

London United bus drivers on strike: “What we’re all facing is the same thing, and we should stand together”

Our reporters
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Over 1,600 London bus drivers took strike action on Friday-Saturday at the Fulwell, Hounslow, Hounslow Heath, Park Royal, Shepherd’s Bush, Stamford Brook, and Tolworth garages.

They have rejected two below-inflation pay offers from London United, a subsidiary of French transport giant RATP, raking in hundreds of millions in profits. The most recent offer is for 3.6 percent this year and 4.2 percent next, with RPI inflation at over 12 percent and expected to reach 17 percent by the end of the year.

A bus driver at the **Stamford Brook** garage in West London told the *World Socialist Web Site*, “We’re out on strike due to the fact that pay is unfair with what’s going on in today’s economic situation. Everything’s going up constantly. We are put under stress all the time every single day, but unfortunately the main people behind London United can’t seem to see that and they don’t respect that we’re out there every day facing everyday crises.

“We’re all struggling, we’re all trying to make ends meet. Everybody’s getting big pay rises among the bosses, but the guys at the bottom, the small cogs, they’re not. Having a two-year deal, I don’t think it’s fair. I’ve heard that other companies have had a one-year deal and they’ve [bus workers] still turned it down. They need to meet the needs of the workers.”

Disgusted by the enormous profits made at workers’ expense, he said “I was looking at the newspaper yesterday where the water companies were making extraordinary amounts of money. Whatever the situation is, or who these people are, we as workers, driving everybody around every single day, facing roadworks and whatever the conditions are on the road, we’re still not being paid what our jobs are worth.

“I worked straight through the pandemic and everything, no time off, or anything.”

Asked about the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee’s campaign against the victimisation of David O’Sullivan for sounding the alarm over COVID infections, the worker replied, “I think I do remember that name. I had COVID; I had some days off then. Before that I did everything I could to keep myself safe, I wore gloves, a mask, sanitiser, and I still caught COVID.”

Drawing the link between the lack of protection from COVID and the exposure to extreme heat in recent weeks, he continued, “We were working in 39 to 41 degrees [Celsius], and some of the buses do not have air-con. It was weeks during the hot weather, but it’s all due to money. Everything is down to money: cost-cutting, cost-cutting, cost-cutting, every single time.”

WSWS reporters brought a message from rail strike pickets in London that same day, who said they would stand together with bus drivers. “We appreciate that, that’s cool” said one of the bus strike pickets.

Opposing the separation of the strikes, the Stamford driver told us, “It should be unity; it should be all as one. To show strength, we should all stand united and do it all at the same time.” That would “show the strength of bus drivers, train drivers, underground drivers, everyone that works for [London] United or London transport, it’ll show them.”

“At the end of the day, I think we’re all fighting and struggling trying to get to the same thing. It’s about pay, it’s about pensions, it’s about working conditions, everything is on the line.”

Asked about the three million workers in many sectors in dispute and ready to strike but being held

back by the trade unions, the driver replied, “It’s nuts! I saw a picture the other day, and it was strange because it was of a concert, and the amount of people there, I said to my wife, ‘This is what all of us should do at one time, to show the government that we’re all as one’. What we’re all facing is the same thing, and we should stand together.”

WSWS reporters raised the mass protests in Sri Lanka which forced the resignation of the despised president Gotabaya Rajapakse, and he replied, “This is what we should be doing. That’s the power of the people.”

“I don’t trust parliament at all, I don’t trust the next prime minister at all, whoever steps in. As long as I’ve been able to vote, I’ve not trusted anybody, because what they say and what they do are two different things.”

On the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee’s fight to give workers a voice independent of the unions, the worker said, “I hear this all the time, and it’s a bit controversial, but if you’re fighting for someone and yet you’re getting a back-hander, you can’t be doing that job.”

The driver spoke of his opposition to Conservative government legislation which criminalises protests that make too much noise: “You have to make noise to get people to come to you. We are making a noise so that people can see us and know that we are here fighting for a cause.”

“We are all staying here and defending our jobs, and standing up for what is right”

Other drivers at Stamford Brook agreed, “We need to all come out together or nothing’s going to happen.” One pointed out, “The reason we’re often not all out together is they’ve split up the pay anniversaries. I think it was the mayor [of London, Labour’s Sadiq Khan] who did that.”

Another picket pointed to the growth of RATP’s business while they were claiming there was no extra money for a pay rise and said, “They want to grow their business, but they’re pushing down our pay so we can’t live.”

At **Shepherd’s Bush** garage, a driver denounced last year’s pay deal agreed by the Unite union. Asked his thoughts on Unite’s General Secretary Sharon Graham, he said, “I don’t trust her. I don’t trust her. I don’t trust [Unite regional director] Michelle Braveboy. I

don’t trust any of them to be honest; they’re all the same. They don’t represent our best interests, to be honest.

“We as drivers need to be one more organised, more together—we’re divided for various reasons. We’ll see how this strike goes and how much progress they make, and then from there, if the union sells us down the river like they did last time I think all these drivers, in all of London, need to seriously think about getting rid of Unite as the union.”

The driver added, “We need to be united all together to take on the companies and the government but how do we do that I do not know.” He agreed to look into the work of the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee and the programme it put forward.



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