



On the bus workers' strike On the economic crisis

Thoughts, questions, ideas, perspectives from a socialist bus worker solidarity activist: brent@workersliberty.org:
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For working-class action to bring down the system

www.workersliberty.org

2 years ago, Metroline drivers broke 7 years silence from the union and took strike action against the 2nd biggest transport transnational organization in the world. A visibly scared, and in some ways corrupt, union leadership backed down - and drivers agreed to pocket far less than their due before Christmas. They were the only section of the union to take action.

The next year Metroline bosses were unusually quick to meet the union's (low) demands. Unite leaders, probably to save Ken Livingstone, appeared to shelve all disputes on the London buses.

**Capitalist crisis: why it's happening,
and how to respond. London
Workers' Liberty Forum.**



Thursday 23 Oct 2008 - 7:45pm
Lucas Arms, 245A Grays Inn Road,
London WC1AAn introduction to basic
Marxist ideas about capitalism and class
struggle. As governments across the
world intervene in the economy with
measures that have been called "bankers
socialism" we put the case for working-
class socialism

Now we've got Boris Johnson
who, let alone the buses, wants
to smash the RMT on the tube. He
has also declared he will raise
transport fares by 6% next year,
hitting working-class people
hardest.

This year Arriva and First have
reported record revenues and
profits and Metroline parent
company, Comfort Delgro has
plans to become the largest and
most profitable land transport
organisation in the world within
six years.

For drivers around London, the
Metroline strike was inspiring and
seemed to prove strong strike action
possible.

This year, First drivers started things off
on 29th August, having turned around an
uneven membership three years ago
into a solid union section across the
garages. Metrobus drivers in Croydon,
Orpington and Crawley joined for one
day's action on the 12th September. This
Friday, the 2,500 drivers at Metroline
will be out again, voting 88.5% for
strike, boosting the strikers to 6000.

Under the slogan "equal pay for all",
Unite seems serious about fighting
against the system of private
companies out-tendering each other by
under-cutting workers' wages and
conditions. Arriva North and South and
East Thames and East London should
also be out on the 22nd. Even at
Transdev Sovereign, normally weak,
there seems to have been a turn around
through concerted activist work.

*Here are some general
questions. They are deliberately
open.*

Do you have faith in the system?
What drives this system?
Can they even save themselves?
Why is New Labour is bailing the
banks out?
What is their plan?
Where is this all going?
Their system is paralysed with
fear?
Are we scared?
What are we going to do? What
we?
What relation does a London-
wide bus strike have to this
crisis?
Did we choose this?
What are we going to do?
What are we fighting for?
What are our values? What do
we need, what do we want?

***This is the time to discuss, to
question, to demand, to
organise!***

Drivers are fed up of the injustice and craziness of the same work being paid thousands of pounds more or less depending on the company. There is a unanimous strength of feeling on this issue. But for other drivers, in Arriva Shires for example, rotas seem the biggest issue.

Some drivers think differently on whether "equal pay for all" should apply to bendy-bus rates and different shifts.

On First buses, one of the company negotiators has "resigned" and the company is determined not to give ground to the union. "The union is intent on dragging further bus companies into strikes in pursuit of its *fruitless bid to standardize conditions of working and pay in all companies,*" said Adrian Jones, managing director in London and Berkshire

Drivers have seen through the tricks management try to pull by manipulating the rotas - they can see that the companies do not give a penny without trying to claw it back at the same time. Offer after offer - that has tried to test the resolve of the union - has been rejected by drivers, who seem sure that they will go forward this time.

Many members have no idea what the plan is, or if there even is a plan. If there is a plan, it is decided above their heads and not communicated very well. Drivers are consulted (in general) to tell them what they need to do - which is important but far from what's needed to grow a strong union that workers can trust in. Nonetheless it is impressive how well-attended, strong and committed the pickets have been in all the garages so far. There have been small levels of scabbing but the prospect of a London-wide bus strike soon is irresistible.

Previous years wouldn't necessarily inspire confidence in drivers, but in garage after garage new, fresh reps have been elected with a new promise to fight and be accountable to members. No more partnership with the companies, which has meant reps selling themselves over to the company's way of seeing things, becoming the company's person in the union.

AWL Trade Union School

Saturday 25 Oct 2008 -
11:30am
5:00pm

Oxford House, Derbyshire
Street, Bethnal Green,
London E2 6HG

Some drivers need to stop being cynical and stop leaving the union in frustration. The drift over to the RMT is the wrong move, just at the point where union members across London are beginning to be more proactive and reps more accountable. These non-union and RMT members need to come back positively to

Unite and be part of a struggle that should involve all drivers, actively making decisions and building the organization.

But things don't change overnight, and drivers have to take the lead in breathing new life and expectations and ideas and time into the union. The progress made over the last few years is really encouraging and should be motivation enough to see that it's worth putting energy into a strong and fighting union.

Every member should develop a voice, an understanding and a stake in the decisions of the union. Transforming the bad days of corrupt unionism on the buses involves changing the culture of power in the union. Drivers are intelligent, thinking people, with ideas, experience, education and talents. Those with time should form a strike committee, networking ordinary members across the garages and companies - to steer the union leadership through the strike and organize maximum participation in the strike. Everyone should play their part. This would be a big and exciting challenge.

The union as a whole should facilitate everyone's participation by organizing

LONDON SHOP STEWARDS
NETWORK to ALL TRADE UNIONS
NO RETURN TO THIRTIES
WE WON'T PAY FOR BOSSES
GREED
FIGHT FOR EVERY JOB
Protest against the fat cats in the
city of London who threaten our
jobs and living standards.
MEET AT Bank Tube (Threadneedle
Street entrance)
MONDAY 13TH OCTOBER 12 NOON

crèches, pooling care costs etc, to hold mass member meetings and protests on strike days.

The union will shut down a huge circuit of London transport and the most working-class mode of transport. This is immense power that may also be a parting kick to this toppling system, especially if other workers join the strike, stop work, stop re-producing this system.

The RMT union activist Andy Littlechild who was a key leader of the Metronet Engineers' strike has been suspended. This is one of several victimizations that the union has to fight. The managements of the companies on the London underground have been acting more and more provocatively and aggressively. Bus workers need to be prepared not just to strike over pay but to act immediately if drivers are victimized.

In this period of economic crisis, more and more parts of the system are revealing how they have been implicated in the gambling in the name of greed and bonuses, which has infected the whole capitalist economy. Now as their system is crumbling, they are reacting with fear as the house of cards falls down. While the rich should pay - the bankers, the lenders, the insurers, the

capitalists – government finance ministries around the world have shown in whose interests they govern.

Britain has rushed to bail out the banks and bankers to the tune of 500 billion, almost as much as is spent on health, education, defense, roads, pensions, policing, prisons- and the whole public sector. Yet they have been in dispute with all the public sector workers through trying to impose a 2% pay limit!

They have created money from nothing by all sorts of swindles, which every section of the economy has relied on to extend operations and maintain growth. As oil runs out, climate disasters increase, water becomes scarce, wars rage, and the governments move to scapegoat minorities and migrants, we need to take this opportunity to stand strong.

The union needs to be outward looking, making sure cleaners are unionized and can advance their struggle using the strength of drivers. Bus and tube workers should launch a big campaign for public ownership and workers control over a well-funded FREE public transport system. Such a campaign is being built in Manchester and in Scotland as a response to congestion and pollution.

Maybe in further strike action drivers could run the service without charging passengers, hitting the companies but building solidarity with working class people who struggle to pay the rocketing fares.

Bus workers could add their strength to a growing movement wanting all public services brought back in house, including energy companies and utilities.

Our first National Gathering will be held in London, bringing together trade unionists and environmentalists to discuss and organise for the fight against the bosses and against climate change. Sessions will address the transport, aviation and energy industries and our ongoing work in Scotland, Kingsnorth, Heathrow and much more. LSE, 15-16 November.
www.workersclimateaction.co.uk



Many bus workers in London come from the warzones of the world, Sri Lanka, Somalia, the DRC, Afghanistan - and former colonies of this system like Jamaica and Ireland. If workers are prepared to stop London over 50p an hour, perhaps in future a strong and united union in public transport could also use working-class power in working-class solidarity. Bus drivers are not horses that pull a cart; they are people who need hospitals,

care in old age, education for their children and themselves. In this period where these companies and government departments will try and cast off workers and their services, throwing people out of homes and slashing pensions, strike action should be taken on the buses and tubes for workers' interests in general.

Mainly school children walked-out when this government started bombing Iraq. There is every possibility that they will attempt to support a war in Iran. Iranian bus workers in Tehran have been battling against the regime, scaling fences to attend banned union meetings. Their union leader, Mansoor Ossanlou, has been in and out of prison, has had his tongue sliced and has lost the sight in one eye. He is in prison now. Bus worker solidarity should be used both to support workers' power in Iran, and against Imperialist war.

Unions need to break the anti-union laws that ban solidarity. If the rich can control the finances, we can control the wheel.

In times like this, people learn fast. Working-class solidarity and the strength is the solution. The working-class needs to quickly build organizations to educate and equip people for the period ahead.

The socialists, who are divided and a small force across the world, need to act with unity to provide assistance in terms of history, analysis, experience, politics and coordination.

Workers should now wake up and get organized. Freedom has to be fought for and won. That much is the experience of history.

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Who we are: the Alliance for Workers' Liberty



Today one class, the working class, lives by selling its labour power to another, the capitalist class which owns the means of production. Society is shaped by the capitalists' relentless drive to increase their wealth. Capitalism causes poverty, unemployment, the blighting of lives by overwork, imperialism, the destruction of the environment and much else.

Against the accumulated wealth and power of the capitalists, the working class has one weapon: solidarity.

The **Alliance for Workers' Liberty** aims to build solidarity through struggle so that the working class can overthrow capitalism. We want socialist revolution: collective ownership of industry and services, workers' control and a democracy much fuller than the present, with elected representatives recallable at any time and an end to bureaucrats' and managers' privileges.

We fight for the labour movement to break with "social partnership" and assert working-class interests militantly against the bosses.

Our priority is to work in the workplaces and trade unions, supporting workers' struggles, producing workplace bulletins, helping organise rank-and-file groups.

We stand for:

- Independent working-class representation in politics.
- A workers' government, based on and accountable to the labour movement.
- A workers' charter of trade union rights - to organise, to strike, to picket effectively, and to take solidarity action.
- Taxation of the rich to fund decent public services, homes, education and jobs for all.
- A workers' movement that fights all forms of oppression. Full equality for women and social provision to free women from the burden of housework. Free abortion on request. Full equality for lesbian, gay and bisexual people. Black and white workers' unity against racism.
- Open borders.
- Global solidarity against global capital - workers everywhere have more in common with each other than with their capitalist or Stalinist rulers.
- Democracy at every level of society from the smallest workplace or community to global social organisation.
- Working-class solidarity in international politics: equal rights for all nations, against imperialists and predators big and small.
- Maximum left unity in action, and openness in debate!

If you agree with us, please take some copies of *Solidarity* to sell - and join us!