

FirstGroup Campaign History

In 1999, FirstGroup acquired Bruce Transportation and Ryder Public Transportation to become the second largest school bus and transit operator in the United States. The Teamsters reached out to colleagues in the Transport and General Workers Union (T&G) in the United Kingdom as the largest union representing bus workers at FirstGroup, in order to gain information about the company.

In 2000, representatives from the T&G and the International Transport Workers' Federation (ITF) attend meetings in Washington D.C. with the Teamsters and other unions to discuss FirstGroup's North American business.

In 2001, T&G and ITF delegates return for further meetings in Washington D.C. and traveled to St. Charles County, St Louis, where two Teamster First Student units had been on strike, and attended picket lines and arbitration meetings. Teamsters won significant pay increases and a strong contract.

2002 saw three Teamsters attend two globalization education courses at the T&G education center in Eastbourne, England, strengthening ties between the two unions. FirstGroup's anti-union behavior is raised at both ITF global meetings and meetings between FirstGroup and the T&G.

Attempts by the Teamsters to reach out to FirstGroup are rebuffed, and so, during 2004 and 2005 the T&G and Teamsters joined together on a campaign to persuade the company to deal with serious issues in the U.S. The campaign reached out to politicians, regulators, labor allies and the UK media and community groups and raised multiple issues about FirstGroup's service and safety records in both the U.K. and U.S. Considerable support was received throughout the U.K. for the campaign.

The campaign attended the 2005 FirstGroup annual stockholders' meeting and two workers spoke from the floor about their experiences of anti-union behavior at First Student. The campaign then decided in 2006 to conduct an extensive outreach to large UK-based institutional investors and politicians concerning corporate social responsibility failings at FirstGroup.

Due to the support of 115 T&G members, who were shareholders in FirstGroup, pledging 545,000 shares the campaign was able to submit a resolution (regarding workplace human rights) to be discussed at the 2006 annual stockholders meeting. This resolution was supported by other investors. Teamsters and T&G members again attended the meeting and FirstGroup's chairman admitted that the company had engaged in anti-union behavior and undertook to 'stamp out' such action.

First Student introduced a "neutrality policy" in late 2006, but failed to sufficiently oversee its implementation and accordingly another resolution was submitted to the 2007 stockholder meeting with the support of 142 T&G members and two US-based institutional investors. A team of 24 Teamsters and T&G delegates attended the meeting in support of another human rights resolution.

FirstGroup was now sufficiently moved to announce, later in 2007, the appointment of William B Gould, a former head of the NLRB, as Independent Monitor in the USA, overseeing its adherence to the stated corporate social responsibility policies of the company.



Drive Up Standards
School Bus and Transit Workers United