

Reject Go-Ahead's below-inflation pay offer of 10.5 percent for London bus drivers, vote NO!

Statement by the Merton Garage Rank-and-File Committee
9 October 2022

The Merton Garage Rank-and-File Committee urges drivers to reject the pay deal by Go-Ahead and Unite's Negotiating Committee at London General and London Central.

On July 2 (the anniversary pay date), inflation stood at 12.3 percent RPI. It is predicted to rise higher after October's energy price hikes and a record collapse of the pound that is pushing up prices for food, fuel, and other essentials.

In November 2021 Unite issued a statement claiming: "Sharon Graham says the union will continue to base claims on the RPI figure rather than CPI because it better reflects the actual price rises experienced by Unite members." Anything below RPI, Graham stated, was "a wage cut".

As soon as inflation kicked off, all such talk ended.

In May, Graham's "bus combine" of reps claimed they were launching coordinated London-wide action for a 15 percent "inflation-busting" pay rise.

They have done the opposite, dividing us into separate company pay talks, blocking united action and helping the operators hold down wages with below-inflation deals: 3.5 percent at Arriva London South, 9.25 percent at London United, 11 percent at Arriva London North.

The list of below-inflation deals imposed by Unite continues to grow across transport, logistics, manufacturing, and the oil industry--described by Graham as 'victories'.

The Go-Ahead offer

Unite's original pay claim at Go-Ahead was for an "RPI Plus % pay rise" based on RPI at settlement date. At Go-Ahead Northumberland Park, Unite's pay claim was for RPI + 3 percent. This equates to 15.3 percent. We overwhelmingly rejected the company's insulting offer of 9 percent in a ballot held in August.

Yet according to MD John Trayner's letter, Unite's Negotiating Committee agreed to recommend this latest deal, and the reps have been stood down "to explain the context of the offer".

According to the reps, Go-Ahead "cannot afford" to pay more than 10.5 percent. A few facts:

Go-Ahead group is worth £669 million and was profitable enough for takeover this year by a Spanish-Australian consortia.

Go-Ahead annual group revenue was £4 billion this year with mid-term operating profits of £150 million and the company announced a return to dividends for shareholders.

Go-Ahead CEO Christian Schreyer enjoys a "performance based" salary of between £551,000 and £1.9 million.

We are struggling to survive the worst cost-of-living crisis in our lifetime that is getting worse week by week. There is only so much overtime we can do before we break.

By what authority did the Negotiating Committee agree to recommend this deal and to dump the claim for 15 percent?

We have Unite reps arguing it's a good deal. Others trying to scare drivers that if we strike, we might get a worse offer. Supporters of Sharon Graham say we must be "realistic".

If coordinated strikes had been organised across

London this summer, we could have won 15% already.

We were in a strong position, with the companies facing a driver shortage, strikes on the London Underground and railways, and a government in turmoil. It was the perfect time for united action to defeat the operators, Transport for London and the Tories' plans for billions in cuts and the banning of strikes.

The Merton Garage Rank-and-File Committee is proposing a strategy to win this fight. In calling for a NO vote we recommend:

- End the strategy of divide and conquer! Unite must organise immediate simultaneous balloting of all drivers at Go-Ahead, Metroline and Abellio where the 2022 pay award is being stalled, to win an above-inflation pay raise.

- A vote of no-confidence in Unite's Negotiating Committee and the election of trusted drivers at each garage to lead negotiations under the control of the rank-and-file.

- No more closed-door talks! All negotiations with the company to be livestreamed to members.

- Rank-and-file control over strike pay! Minimum £100 per day for every driver to ensure that strike action is effective. It is our dues money.

- Delegations from every garage to visit London Underground, rail and Royal Mail picket lines to build links and win support for our fight.

We send our solidarity to drivers across London and urge our colleagues to get in touch to plan a common fight: **VOTE NO!** mertonrankandfile@gmail.com



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact