

# London bus drivers protest deadly heat, abandon non-A/C buses on side of road

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London bus drivers took matters into their own hands today, refusing to drive buses without air conditioning. Temperatures hit a record-breaking 42 degrees in the capital, but inside drivers' cabins temperatures reached 50 degrees centigrade (122 Fahrenheit).

Human body cells start to die between 46 and 60 degrees. At around 50 degrees, most irreversible damage to cells begins.

A video shared this afternoon by a driver from Abellio shows a long line of double-deckers abandoned on the side of the road. The driver explains, "It's Tuesday 2 o'clock, and just to let you know, all the buses here—all down there... they're buses that have got no air con."

Crossing the road, panning left to right, the driver says, "so all these buses have been left there because the drivers have been refusing to drive, because the company won't sort out the aircon. That's the Abellio way."

Around a dozen buses can be seen parked against the kerb in both directions.

The video went viral on WhatsApp and Facebook, receiving messages of solidarity from drivers across London. "That's how you do it ladies and gentlemen. Hit them in the pocket," wrote one driver.

The dangerous conditions forced on drivers were exposed in another video posted by a driver from Arriva today. With sweat streaming down his face, he explains his cabin temperature is around 50 degrees.

"I'm getting hot air coming in. There's no cool air anywhere. It's hot air coming in... my legs are burning; my whole body is also burning..."

"One of the passengers had to get me a water to cool down. Somebody has to get me water. I'm not going to continue for another 15 minutes. I will hold here until I'm cooled down."

He concludes, "This needs to stop, we need to do something about this. It keeps going on and on and on and nobody's saying nothing about it. A driver is going to pass out and have a huge accident before they start doing something about this."

For thousands of drivers, such barbaric conditions are a bitter reminder of their treatment during the pandemic. At least 76 London bus workers died from COVID-19 due to TfL and the bus operators' criminal neglect of health and safety, aided and abetted by Unite.

Over the weekend, Transport for London announced it had a "comprehensive hot weather" plan to keep staff and passengers safe. Tom Cunnington, TfL's head of bus business development, claimed that "operators have many measures in place to protect staff, including air conditioning in all driver cabs."

Cunnington's statement has provoked fury. Drivers' testimony—including photos of temperature readings at 40-45 degrees—expose TfL and its chairman Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan as barefaced liars.

A driver from Battersea said that Abellio engineers had been directed by management to loosen the engine belts that run the AC. This is to save money on diesel, as the AC uses extra fuel.

Another driver demanded, "Why are TFL still falsely claiming all busses have air con?" His pointed question was directed at Unite the union, "All the reps & so-called activists that was claiming to have regular contact with Sharon Graham, what's the latest? What are you doing about it for the members that voted you in?"

As reported by WSWs, Unite's heatwave safety guidance issued Friday is a travesty. Sharon Graham and her officials have taken no action to protect drivers from life-threatening extreme heat this week.

Moreover, the problems with AC have been the subject of complaints by drivers for many years.

A driver from Brixton told WSWS, “Unite should have put their foot down and said our members are suffering, they can’t work in these conditions. Therefore, we support their right to leave their buses because this is a health and safety issue. We should be on strike straight away. They could possibly take the companies and TFL to court because they are lying.”

The driver estimated only 20 electric buses, on the 319 route, have proper air conditioning at Brixton, out of a fleet of at least 80 buses.

To add insult to injury, Khan posted a Facebook message yesterday about his dog Luna “looking comfortable with her cooling mat and blanket tonight”, adding “this extreme heatwave is dangerous not just for us but for our pets too”, linking to advice from the RSPCA.

“Looks like bus drivers are better off if they register with the RSPCA”, a driver replied. Another wrote, “We have worked and sweated in bus cabs of 40 plus degrees. No AC, no respite from the heat, yet you have the audacity to put a post on FB about dogs suffering in this heat.”

Across several garages, drivers have taken similar action to that of Abellio drivers. At London United Park Royal garage, drivers decided any non-AC buses would be driven back, with more than 20 returned. A driver reported 25-30 duties were left open today at the garage with drivers calling in sick.

A driver described the past days’ heat as “murderous. I’m surprised that no one has died yet. There is a failure of leadership at all levels.” He congratulated drivers for removing themselves from overheated buses, saying it was “necessary for their own health, let alone the passengers”. But he pointed out that drivers “won’t be paid for their whole duty”.

Conditions in London were replicated across the UK and Europe today, amid record temperatures driven by climate change. In Spain and Portugal, 1,700 people have died from heatwave conditions over the past week.

The following statement has been sent to WSWS by a driver outside London, highlighting the common conditions facing bus workers everywhere:

“I’m a bus driver in Coventry. We have 10 electric buses which have air con (except the one I had the

other day was not working and only blowing hot -- this is quite common). The rest of the fleet NONE have any form of cold air. It’s either hot air or outside air.

“We were offered bottles of water but that doesn’t really help when you are sweating non-stop. Also, the ridiculous times we have to stick to, particularly on a Sunday and on evenings where you get one minute at each terminus. You don’t even have time to go to the toilet or get out to stretch your legs.

“I know of a few drivers who took their buses back to the garage and said I’m going home I don’t feel well. There are fans on every bus, however, they do nothing. You could blow more powerful than what they are. There needs to be a safe max temperature for bus drivers, and if the company aren’t able to provide a cooling system (air con) on a bus then that bus should not be out.

“It won’t be long before a driver passes out and crashes potentially causing death to either themselves or someone else. For £12 an hour it is absolutely not worth it. Health before profits.”

***Tell us what is happening at your garage or workplace and find out about the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee. We can be contacted here.***



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**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**