

Abellio London drivers speak out against Unite betrayal

“Everyone’s been sold down the river”

Our reporters
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Bus drivers at Abellio London are continuing to speak out against Unite after the union’s cancellation of their three-month strike. Unite’s anti-democratic action, ramming through a below-inflation pay deal via a non-binding consultative ballot, has produced widespread anger.

Theresa (not her real name), is a senior bus driver. She said her colleagues learned the dispute was cancelled via a text message last Friday from Unite.

“Let us see the results. Because obviously, when we vote, someone will take a picture and they’ll put the yeses and the noes and the total. It all gets sent out. But we’ve seen nothing as yet from the ballot-slash-survey, just them saying, ‘we’ve accepted the deal’.

“They’re taking the piss. Everyone’s been sold down the river. I mean, we’ve done the ballot for carrying on the strike and they’ve gone and just lifted it.”

She said the company was already throwing its weight around, “They’ve put onto Dash web, they want us to sign-on 15 minutes early. No mention of extra money. They want to pay the bare minimum, they’re going to get the bare minimum. So I might go into work a little bit early and I’ll fill out my duty card, but I won’t be signing on until one or two minutes before I need to, and I won’t be doing any favours with regards to taking my bus over.

“One of the people in the WhatsApp group said something about, ‘well, when are they gonna be doing the schedules?’ It’s broken. Currently, all the duties that we have are set against a 30 mile per hour road [speed], when the majority of the buses have been

restricted to 20 mile an hour—but the duties are still reflecting a 30 mile an hour. So that’s something that should also be challenged when the schedules get changed, if and when they get changed.

“Management has put on Facebook it would be done within six months, and a 60-minute break, but we’ll see what happens. Because the original agreement was rejected by drivers anyway, and they voted to continue striking, but there was nothing resolved on the schedules.

“I had a query about my duties, because to me, when you’re on earlies, you’re on earlies. When you’re middles, you’re on middles, and when you’re on late, you’re on late. But before I came off for my annual leave, I was starting at half six, 8:30, something like 9:00 o’clock. And then my last duty of the week started at twenty past one in the afternoon. There’s no consistency. And when I go back to work on Monday, I’m starting at half past six. Then I’m starting at 4:50. You’re up and down. And when you challenge it they say, ‘well, the union agreed that’. They don’t give a **** about you, whether yo’re coming or going, or what time you start.”

She said Abellio was also changing drivers’ duties with no prior notice, “I quickly screenshotted mine to make sure it wouldn’t change.”

A big issue is the expansion of agency staff, she continued. “During the strike, they banned people from doing overtime and the rail replacement. It was something like £150 a day for Abellio drivers. Agency drivers are doing that now and they’ll be getting well over £200 pounds. They’ve had agency staff doing all that work when we were on strike, but they’re not willing to give us a decent wage. You know, a simple

request, getting a decent duty or a decent break time.

“All they did was just blackmail people into coming back, basically by cutting off all the overtime, but if you were paid a decent rate of pay, you wouldn’t need to do overtime.”

Theresa said drivers were the ones creating profits for the company: “You don’t see John Eardley [Abellio managing director] and Lorna Dodds [Abellio operations director] rocking up at the garage. They’re not the ones that are getting the bus at ungodly hours and going to bed at ungodly hours and given the basic 10 hours in between shifts. Or going to a foodbank and wondering how they’re going to pay the gas and electric.”

Anger at Unite’s betrayal was boiling over, she said. “A lot of them have cancelled their direct debits, and some are just thinking ‘well, why the hell have I bothered striking all this time?’ Or ‘why did I bother joining the union?’ To be fair, I only joined it because if I didn’t, I wouldn’t have got any money because I’m in the RMT. A lot of them want to know who they need to contact to cancel their direct debits.”

WSWS asked how many drivers had voted in Unite’s “survey”. Theresa replied, “We haven’t got a clue. It was just like a simple yes or no vote and what are your three priorities? I just ticked the no box and didn’t even bother about priorities because the no should be enough.”

She said Abellio drivers had already voted to continue their strike, even after most of the reps joined with Unite officials to recommend Abellio’s below-inflation pay offer on January 25.

“So how, in the quickest time, have we gone from being ‘Yes’ to carry on striking, to ‘Well, let’s go back and get shafted by the company’?

“My consensus is that the drivers are still not happy. We were a collective and as a collective everyone was pissed off. And I presume they are still.”

She explained that Unite officials worked to erode morale and whittle down the original strike demands, “When Unite announced £20 for involuntary overtime, the morale on the picket line was pathetic. It was just dead, you know. You could tell people were pissed off and felt like they’ve literally been sold down the river.

“We’re all waiting to see what’s happened. Where are the results? Let’s see the percentage from each garage and see what’s going on. Someone should

challenge this in court. It’s a dereliction of bloody duty, is what I call it. Failure to look after you, the people who are paying you to look after them.”

Contact the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee.



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