva London South (ALS) to ballot over yet another below-inflation pay offer to drivers.

Less than 24 hours after Wednesday's solid one-day strike brought services at Arriva South to a near standstill, Unite scurried into talks with company executives.

The deal they cobbled together is an insult. It provides a 3.5 percent pay increase plus £250 lump sum. Unite reps explained, "This is made up of a 3% increase from August 1st 2021, and a further 0.5% increase from 1st April 2022 and a £250.00 cash payment".

Unite reps claimed they were "forced to bring it back" to vote on because it was "an improved offer". In fact, the deal is worse than Arriva's last offer made to Unite on May 4, comprising 3 percent backdated to August 2021 and a £300 lump sum.

The additional 0.5 percent will be subtracted from 2022's yet to be negotiated pay deal. For this reason, it cannot be counted as an "improved" pay award for 2021. The lump sum has been reduced by £50. By the union's own admission, four months back-pay has been sacrificed for £250.

Drivers across Arriva South responded angrily to the deal. Some calculated that drivers will lose around £420 in back pay for a £250 one-off "bonus". Many drivers at Brixton, Thornton Heath, Norwood and Croydon garages are already calling for a rejection of the deal, describing it as "rubbish", "daylight robbery" and other more expressive terms.

Unite's reps claim that accepting Arriva's offer will "clear the decks" for this year's pay talks. But as

drivers have asked, how can acceptance of a below-inflation award for 2021 lay the ground for an above-inflation pay rise for 2022?

By March 2022, the 12-month CPI inflation rate was 7 percent. This means Unite's recommended pay-deal over the life of the 2021 agreement (running from April 1, 2021 to April 1, 2022) is 3.5 percent below inflation.

Unite's reps are busy apologising on Arriva's behalf, claiming the company does not have the money to fund a higher wage increase. At the same time, they are asserting that Unite will accept nothing below 8.2 percent for 2022. This is a fairy tale.

Does anyone think Arriva will change their tune during pay talks for 2022? They will simply claim they cannot afford it, while handing millions more to company executives and shareholders. And what will Unite's response be? Reps sought to reassure drivers yesterday, stating that Unite's bus "combine" is preparing "London-wide action" for 8.2 percent. In reality, Unite is enforcing a raft of separate pay talks across London, upholding the divide-and-rule strategy of the bus operators.

The proposed sell-out deal at Arriva South confirms the warnings by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee. No confidence can be placed in Unite. Bus drivers can only combat escalating inflation and win a genuine pay rise if they take control of the dispute out of the hands of this pro-company syndicate.

On Thursday, Unite reps told angry drivers that if strikes continue "there is no exit ramp". Unite is using the threat of industrial action to intimidate its own members instead of the employers! They are counting on the financial hardship caused by protracted industrial action to wear down opposition.

Last month, during the P&O ferry workers dispute, Unite General Secretary Sharon Graham launched a “£10 million fighting fund” supposedly to “defend our members against the worst excesses of bad bosses”. So why are Arriva drivers being kept on strike pay of just £70 a day? The only purpose is to starve them back to work.

According to its financial accounts for 2020, Unite sits on annual membership dues of £161 million. It has £119 million cash reserves and receives payments from shares of £2.4 million per annum. It handed £683,702 in donations to the Labour Party and £101,168 in salary and benefits (minus expenses) to its then General Secretary Len McCluskey. The £98 million it lavished on a union “conference and leisure centre” is currently under investigation by police.

Members must demand that Unite immediately doubles their strike pay. This will enable drivers to reject Arriva’s below inflation offer, while enabling them to pay their bills and keep a roof over their family’s head.

Unite’s determination to enforce a below-inflation 3.5 percent settlement at Arriva South is not a local issue. Unite’s national officer for buses Bobby Morton presided over the deal. In a statement issued earlier today, he hailed it an “improved offer”. This is the man who James Rossi and his fellow Unite “activists” had described as one of “Sharon’s generals” who would bring “change”.

Nationally, annual pay growth to February, excluding bonuses, was just 4 percent, less than half RPI inflation over the same period—a measure of the unions’ role in wage suppression.

Notwithstanding her verbal commitment to “workplace activism”, Graham and her officials are policing the dictates of big business and the London Stock Exchange. They are seeking to hold the line in a growing wave of pay disputes based on a de facto agreement between the Trades Union Congress (TUC), the Bank of England (BoE) and the Johnson government. TUC President Frances O’Grady is one of 12 directors on the BoE’s board.

The London Bus Rank-and-File Committee calls for a “no” vote against Unite’s below-inflation pay deal based on a programme of struggle outlined in last week’s statement, “Support Arriva South bus drivers! For a London-wide strike to break Unite’s de facto pay

freeze!” Wednesday’s strike showed the determination of workers to fight, a sentiment matched across the London Underground and railways. By establishing rank-and-file committees at every garage and depot, drivers can map out a campaign to win.

On Wednesday night (May 18), the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee is holding a Zoom meeting to discuss the issues that have arisen in the Arriva London South pay dispute. We urge drivers who would like to attend to contact the committee at londonbusrankandfile@protonmail.com.



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