

Dublin Bus strike a draw

Bus drivers at Harristown garage returned to work after a weeks strike in November.

Two new routes at the centre of the dispute the 128 and 4a were introduced with both routes starting breaking and finishing downtown.

It does however, appear that other routes and senior drivers have won cast iron guarantees that the company cannot make similar moves on their routes or duties.

Spare drivers, recruited after January this year, have a commitment that they will not be forced to operate these routes indefinitely and that as the duties get marked in they may opt off these routes.

An extra 5 and 10 minutes walking time were also won. This issue is crucial for drivers as the interviews with Socialist Worker clearly show.

Yet the fact that it took a weeks strike to wring this from the company is telling.

While the strike did not win, it's important to understand that busworkers did not lose either.

Most drivers voted to accept the Labour Court deal not because they wanted to



but because they saw no alternative to it.

Both SIPTU and NBRU officials had made it clear that they had no intention of fighting this any further. Both unions warned that the strike would not receive support from other workers.

Both warned of the dire consequences of continuing the strike. Both told drivers that the issue did not directly affect 85% of drivers and was therefore unimportant.

It is no wonder drivers ac-

cepted the outcome.

Official sabotage

The reality is that from the start of this dispute neither SIPTU nor NBRU union officials could understand drivers concerns.

The official leadership of both unions wanted drivers to accept the original offer. Their attitude was; "it will only affect spare staff for now—so what's the problem?"

Both unions worked to undermine support from other

garages, telling their reps to instruct drivers to pass any pickets from Harristown.

They misled other garages about the core issue and simply parroted the company's line on the dispute.

Officials openly talked about balloting the other garages but ensuring they voted against striking in support of Harristown.

Before the strike union leaders were openly saying that Harristown could strike for as long as they wanted on

its own, but would be forced to crawl back on the companies terms.

They tried to keep Harristown bus drivers isolated and when it became clear that Harristown drivers would not play by these rules the leadership turned nasty.

Drivers first organised a march in the city and sent out word to all other garages that they would be seeking their colleagues support; they also explained why the strike could be important for other Dublin Bus drivers.

It was now that both unions sunk to their lowest. Using anti worker newspapers they tried to attack some drivers for been socialists and pretended the whole issue was been driven by dark forces.

This "red scare" was designed to break solidarity in Harristown and justify scabbing elsewhere.

So desperate were they to insure the strike didn't win that they tried to undermine the Harristown drivers march, telling the media it was politically motivated and telling drivers not to support it.

Over 500 drivers attended the march with many drivers and reps from other garages joining the protest.

Harristown drivers were right to fight

THE COMPANY were introducing these routes with no agreement with the drivers.

They were breaking national agreements by changing existing bills (route 4) again with no consultation.

Walking time on these routes would effectively mean forcing drivers to give 3 or 4 hours of their own time per week to compensate for inadequate time to get to and from the city.

The company knew this but calculated that as it was only new drivers no one else would care.

The company insisted they had no agreement with drivers on other routes not to start break and finish downtown.

The leadership of both

the NBRU and SIPTU dismissed the core issue in this strike as unimportant and scandalously openly advocated scabbing on their fellow drivers should they place pickets on other depots.

On several days during the strike reps were paid by the company to come in to their depot to face down drivers from Harristown.

These same union reps could not make their way out to the picket line to show any solidarity to striking drivers on the days that they took the company's money.

These same reps were so busy doing the company's work that they could not stop them using extra buses and overtime duties on routes that ran parallel to Harristown.

Harristown drivers can be proud of the stand they

took. In fact the solidarity was solid.

Drivers from different countries and continents stood shoulder to shoulder. New drivers came to the front of the fight and many will have learned a valuable lesson for the future.

Above all the Harristown strike showed that drivers can unite despite differences of race and colour.

The fact that many senior drivers where willing to take a stand over a issue they were told need not affect them is important.

The idea of a union is "a injury to one is a injury to all", while some union leaders may have forgotten that it is clear that Harristown drivers have not.

In the months ahead Dublin bus drivers we will

face more fights, the 48hour week, attempts to privatise and deregulate jobs.

The Harristown strike is a important pointer to how workers can fight. and they are better placed to defend their conditions and jobs in the future.

The strike was conducted in a very democratic way with mass meetings every day on the picket line.

Workers went to other depots with leaflets to Dublin bus workers about their issues and appeal for solidarity.

They reported back to the mass meetings and decisions were taken by the pickets on organising the demonstration and ensuring strong solid pickets were kept on the gates.

Disgracefully the NBRU

intends to conduct an investigation into the conduct of the strike.

This was an official strike that received little or no official support.

Now busworkers have learned many lessons about the union leadership.

But instead of workers leaving one union to join another, there needs to be a concerted and organised challenge to union officials and representatives by contesting elections in every garage in the near future.

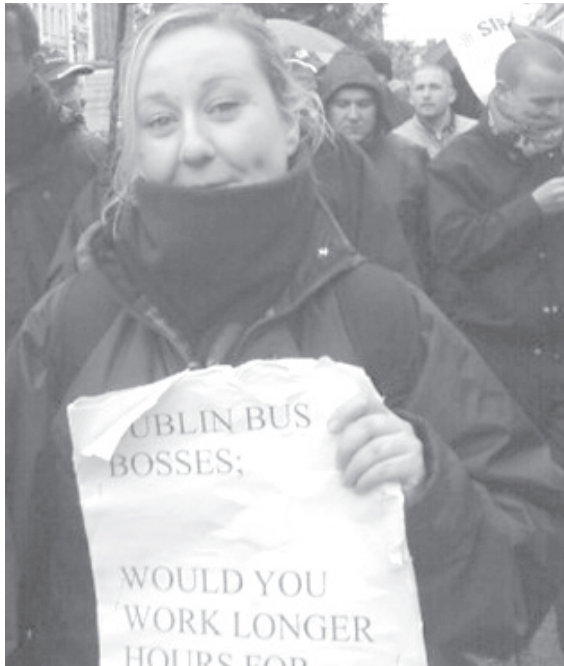
The rank and file Busworkers Action Group will grow in strength as a result of this dispute and needs the support and commitment of every busworker to undermine the treachery of the union leaders.

Interview with Gillian Kelly, suspended bus driver

GILLIAN KELLY is a young woman from Swords. She is a bus driver for just nine months and not yet appointed. Her refusal to operate one of the new routes at the heart of the dispute led to her suspension by Dublin Bus on the morning of 12 November. Gillian talked to Socialist Worker on the picket line about the strike and the issues involved.

“When I reported for work and went to get the running board to start my days work, management gave me a board for one of the new routes and I refused to take out the bus. I was suspended immediately and then my union representative told me we were now in official dispute with the Dublin Bus.

When the pickets went up there was only one bus went through the picket line. Although he is a migrant worker, the rest of the non-national workers in the garage have been solidly behind the strike. Over 30% of staff in this garage are migrant workers and all of them are in the union and have been great on the picket line. When the driver



Gillian Kelly

who crossed the picket line returned to the Harristown later we all turned our backs to him as he drove past us.

There has been a really big turnout on the picket line especially early in the morning

and there is a great sense of unity here. We talk about all the issues together and decide together how we are running the strike.

The big issue in the strike for me is the extra hours

these new routes will add to my working day. I live in Swords which is not that far away but if my working day starts and finishes down town it will add another two hours to my working day. Its worse for others that live far away like Laois, Drogheda, Lucan, Cavan.

One of our colleagues was on the radio yesterday talking about how her working week could be increased by 15 hours. She lives in Lucan and has a young family. The job is tough enough without these changes. Apart from that these routes are not agreed with the unions. We want the company to suspend introducing new routes until we have a discussion about it.

We are told we are under threat from private operators but I don't think the way forward is to jeopardise our working conditions. This is a long term issue for us and we will suffer down the line if we don't put a stop to it. It doesn't make sense. Drivers could be left sitting on the quays with a full load and clogging up the city. Lots of these kinds of issues are not

being discussed.

And Grangecastle is another new garage like this one which is on the way in the next two to three years. That's why we need the support of other depots around the city. They will all be effected by this. The lads went around the depots this morning with leaflets calling for support and they got a fantastic response. Its really positive and other garages will eventually come out with us.

I absolutely love my job. There is a great sense of comradery and wherever you go in the uniform you meet other drivers. There is great respect for each other. The Minister for Transport says its terrible to disrupt peoples lives by going on strike but that is exactly what is happening to us.

My dad was the first treasurer of the National Busworkers Union. I remember him going out to collect the dues. He put a lot of work into the union and I am proud of that. Even though he is left Dublin Bus he is still a big trade unionist and that has certainly had an influence on me.”

On the picket line: Dublin Bus drivers talk to Socialist Worker

Richard Whelan is a driver who lives in Navan.

“DRIVERS LIVE all over now in Cavan, Trim, Kells and even Portlaoise. It is an adverse effect of Government policies – house prices went so high people can't afford to live in Dublin so this issue will effect everyone in Dublin Bus.

If I have to start, break and finish down town it will impact on my life. It's not so bad in the morning if you're on an early start but going home will be a different story. My wife will have to do the homework with the kids every day because I will never see them. Even as it is I see little enough of them.

When the Viability Plan came in five or six years ago there was loads of issues in that and they are only coming through now. So we are taking on many changes to our working lives. I think the company is trying to lower our morale but they wont succeed.”

Malik is a driver from Pakistan

“I LIVE in Lusk so definitely this new schedule



will add on another two hours to my working day. I am on the spare roster so I could be on these routes, starting, breaking and finishing down town. It will put extra constraints on my life.

When I joined the company five years ago it was great. I used to work in hotels and had no union or no protection. So it was a great change for me to be in a union and get proper working conditions. There is a great sense of solidarity.

You feel safe and know you will get support. I feel very proud to be in the

union. We all want to go back to work but this needs to be sorted out once and for all.

Four times we balloted on this and each time we rejected it. So we balloted for strike action and thought that would sort it out but the company went ahead and that is how this strike started.”

Tolga is from Turkey

“DEFINITELY THIS change will make my working day longer.

You will never be sure when you can be home. You

will have to go to the garage to park and back to the garage to head home. I think leaving buses parked in town like this is dangerous. If drivers are late to take up shift the passengers will get frustrated and we will have to take up the flak. If you have to break in town you end up spending more money.

There is nothing to do – some people could get into bad habits like gambling. I used to like breaking in the garage.

You can play pool and there is a good friendly atmosphere. We were told

that we would be starting breaking and finishing in this garage and now this is changing. My father started a union in southern Turkey in the 1940's.

He used to work in a bakery and was telling the people about the union and getting them to join. He was black listed for years and had to use false names to get work. He always talked about unions and I believe unions are good for working people.”

Sam is from Dublin

“OUR UNION is shameful. They have given paid leave to shop stewards to stay in the garages and encourage other drivers not to support us.

But I believe the support is there even though the union are trying to create a distance between us and the shop stewards.

We can get ghost buses (staff buses) in and out of work if you live in Dublin but there is no ghost going down to Cavan or Navan. This will most definitely make the working week longer. The company are trying to set a new standard and we cannot allow them.”