

Martin Hickman

Barnsley and Rawmarsh bus drivers took their seventh day of strike action on Wednesday of this week with the first industrial action by workers in the industry in 2012. There were big picket lines from early morning. The picketing had its effect with a fuel delivery lorry turned away! Stagecoach management are struggling to keep up their scabbing operation. From day one they have been relying on getting managers from other areas to come and drive buses on strike days but now less have been coming. They're so desperate that even the top bosses are out driving buses. One driver was told by a mate on the Isle of Sky that drivers there are being asked to take holidays in order to scab on the strike in Barnsley! There's been growing support from the trade union movement for the Barnsley & Rawmarsh drivers. Barnsley Trades Council organised a rally and activists from Unison, NUT, NASUWT and UCU joined the picket lines. They brought badly needed solidarity and collections to back the drivers action. Dramatically Strike breakers are being paid £105 expenses plus £50 bonus each strike day. That means management are paying £10,500 each strike day as well as reducing fares dramatically. Even so very few local people are using Stagecoach buses. All that drivers are asking for is an extra 26p an hour to bring them up to £9 an hour for a 38 hour week and for the increase to be back paid to the start of April. The drivers get no extra payments for unsocial hours. Some have to start at 4.30am. The last bus service finishes at 3am but there is no reward for working those hours. Some 30 non-union drivers have joined Unite since the strike started. The strikers are determined to face down Stagecoach On Wednesday management finally blinked and have asked the union to take part in talks this Friday. Union members believe that this shows that local management are feeling the pressure. If talks are not successful on Friday then there will be another strike on Monday 16 January. It's crucial that Unite moves to escalate the action further if the bosses don't move. The scabbing operation is already in trouble. Imagine how stretched they'd be if they were hit for 48 hours or longer? Stagecoach certainly has the money to cough up a decent wage. Their pre-tax profits for the financial year, announced at the end of June, were up 52 percent. That means Stagecoach made £191.2m pre-tax up from £125.9m the previous year. Revenue rose 10 percent to £2.39 billion. Stagecoach boss Brian Souter said "We are seeing growing demand for our bus and rail services in the UK...as consumers look for better value and more convenient transport alternatives to the rising cost of motoring..." The drivers in South Yorkshire are showing that it's possible to take on greedy employers despite the "hard times" we're living through. Every bus worker should get behind the fight in South Yorkshire Messages of support should be rushed to Barnsley Unite Branch Secretary Tony Rushforth, a-rushforth@sky.com. Cheques should be made payable to Barnsley Unite and sent to Tony at 45 Tune Street, Wombwell, Barnsley S73 8PX Article Taken from SWP