

# Bus drivers at Tottenham and Palmers Green on Arriva London North deal: “It’s a pay cut”

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On Saturday, members of the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee (LBRFC) visited Tottenham and Palmers Green bus garages to speak with drivers about the below-inflation pay deal agreed between Unite and bus operator Arriva London North.

The deal was passed in a ballot last Thursday, following a campaign by Unite to “fully recommend” the company offer. While 701 drivers voted to accept, 533 voted against. At Tottenham and Palmers Green, the drivers voted the deal down by 146 to 85 at Tottenham, and 174 to 18 at Palmers Green.

The LBRFC called for a No vote in a statement circulated on WhatsApp groups.

Drivers at both garages were scathing of the deal and spoke angrily of Unite’s collusion with the bus operators. The 11 percent figure is well below RPI inflation of 12.3 percent, which is expected to rise further due to energy price hikes and the collapse of the pound that will make imports more expensive.

A Tottenham driver said, “We have been left behind all these years. I have been in the job for 15 years and this deal is also a pay cut. It’s not good enough. I do not understand why this always happens. Whether it’s back handers, is it something else? I do not know. How much have my wages gone up in 15 years? Nothing compared to the bosses and company profits. They give you a little pay rise but then change the rules to work longer, shorter breaks, and they get their money back always. It’s ridiculous. The union does not take responsibility for this, yet they agree to it.”

Another driver explained, “I voted against the deal because we had these companies where we wanted them. We all voted to strike. Not just us, but all bus companies. We were all together. While it’s a large pay rise, it is still below inflation, so it’s a pay cut. But you try telling that to new drivers coming through the door. They got 11 percent and that sounds good to them. But drivers at this garage and Palmers Green voted no.

“The other garages voted to accept because they were influenced by the union more than we were, and the 11 percent sounds good. Also, they have a lot of new drivers from Stagecoach and other companies that pay less. We are always militant. We are a big garage. We have drivers from all over the world and we all talk to each other. The other garages are small and that might be why it’s different.

“The cost of living is very serious, and we have all got to pay bills. The only reason I am still in the union is because of the new union rep here, he is good. The union are dodgy, but he is on our side and opposed the deal. The union is quite happy to accept the hotels, the weekends away. It’s not cash in pocket, but it works out the same. I do not want to name names. The union rep here has been asked to go down to Arriva London South garages to defend drivers down in South London. I follow social media and the bus groups. People like Jimmy Rossi and others are full of it and do not impress me at all. So, I would like to know why you are different.”

Another driver said, “Look, we voted against this pay offer. It’s no good. Why is it that when we are on strike, London General buses are working, and when London General are on strike we are working. It’s no good, different companies but the same union. The union reps from all the bus companies should all get together and fight as one.

“It’s called a union, but they are not united. When we talk about a pay raise and when we are going on strike, we should do this all at the same time. But this does not happen today, it’s very difficult. The union reps go to the managements and have cups of tea with them. They are representing you on paper, but they get privileges, so do not want to rock the boat. I have to look for parking for my car. It takes me one hour sometimes, but the union can park here in the garage. We pick them, but they do not represent us.”

Another Tottenham driver said he voted the deal down because, “it’s not enough for what we do. We are working today while others are out on strike: rail workers, posties.

Why is it so divided? We need to be all together on the same page. I have lost faith in the unions. Is this the way the world works? The shareholders always win, and the workers always lose?

“A lot of the drivers have lost faith. We did try to push Unite out of here and join the RMT, but it did not work. We had good numbers here for the RMT, but as a result of the ballot a lot have left the union.”

A driver at Palmers Green said, “I have not been here long, only about six months. So, I just followed what other drivers said. But I really needed the pay raise to pay the bills. I work about 10 or 11 days on the trot with overtime. If I work seven days in a row, I get £500. That’s because I am new. I am on £12.30 an hour so I am forced to work just to pay the bills.”

Another driver said, “The result is all to do with money. I voted against. I work about 13 days in every two weeks, that is the legal maximum. But you have to do the maximum just to pay the bills and to look after the kids. I am sure that there is a lot of other drivers in that situation too. I think that most drivers thought this was a bad deal or definitely not good.

“Energy bills are all going up today again. So, we can’t wait anymore. The pay talks are from last April. Drivers know the union is not what it was, and they are now in the pockets of the companies and the bosses, but the pay raise is the highest we have got for a long time, even though it’s below inflation, but the back pay helps.”

The last driver we spoke to said, “I have only come back into the bus industry recently, in the last two years. I was a bus driver in 1989 to ’95. That was when we had the T&G [Transport and General Workers Union], which was much better. When we went out on strike the whole of London went out on strike, not like today, company by company. There were no second ballots or third ballots, only one was needed.”

David O’Sullivan, a member of the LBRFC, explained the T&G’s record, pointing out that its former leader Bill Morris was appointed to the House of Lords, becoming Baron Morris of Handsworth, “and he didn’t get that by representing the interests of workers.”

The driver told O’Sullivan, “Today the top union blokes are in with the management, and they are getting back handers from the management. And they have shares in the companies. Look what happened to this hotel built by union dues by the previous union leader Len McCluskey. His mate got the building contract and it cost millions. Who paid for it? We did.

“I think the only way forward is to form a new union, a different union, because this union is not strong enough. If you had a strong union, you would not always be talking to the management on good terms. You really have to be on the

opposite sides and dislike each other, not friendly, because we are on opposite sides. The management come in and out of the union office whenever they like. What are they saying to each other, especially in the middle of pay talks? This should not happen.

“I have left the union... I believe 15 drivers have left the union because of the result pushed by the union. But what to do now? This rank-and-file committee you are talking about, is it a new union? If it is going to work, we all have to come out of Unite and join, not just one or two. Everyone has to be in it together, like the old days, tubes, trains, buses, all together.”

Members of the LBRFC explained that rank-and-file committees would unite workers together, whether they are in the union or not, to assert the interests of drivers against Unite’s collusion with the bus operators. The union bureaucrats defend company profits, accepting the companies’ lies that they “cannot afford” to increase pay in line with inflation. They must be driven out and the workers must take control. Rank-and-file committees always start from the needs of the workers, who are the ones that produce the wealth.

A network of rank-and-file committees would enable transport workers to link their struggles and cut across the artificial divisions being enforced by Unite and other unions, including the Rail, Maritime and Transport (RMT) union.

Uniting bus, rail and tube workers in struggle in the UK and across national borders is the only way to combat the combined offensive of the global transport companies, Conservative government and Labour’s Mayor of London Sadiq Khan who are enforcing historic attacks across the transport network.

On Monday, the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee published an open letter to ALN drivers outlining the purpose of such committees and how to establish them at each garage.

Drivers who want more information can contact via email at: [londonbusrankandfile@protonmail.com](mailto:londonbusrankandfile@protonmail.com)



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

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