

A postscript to “*Off the Buses*”.....a puzzling outcome.

On November 30th 2009 we returned to West Yorkshire, passes at the ready and expecting the worst. We felt emboldened simply because the foremost bus pass website had bravely published our abbreviated account of the horrors we had been put through in the West Yorks Metro Region ever since the pass was introduced on April 1st 2008. We were beginning to lose all hope of ever being believed for what had happened to us was almost beyond belief and we could only wonder at Primo Levi’s prescient comment “what is morally impossible does not exist”.

In the event of yet more instalments of the sadistic bullying we had been subjected to for close on 18 months, we went equipped with a small, handheld, digital tape recorder. Though our hearts were in our mouths, we decided that the best course of action was to bus-hop and jump on as many buses as possible throughout the region. Over a couple of days we must have clocked up about 25 journeys, boarding First and Keighley buses. Unfortunately we never boarded any Arriva buses and we still need to excise this nightmare at some future date, as earlier on in the year we were involved in a number of very unpleasant incidents on the Arriva buses.

Well, we did get some trouble but it was mercifully very minor and only on three occasions were we gruffly asked “what’s this”? We immediately responded with “it’s the correct senior citizens pass”, or something of the sort and that was that! One ventured he had never seen the pass before and we immediately bristled up thinking “here we go again”, only for the driver to instantly back down, letting us through without further ado. However it was also three times too much as we have never experienced any trouble *at all* either in 2008 or 2009 in South Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cumbria never mind in the Home Counties and adjacent counties including Hampshire, Dorset, Somerset and Devon.

Moreover and *for the first time*, we were aware that the drivers seemed to be looking at the pass knowing what insignia to look for. We can only surmise something has happened at the very top level - possibly stemming from the National Pensioners’ Convention meeting held in Euston, London on November 5th. It was here we raised the issue from the floor and, with the help of other pensioners, handed out a concise, but dramatic leaflet, briefly describing what was taking place in West Yorkshire. Most likely we’ll never be privy to know what has happened behind closed doors, for we do live in a most secretive state both on a local and national level and which requires an all mighty effort just to even begin to get at the truth. This so-called “democracy” is the thinnest of *thin democracies*, one that calls for the maximum expenditure of effort to even get a minute particular altered. Not one letter but an avalanche of letters is the only way one is ever likely to get a result. And what has happened on the West Yorks buses over the past 18 months only serves to confirm this “wild” assertion. None of this bodes well for the future.

However, a word of caution is needed here. We have been here before. At the beginning of 2009 we also thought we had really got a result – only for our expectations to be dashed. We had typed many articulate letters to various authorities

informing them of what was taking place on the West Yorks buses. Even so our sixth sense told us that things weren't really right. The chief inspectorate at Bradford Interchange still insisted we get new passes and he and his cohort *still* refused to give us their names! More obliging inspectors on boarding buses we were travelling on even asked us "Could you please tell us what distinguishes the senior citizens' bus pass?" Because we were travelling in "white rose" Yorkshire we jokingly pointed to "the red rose of Lancashire" insignia (the national rose symbol) visible on all the differently designed passes. This resulted in laughs all round. But behind the laughter there was a real, very worrying ignorance that had not been even remotely rectified. As a letter of ours had been published in the Bradford *Telegraph and Argus* regarding the non recognition of the pass, we decided to write another that gave voice to our concern that even the inspectors did not know what to look for and that some, possibly the more senior ones, were insisting we get the "correct" pass. The letter was never published.

And as the events of the summer of 2009 were to show, we had every right to be nervous. There is no point in listing every incident, the worst occurring on July 25th in Ossett and which we mentioned in the original "*Off the Buses*". This was the one and only time one of us finally cracked and refused to put up with the never ending abuse –and who wouldn't when an Arriva driver dismissed a bona fide letter from the Metro Transport Authority that clearly stated our passes were valid? We had simply been provoked beyond endurance. But, as a result, we were condemned by the authorities and branded the abusers. And this travesty of a judgement still stands and we have to live with the stigma and which obviously adds to our nervousness come the day when we dare venture on to an Arriva bus. Certainly the manageress felt sufficiently empowered to scowl at us when we entered the Bradford Metro Interchange travel office on December 2nd as though we had no right to be there. We asked Mr. M Smethurst of the Customer Services Dept of Arriva buses in Liverpool that the Ossett case be reopened and that this time we be allowed to present our case. To date there has been **no** reply and officially we are still reprobates. And Mr. John Keady, Metro's fares and pricing manager has more or less gone along with this judgement, claiming he cannot interfere with the judgement when his procrastination and refusal to get a grip is largely to blame for all the dreadful incidents that have occurred since April 1st 2008 . Though, through our persistent efforts, we may have rectified a grave miscarriage of justice, we are still judged to be scum and troublemakers of the first order. Well we won't put up with it.

We want full apologies from the various aspects of management responsible for this dreadful situation that has persisted for so long and that could easily have resulted in a death. We are not just doing it for ourselves but for other pensioners who have been abused only to meekly shrink away, not having it within them to fight this unnecessary, and quite dreadful, battle. Not for nothing are twins popularly referred to us as "the terrible twins", for without each other we also would have lost heart and allowed the buggers to win. All that was required was quick action by management in April 2008. A simple, half hour induction course would have prevented all this unnecessary suffering. Such a sensible initiative may have fallen foul of some mean minded cost benefit analysis and judged to be too expensive. However, as is invariably the case, it has ended up costing a lot more in terms of time and money.

What has happened in West Yorks would never stand up in a court of law. We want justice and for it to be *seen to be done*. We are sick of pensioners in this country being treated like dirt and even sicker of pensioners being regarded as spoilt scroungers milking the public purse when they are some of the worst off in Europe. When the fabled “smart card” pass comes in on April 2010, can we be sure the same thing is not going to happen all over again? And if there’s no closure, no proper resolution, its introduction could turn into a similar fiasco. The electronic technology may well not be in place as cost cutting measures impact on bus maintenance and the “fixed capital” is not renewed, due to the on-going, deep recession. It is imperative the West York’s Metro Authority and the subcontracted bus companies are taught a lesson they will not easily forget.

Stu’ & Dave Wise December 6th 2009