

Arriva London South bus drivers denounce Unite's sell-out pay deal: "It's a load of rubbish"

Our reporters
15 May 2022

Bus drivers from Arriva London South have denounced the latest below-inflation pay offer from Arriva of 3.5 percent plus a £250 lump sum. The pay deal is for the 2021 financial year that saw CPI inflation rise by 7 percent.

Unite the union cancelled a 48-hour strike that was due to start on May 16, claiming the revised deal was "an improved offer."

Drivers at Brixton, Thornton Heath, Norwood and South Croydon garages were scathing of the deal when they spoke with reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* (WSWS) over the weekend.

WSWS campaigners distributed leaflets issued by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee, "Reject Unite's latest sell-out pay deal at Arriva London South bus company! Form rank-and-file strike committees!" and "Support Arriva South bus drivers! For a London-wide strike to break Unite's de facto pay freeze!"

Many drivers said they planned to vote "no" in this Friday's ballot. Interviews and comments will be published over the next days. All have been anonymised to protect drivers from victimisation.

Brixton garage

At Brixton, where support for last Wednesday's strike was solid, drivers discussed their response to the pay offer and Unite's ongoing collusion with the bus operators. Some drivers signed up for a Zoom meeting being held this Wednesday by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee and to receive more information about the committee.

Brixton Driver 1 said of the revised pay offer, "We're worse off. We're only backdated till August. So, you've lost four months, you're on a higher tax, and now you're going to get a cut—you're going to lose

at least £500 in your pay packet. Unite are full of s***.

"When this was London transport it was run properly. Now, they're doing exactly what they want, which is divide and conquer. That's why you have London General and Arriva [two separate pay disputes]. If all the garages all end up under Unite, how come we don't all strike? How come this isn't organised so that everybody comes together?"

"Everyone is facing the same problem, the rich are getting richer, and the poor are getting poorer. During COVID, I was working and getting abused."

Brixton Driver 2 said, "The deal is no good, we didn't get what we asked for. It should have been from April [2021], but now instead they've said August. But if we reject it, what is going to happen? Half the year is almost gone, and we haven't even started talking about 2022!"

"They're playing very hard with Unite, and some of Unite want to accept 3 percent. They say, 'let's take 3 percent, let's take 2 percent'—they don't mind. They're more comfortable than us. We all do the same job across the garages, and there is only one Unite union, so why aren't we all striking?"

"We worked hard during the pandemic. I feel like Unite aren't being tough enough with the companies. Sometimes I feel like they are on the side of the company."

"I've been doing this job for 20 years. I joined after an ad said you could earn £500, and now 20 years' later, I'm making £500 for five days' work and long hours. Back then, I was getting £8 or £9 per hour, now I'm making £15 per hour but I'm worse off. How can that be? Something is off with the whole system because that doesn't add up."

Brixton Driver 3 said, “I’ve been working here for 18 years, and I am not satisfied with this pay rise. Our tax year starts in April, so why start the back pay from August? What about the other four months? I’m not happy with it at all.

“I worked right throughout the pandemic. All the other garages got a little lump sum—we at Arriva didn’t get anything. We worked so hard for nothing. Our pay was less because we were on Sunday duties. So, we lost a lot of money during the pandemic and then the pay rise is rubbish.

“The union should have led with 4 percent or above. I am not taking that as a member. They should have stood strong. Arriva workers are really underpaid compared to the other garages and companies. I am striking.”

Norwood garage

Norwood Driver 1 said, “I have worked here 16 years. The pay deal is not good, and the union needs to go back again. The union should not have brought this to us to vote. At first, we thought they were going in for 5 percent. Then we realised they went in for 4 percent. Now they’ve come back with 3 percent and 0.5 percent. It’s a load of rubbish. I will reject this, and vote no.

“We are struggling. Almost all bus drivers have to work six days. We need two rest days, but when the pay is poor you have to work 6 days. The hours are not great, working eight hours sometimes 12. I only see my children for one day. There is tension in the house because my wife thinks I am intentionally avoiding the family, but that’s not the case. You have to work an extra day just so you bring home some decent money. Family life is out of the window.

“The unions are so divided. We need to unify the garages so it’s one big voice against the management and the government. Maybe we will be taken seriously then, but at the moment it is so divided.”

Norwood Driver 2, who works for an agency, explained, “Unite try to benefit the bus operators. They don’t even try to listen to what drivers are saying. It’s a sad sight where, ironically, they’re dividing us, not working with us and the issues we have to deal with.”

He said of the revised deal, “It’s terrible, absolutely terrible. All those drivers who have died from COVID, through lack of PPE. They don’t care about the drivers’ protection.

“I caught COVID in 2020 and it was a difficult struggle. They didn’t offer us any gloves or protections. Luckily, I came through. I knew drivers who died, so it’s a surreal situation to see what’s going on. It taught me a valuable lesson, that Unite never really cared about us. It’s up to us to find a way to be able to protect ourselves.

“It’s not fair to the drivers who put in as much work as we do and the company are the ones benefiting.”

The driver said the pay award for last year “should be more than 10 percent at least! Especially considering the long hours we are putting in and how exhausted we are—we need to rest too. It’s important for drivers to recuperate. They need to shorten the hours a bit for us.”

Norwood Driver 3 said, “It’s a really difficult time. Mortgages are going up and we have to work overtime to make ends meet. Without overtime you can’t survive. So many accidents are happening because of fatigue. If we had a decent salary, I don’t think we’d do overtime.”

When the latest pay offer was announced by Unite, “Everyone was like, ‘is this a joke or something?’ I mean I was sick with COVID and they didn’t pay us any COVID money. Other garages have COVID money, but Arriva had nothing. I caught COVID at work, in the first wave. We were called to come and work. Drivers were dying and I was in hospital.

“I hope they come up with something better this time. Most of the drivers are voting for us to strike again. I think that’s the only solution to have a two-day strike again.”



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact