

Stagecoach West Scotland drivers launch six-week strike

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Four hundred thirty bus drivers for Stagecoach West Scotland, from the company's Arran, Ayr, Ardrossan, and Kilmarnock depots, launched a six-week strike June 9, aimed at increasing poverty-level pay. The strike follows months of prevarication by the drivers' trade union, Unite.

Workers rejected a miserable 4 percent offer as long ago as November 2024, by a 98 percent margin on an 81 turnout. Late May and early June, three one-day strikes were finally held, producing no movement from the company, who are insisting that any pay increases beyond the 4 percent come at drivers' expense in the form of longer hours, unpaid breaks and loss of annual leave.

During their one-day strikes and at the start of the six-week stoppage, workers held well attended protests outside Ayr and Kilmarnock bus stations, although some bus services were operating normally. At Kilmarnock, on Monday, passing motorists sounded their horns in support.

This WSWS reporter spoke to drivers in Kilmarnock. However, they had been briefed by Unite not to give interviews. Workers were unwilling even to be quoted anonymously, expressing concerns about being sacked for "gross misconduct" if they spoke to the press. Unite, some said, would only defend them on an individual basis through the protracted and costly unfair dismissal proceedings rather than robustly and determinedly defend workers right to free speech through a collective mobilisation.

While Stagecoach, with its immense resources and a pro-business media broadcast whatever it wants, workers are prevented from counteracting this by their union's refusal to defend elementary democratic rights.

Unite officials' only public statements point to the fact that Stagecoach West Scotland drivers are worse

paid than colleagues in other Stagecoach regions in Scotland and England. A June 9 Unite press release quoted Siobhan McCready, Unite industrial officer, as stating, "The pay dispute could have been resolved months ago if the company made an offer which pays the Stagecoach West Scotland drivers similarly to other drivers across the country."

There are indeed differing rates. Stagecoach Highlands is currently paying £14.28 an hour, after a deal agreed last November, while West Scotland only pays £13.00. Stagecoach Strathtay and Perth pays £15.00 an hour. A new start in Bow Garage, London, will get £16.00 an hour. Stagecoach East Midlands are advertising £17.54 an hour for qualified drivers. Stagecoach North East on the other hand is only offering £14.86 an hour. But Unite negotiated all these differing rates in collaboration with Stagecoach's regional operations, rather than seek a unified rate for the job.

Under conditions of tremendous and deepening inequality, with wide sections of workers being offered minimal, often sub-inflation increases, and with a host of new attacks on social spending and welfare benefits being implemented by the Starmer Labour government to pay for its rearmament drive, the trade union apparatus works to keep every dispute isolated and workers fragmented and silenced.

Workers' families have not been gagged, however. Social media posts gave full vent to the tremendous frustrations, primarily over company distortions over bus worker earnings. Stagecoach's web site is currently claiming their offer represents "£3,123 for any driver working a normal 39 hour week to £29,487 from February 2026."

One post read:

"Unfortunately due to company policy drivers have

been SILENCED and are not allowed to give their version of events when STAGECOACH are throwing out nothing but pure hatred towards their communities and staff all over the press.”

The post explained that since 2022, drivers have been paid £13 an hour with an overtime rate of £16.54 only available for working a rest day. Drivers are currently asking for £15 an hour, backdated to 1 Jan 2025. Stagecoach claim drivers are being offered 11.85 percent, but this “offer” involve the loss of a full week’s holiday, loss of breaks and drivers not being paid for time spent filling in running board and defect cards, cashing in and end of shift paperwork.

The same post noted that since drivers last got a pay rise, bus fares have increased by 37 percent. Another post opposed the same distortions and responded to frustrations among passengers over the cancellation of rural and local bus services.

The drivers’ dispute takes place at the same time as the strike by Birmingham bin workers, also Unite members, against pay cuts and job losses enters its third month. Labour-run Birmingham City Council are using a High Court injunction to criminalise effective picketing. Rather than challenge the injunction by mobilising its one million members, Unite has agreed to comply while the council organises a mass strike breaking operation.

Many other disputes are simmering in Scotland, including among transport workers. Workers on Glasgow Subway have also voted for strike action. Over 100 workers, Unite members, voted, by 97.5 percent majority, for a series of one day strikes later this month in response to chronic understaffing, and poor working conditions. 700 care workers for the charity Enable, Unison members, recently initiated a rolling strike, the first in the sector for over a decade, against poverty pay. Workers at five companies based at Glasgow airport—Glasgow Airport Ltd, ICTS Central Search, Swissport, Menzies Aviation and Falck—are involved in disputes over pay, working conditions and understaffing. They are to be balloted for strike action by Unite within two weeks if the disputes are not resolved first.

All these disputes are being kept apart, managed and manipulated by the trade union apparatus, instead of being brought together in a unified industrial and political offensive against low pay, poor conditions,

collapsing education, transport, health and social care systems.

Underlying the bureaucracy’s prostration before corporate management is their aim to ensure a stable and lucrative platform for investment to secure their own relations with the companies.

With 24,000 employees, Stagecoach runs around 26 percent of the bus services in the UK, one of a small number of large operators. Unite, the largest union in Stagecoach, ensures that disputes never happen across Stagecoach or any of its rivals simultaneously.

Stagecoach is wholly owned by DWS, who bought Stagecoach in 2022 for £595 million, outbidding a proposed merger with National Express. DWS is 80 percent owned by Deutsche Bank. It describes itself as “one of the largest global infrastructure investment managers.” Based in Frankfurt am Main, DWS record 47 subsidiaries and 28 “structured entities” around the globe. 24 of the subsidiaries have branches of their own. The 2024 annual report claims total assets of €1.01 trillion and pre-tax profits of €951 million. DWS has interests in airports, transportation, alternative fuels and many other revenue streams.

Bus workers in Ayrshire, therefore, are in conflict with a vastly resourced international operation devoted to the worldwide expansion of shareholders’ wealth at workers’ expense. To combat Stagecoach and DWS requires a comparably international movement, seeking to unify workers across regional, sectional, company and national borders and which put the interests of workers above and at the expense of those of the corporations.

Contact the WSWS today to discuss the formation of urgently needed rank-and-file committees at every Stagecoach depot.



To contact the WSWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact