

# Striking Birmingham bin workers speak out: “I think we’re just the start”

Our reporters  
15 April 2025

Around 300 striking refuse collection workers rallied outside Birmingham City Council House on Tuesday morning, just one day after they rejected an offer to end the dispute based on the council retaining its savage cost-cutting measures.

The council’s offer upheld the axing of the safety critical Waste Recycling and Collection Officer (WRCO) role and pay cuts of up £8,000 for 150 workers, and was rejected by 97 percent.

The mood at Tuesday’s rally was defiant, with workers expressing their determination to stand united against the council’s sweeping cuts. Workers rejected a one-off lump sum payment that was used to try and entice a Yes vote.

Unite the union agreed to put Birmingham City Council’s (BCC) insulting offer to the membership in a ballot held at its headquarters in Birmingham on Monday. Following its rejection, Unite officials claimed a new deal was possible “within days”.

Today’s rally was called by Unite to promote its call for a “debt restructuring agreement” with BCC and the Starmer Labour government that would supposedly defend workers’ pay and conditions.

A Unite petition, “Back Birmingham’s Refuse Workers”, addressed to Leader of Birmingham City Council John Cotton and Head Commissioner Max Caller, appealing for “meaningful discussions” to end the dispute, was to be handed to the council during the rally.

But council leaders refused to even accept the petition, with workers reporting they were barred access to the Council House by security and had the doors shut in their faces. At the same time, picketers have received letters from BCC threatening that “investigations are underway” over totally unspecified “incidents” on the picket line.

In other words, the BCC and the Starmer government are preparing to escalate their strike-breaking operation.

Striking refuse workers spoke with reporters from the *World Socialist Web Site* explaining the significance of the strike and the assault being mounted against them.

Another striking worker, David, said: “I’ve been working for the council for 35 years as a dustman. I love my job but now we’re on strike and I believe that we are justified in staying out as long as possible because the offer that’s on the table from the council is a joke.

“They said they had no money to begin with for the grade 2s and the grade 3s. They then brought out a little cushion of £4,000 and £7,000, but they’re going to be losing £8,000 a year thereafter. No money on the table, then out the blue, they have now offered £8,000 for the grade 2s and £16,000 for the grade 3s.

“But on top of that now they are coming after my grade, which is grade 4, but they haven’t even let the public know this and I’m going to be losing £8,000 now but no enhancer for me.”

David described the dispute as a test case for other sections of workers, “We went bankrupt in this city... I think we were deliberately set to fail. It’s groundbreaking. What’s happening for us will happen, and is happening, throughout the whole of this country. Look at the steel workers for a start.

“This whole country needs to stand strong for the workers of this country and keep what we’ve got. We don’t want any more money. We just want to stay on what we’re actually keeping now.

“I’m a proud member of Unite and I have been for years, they’ve looked after every single striking member with some payment towards living costs. The working man and woman in this country they deserve

better. Labour are jokers they really are, and we're not going to take it. I agree we should all stand strong on what we believe in and what we earn."

**Prem** said: "This is going to have an impact on the other council workers, that's what I think. They are sending the police against us—it's just wasting time and money. They are supposed to care about the workers but they've got some plan.

"I've worked in the city council for 14 years, and it's the first strike in my career. They really want to change something and we are just standing in their way. The problem is, we are very united, and [so] they try to split everybody, and do cuts here, cuts there, little by little bit.

"But if we stay united maybe we can protect our future." Asked for his views on expanding the strike, he replied, "I think so, that would be best solution for this situation, because I think that they are going for everybody."

Speaking of Labour's role in organising the strike-breaking operation, Prem said: "To be honest I voted for them, but it looks like I made a mistake."

**Colin** said the dispute was part of a wider picture, "It's not just us, there's teachers and there's more to come. I think we're just the start, we've had enough.

"We worked through all that COVID stuff and nothing was mentioned, and then there are these cuts. Some of the guys used to have early starts, cut again, and they used to get paid a certain amount of money, cut. And when they cut that off [early starts], people would stop you in the streets and say, 'Why don't you lot come earlier?'

"Taking the WRCO roles off is another thing again, which will lead to the drivers losing... they'll be moving on to them next. It's a knock-on effect.

Colin described the council's one-off lump sum payments in exchange for massive pay cuts of up to £8,000 as a "pittance... these guys are working for hardly anything anyway, and like I said it's a knock-on effect and there's more to come."

He said the media was lying in its depiction of the dispute, including that strikers were offered a "generous deal" to end the dispute, "They're not good deals... we're not moving forward. When was the last time we had a wage rise? It's that bad, we aren't even asking for a pay rise. They just want you to go backwards.

"Yet you've got guys coming in from the Houses of Parliament, the wages that they're on and stopping in these top hotels, all expenses paid, and from the moment they arrived coming in heavy-handed like that straight away.

"Right now, outside our workplace they put all barriers up to stop you from protesting, so you have to stand across the road, it's one thing after another."

Of the Labour government's role, Colin said, "If I knew this, they wouldn't have had my vote, but I think they're going to get a shock."



To contact the WSWs and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](https://wsws.org/contact)**