

UK: Arriva North West bus workers in second week of strike

Our reporters
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Around 1,800 Arriva North West bus workers are in the second week of an all-out strike over pay. The workers are out at 11 garages across the north west of England—Birkenhead, Bolton, Bootle, Liverpool, Macclesfield, Manchester, Runcorn, Southport, Speke, St Helens, and Winsford. The wage rates for bus drivers vary across the bargaining unit, with those at Winsford on just £11.08 an hour.

The strike began on July 20, after GMB and Unite union members voted by 96 percent on a 72 percent turnout.

The company is seeking to impose what it describes as an 8.5 percent deal under conditions in which RPI inflation is ruling at nearly 12 percent and the lower CPI measure is at 9.4 percent, with predictions it could hit 12 percent in October. Moreover, the companies offer is split into two parts with just 5 percent being paid from April and the rest in October.

World Socialist Web Site reporters spoke to pickets at Arriva's depot in Wythenshawe in Manchester.

A driver said that the strike was solid, with the company unable to run most services. "It's only way forward, it's the only way you are going to win anything. It's got to be you're out of the door and you stay out of the door until it's resolved. You don't do one day here, two days there. It doesn't work, it'll never work. That goes in management's favour."

The driver said that staggering cost of living increases necessitated the strike. "I pay by direct debit every month for gas and electric. I was paying £78 a month and they said that I'd have to up it to £163. I got an email yesterday saying that my direct debit would be £233. I got on the phone and said that I can't afford that, I'm on strike.

"I come out after stoppages with around £360-370 a month wages, sometimes less, all depending on your

week, because you never get a 37.5-hour week. My gas and electric now at £233 is nearly a week's wage, and I've got to pay for my food, the fuel for my car to get to work, and then my food when I'm at work on the meal break. If I were to sit down and write it all down, you'd go, how the hell can £360-370 per week cover all of that, and then you've got the insurance for the car, road tax, and that's just for your car.

"I'm lucky that I live in housing association accommodation and I pay £80 a week. But when you add it all up, I'm left with absolutely nothing. We really do get peanuts, trust me.

"None of us want to be on strike, we want to be in work, but our hands have been forced. We can't afford to live."

Speaking about Arriva's offer, the driver said, "It's 5 percent. The 8.5 percent is over an extended period of time. It's 5 percent from April until August, and then you get the 3.5 percent after that. If they can give us the 8.5 percent then give it us from April. But still at 8.5 percent it's a pay cut, because the rate of inflation is around 10 percent. They're saying that fuel bills will increase by 66 percent in the autumn. I can't afford that."

The company is seeking other cuts in workers terms. The driver explained, "They want our sick pay to go down here. We currently get 90 percent of our wage and they want it to go down to 80 percent for around six months, I'm not that sure as I've not been on the sick much. We have two waiting days and they want to take it to three. When you first go on the sick, the first two days you don't get paid for, and they want to extend that to three. They are trying to take things off you that we fought for tooth and nail, very hard for. Then we got a little enhancement in our pay for Saturdays, which we've just got, and now they want to

take that off us.”

The driver was critical of below inflation deals signed by Unite and other unions in a raft of disputes by bus drivers. “In terms of all the other bus disputes recently, personally I think that we have all been sold down the river by the union. I don’t think that the [Unite union’s] Joint Negotiating Committee has helped us out. I think that they have let them down massively.”

The driver said he agreed with the Socialist Equality Party’s call for-rank and-file committees, saying, “No back door deals. Everything should be out in the open. They shouldn’t be doing these sneaky little deals behind the worker’s backs, because they are not the ones on the picket lines. They’re not the ones who are financially losing out. They are in a win-win position all the time, so they should be doing something about it, not doing what they are doing.”

Mark is a Unite vehicle rep at Wythenshawe depot. He said, “We’re after anything over 10 percent. Inflation is running at about 11.4 percent now. In terms of the cost of living, I’ve just filled my car up for £120, where six months ago it was £100, so that’s a 20 percent increase. My weekly shop must’ve gone up £15-20 weekly. My electric bill has gone up £15-20. That’s in the summer. I am dreading the winter. We just need to keep up with inflation.”

Of the many disputes of bus workers nationally he said, “I think that all of them should get together; Stagecoach, Arriva, and others, and all fight together.” Asked his thoughts on why there was no general mobilisation of all Unite and GMB members against the attacks of the bus companies, Mark said, “They really need to get together. The more we get together, the more power we have, the more we can shut down cities. The different unions all seem to be looking after their own interests. I really don’t know why they do that.”

Another driver said, “many bus drivers nationally have either left the job or gone sick due to stress related illness such as heart problems.” He agreed that a united struggle by bus workers could take on global corporations such as Arriva’s owners, DB Group, which saw revenues rise by 18.4 percent in 2021 to €47.3 billion and net profit of €5 billion. “All transport should be out; bus drivers, haulage, the rail workers, taxi drivers,” he said.

The Socialist Equality Party urges Arriva North West

workers to contact us to discuss the way forward in this critical dispute.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact