

COVID-19 infections out of control at Cricklewood Bus Garage! For a walkout to save lives!

Emergency statement by the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee
7 January 2021

The London Bus Rank-and-File Committee calls on drivers, engineers, administration staff and cleaners at Cricklewood Garage to organise a mass walkout to halt the spread of COVID-19. The virus at the garage is out of control and unless urgent action is taken, lives will be lost.

At least 12 staff have been diagnosed with COVID in recent days, drivers have told the committee. This includes up to 10 bus drivers. Due to the ongoing cover-up by Metroline, aided and abetted by Unite, the full picture is not known.

Here is the breakdown of infections among drivers provided to the committee:

- 3 drivers from the 16 route
- 4-5 drivers from the 316 route
- 2 drivers from the 189 route
- The Operations Manager
- The Unite Health and Safety Rep

This cluster confirms that workplace transmission of COVID-19 is taking place. As one driver told the Committee: “Cricklewood garage is now a very dangerous place to be”.

Across the UK, a catastrophic spread of the pandemic is underway: 62,322 daily infections, 30,451 current hospital admissions, and 1,041 “official” deaths recorded yesterday. This disaster is the direct outcome of the “herd immunity” strategy of the Johnson government, backed by Labour and the Trades Union Congress, which has sacrificed working class lives to protect the profits of the corporations, banks and super-rich.

On Monday night, with the National Health Service (NHS) overwhelmed, Prime Minister Boris Johnson reversed his previous lying claims that further COVID

restrictions were unnecessary, announcing a new national lockdown. But he ordered key workers to report for duty with not a single additional measure to protect us. Four days later, neither Metroline, Transport for London, nor Unite have announced any new safety protections, despite a new strain of COVID that is up to 70 percent more contagious. We are being treated like human guinea pigs!

Section 44 and Section 100 of the Employment Rights Act gives employees the legal right to refuse to work “in circumstances of danger which the employee reasonably believes to be serious and imminent”. It provides the right for employees to remove themselves from the workplace until “appropriate steps” are taken “to protect themselves or other persons in danger.”

That legal right must now be acted upon.

The rank-and-file committee does not make this call for action lightly.

On September 24, we issued an open letter to Metroline CEO Steven Harris demanding urgent safety measures, including mandatory testing, transparent reporting of infections and full pay for all staff self-isolating. Metroline refused to reply, rushing into secret talks with Labour Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and Unite officials John Murphy and Peter Kavanagh.

On December 21, after yet another infection at Cricklewood, the committee wrote to Unite rep Moawia El Bashir demanding he publish a copy of the COVID “risk assessment” that Metroline claimed they had carried out at the garage. Our letter demanded that Unite inform all drivers about the true number and location of new infections. No reply was received.

Metroline, Transport for London and Unite are actively concealing the presence of mass infections at

the garages. Forcing drivers, engineers, office staff and cleaners into Cricklewood garage amid rampant infections is like being forced into a burning building—it is tantamount to corporate manslaughter.

With a de facto no-strike agreement in place between Unite and the bus operators, there is no time to lose. Drivers cannot wait for the union to call another phoney “consultative” strike ballot—drivers are already being infected and dying.

There is no way to operate bus transportation safely under such conditions. To save lives, bus workers should walk out of the garage. They should not return until the following safety demands have been met:

- Daily onsite testing for all staff, including drivers, engineers, cleaners, admin workers and managers.
- Immediate reporting of all new infections and locations on the company app Blink.
- Full pay for all workers who are shielding, self-isolating or feeling unwell, with no return to work until employees are fully recovered.
- PPE, including masks, gloves and sanitisers for all drivers and staff each day.
- Wearing of masks and social distancing to be enforced on all London buses by TfL marshals.
- Drivers’ hours to be reduced to 8-hours a day with no loss of pay to reduce the chance of exposure. A ban on long shifts that attack the immune system and which leave drivers susceptible to infection.

Workers must not be financially penalised for taking this necessary action under the Workplace Rights Act. All staff must be guaranteed a full income while the safety breaches that have allowed COVID-19 to spread so disastrously are rectified. These measures are necessary to protect the lives and safety of all Metroline employees and the travelling public.

We urge bus workers to begin organising this fight and to join the London Bus Rank-and-File Committee. Covid infections are spreading across London bus garages and united action is needed.



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Socialist Equality Party visit:

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