

# London bus drivers speak after Unite union cancels heatwave strike

Our reporters  
21 August 2026

Bus drivers at Arriva North London held strikes last Friday and this Tuesday in a fight for safe working conditions in the recent heatwaves. On many routes the buses have no air conditioning and can be above 40 degrees Celsius inside the cab.

The strikes were abruptly stopped by the Unite union when it announced on Tuesday evening that “Arriva has made an offer to Unite members.” Unite said there will be a ballot before the next strike scheduled for the 25th, although several bus drivers told the World Socialist Web Site they had received no details of the deal.

WSWS reporters spoke with drivers on the picket line, and again after the strike was suspended. They were determined to fight despite the bureaucracy’s attempt to isolate and shut down their struggles.

**John**, a driver for 18 years, told the WSWS on the picket line at Tottenham that the buses on his route have working AC, “but I’m here in solidarity because I know what it’s like. Because I’ve driven buses before where the heat’s abhorrent.”

Extending the strike “is the only way to be effective. This divide and rule is designed for this to happen. But what happens now, we’re going to strike, and yet still, North is not striking, East is not striking.

“The problem is universal. But the demonstration is just selective, which is not going to be very effective. And I think that’s where the union should come into play and say, OK, this has to be holistic.

“Because, to be honest, this strike: the reason is very good, but the support is very weak. The support should be across the whole industry.

“If it goes on like this, you’re going to find a lot of drivers will come back to work. It should be universal. It should be more uniform. And that’s what the union should emphasise. They’ve got the 476 [bus] running,

they’ve got the other companies running, so it’s disruptive but not paralysing.”

John took a copy of the Socialist Equality Party’s Statement of Aims, and said, “As you get older, you realise this world is not run by governments. Who actually runs this world is business people.

“For instance, Tesco, Sainsbury’s, all these big guys, they employ millions of people. The private sector employs more than the public sector. So, I think that’s where the problem lies. Because these people, to me, are more powerful than actual governments. Because of wealth, they dictate the narrative.”

John denounced the private ownership of essential services, saying, “This country’s leaders are just brain-dead. Why on earth would you allow somebody to take away public transport from you? These people are mad! Why on earth would you privatise the water? ... You can’t live without water! And every party supports that: Conservatives and Labour, Lib Dems. No one is saying, ‘no, stop this privatisation.’”

There are upcoming pay negotiations at Arriva. “We never get a pay rise. There’s a pay cut coming. And I don’t like it, because the unions, they should negotiate that part unconditionally. You can’t say, OK, I’ll give you a 2 percent pay rise, but I’m going to take 1 percent from your pension, 1 percent from holiday. It’s like they take more out of you when they give you a pay rise. They punish you for a pay rise.”

After the last pay rise, he was told, “what we’re going to do, we’re going to reduce the break, and put another rounder inside of it. So instead of doing 4 rounders, we’re doing 5. So a pay rise is never an attractive thing for us, for me personally. They always find a way to get me back for it...

“It should be exempt, that whatever pay talks we have, there’s no way our duties should change. But in

this culture, in the industry, with every pay rise they always reduce everything. And the unions allow that to happen!”

JD, another driver on the picket line, told us his cab could be “42, 43 degrees. It’s like an oven. It’s not funny. When you are inside, there’s no cool air, not even fresh air. Just the air cycling inside the cab. You have to open the cab door all the time and open the front door.”

JD had refused buses which were too hot to safely drive. “Your safety and the safety of the passengers is more important than anything. It doesn’t matter if it’s too hot, too cold, if you’re not safe to drive, safety is number one. You cannot be selfish. You know you’re not feeling well, and driving is not right.

“When it’s too hot, you feel fatigue as well. Fatigue kicks in. When you’ve been driving for one hour, it’s like you’ve been driving for a week. You feel tired, you feel exhausted.

“Sometimes it happens to me that I don’t have water. If I run out of water, you have to wait until the next stop, go to the shop on your next break... So you’re driving all the way from King’s Cross to Edmonton with no water.”

The drivers are treated terribly. “In all the jobs I’ve done, I’m a new driver, but I’ve never seen a job where people don’t care about you, they don’t even talk to you. They don’t even say ‘Hello, how are you today? How are you feeling?’ Nothing. ... Even a machine, a car, you need to look after your car, otherwise the car will collapse. But here, if you collapse, off you go, someone else will come. That’s how bad it is. It’s inhuman in my opinion.”

We asked JD about Sadiq Khan’s comment that bus companies should provide safe conditions, “I think he’s a hypocrite! If you run a business, if you really want to know what happens, you don’t need to ask the operators. Send some spies. Send TfL guys, go see what these people are doing on the buses!”

Another driver said “They’re making loads of profits and instead of using them for aircon, they are putting gadgets in the cab to watch us”.

WSWS reporters returned to Tottenham the day after the strike was called off. No driver who spoke to us had heard details of the deal.

One said, “Another issue [in the strike] is the way controllers speak to drivers. One asked me to sit with a

bus at the end of a 10-hour shift. I refused, and he said he’d put that in his report... I used to be a controller so I know, you’ve got a screen, and it used to be 40 buses, but they added more.”

He took a copy of the WSWS article on the strike and said, “I’m going to photocopy a few of these and put them in the garage.”

Another driver said, “They’ve not communicated anything. They say they’re going to brief us tomorrow.”

He continued, “We had a problem, and they should have told us they’ve resolved it, or at least set out a timeframe, one or two months. But they didn’t tell us anything, both Unite and the transport companies.”

A young driver said, “I haven’t heard anything. Not in the group chats, and not from the union rep.” Asked what he thought about Unite calling off the strike, “It’s bullshit. I think they were ready to just accept any offer.”

One explained, “We’ll keep asking the rep, but nobody’s told us anything... I’ve been on strike two days in a row even though I’m not in the union, but I make a sacrifice for what I believe in. I think unless we strike six days in a row, TfL won’t do anything.”



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

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