



Solidarity from Workers' Climate Action

Second WCA bulletin for BA strike, 27-30 March 2010

Workers' Climate Action applauds the bravery and determination of BASSA members taking action over jobs, pay and conditions!

It is inspirational to see thousands of workers standing together to fight for their basic rights. The high turn-outs at the ballot box are testament to the unity of the workers, but also to the dismal future Walsh is planning for BA workers and passengers.

Gordon Brown has joined in with the anti-union, rightwing media attacks on BA workers. He has called the strikes 'deplorable'. Union-busting is deplorable. Employers breaking deals and exploiting workers is deplorable. Using the police to intimidate workers who are standing up for their rights is deplorable. For a Labour Party politician to tell lies about strikers and attack unions is deplorable.

Striking to defend all BA workers - to defend all workers

It is clear that Walsh's main aim is to break BASSA once and for all, dissolve BA and restructure the company, as he did at Air Lingus. Walsh is an experienced and brutal capitalist. He is throwing enormous resources into breaking the strike and would rather spend £100m on 'scabin crew' than negotiate with the Union, let alone make any kind of concession. Walsh is pulling out all the stops. He is using media misrepresentation, management bullying in the workplace and police intimidation on picket lines. His agenda is clear – he wants to break this workforce.

The BA cabin crew strike is important for all BA staff. The resistance that the cabin crews are putting up will inevitably benefit the rest of BA staff when they too find themselves under attack. Walsh will target other BA staff next, trying to take on each group of workers one-by-one. Scabs should realise that they're next in line - Walsh won't return the favour! The cabin crew have drawn a line in the sand for all BA workers.

No to New Fleet!

New Fleet will create a divided, two-tier workforce and make it easier to smash the union and drive down wages and conditions. That is it was conceived – it has no other purpose. Everyone knows that New Fleet spells the end for quality service, a united workforce and decent terms and conditions.

Unite is asking to be 'consulted' by BA on how New Fleet is to be brought in. But no amount of

WCA: who we are

Workers' Climate Action is a network of activists in the climate change and labour movement, seeking to build links between the two so we can transform both and change the world.

Who we are is explained in more detail in the first strike bulletin we distributed, last weekend - it can be found on our website.

It is also summed up in our letter published in Friday's *Guardian*:

"Climate change activists are mobilising to support the British Airways workers. We do not believe workers should pay for an economic crisis their bosses have created any more than the planet should pay for capitalism's endless chasing after profit. Strikes, workplace occupations and other militant actions are the only way to prevent the costs of the recession being unloaded on to working people. Workers in high-emissions industries have an important role in curbing climate change. They cannot do this if they are pushed down and their union broken. We want to build an alliance between the labour movement and the climate change movement so we can transform both into an effective force for social change."

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'consultation' can change the fact that New Fleet has only one purpose – to create a two-tier workforce and undermine the union. Unite should be opposing New Fleet, not trying to tweak it here or there. Members and reps need to tell the leadership to reject it outright.

We have already seen a two-tier workforce at Qantas; don't let it happen to BA!

"Mindless militants"

The history of bullying, intimidation and victimisation in BA is angering to hear about. To find out that these are normal working conditions at BA, makes this strike all the more important –

it's time to improve both current and future conditions. It is important that the ambitions of the Unite leadership are pushed to the max! Currently, we have seen little in the way of actual demands from the Unite leaders.

A lot of energy in this dispute has gone into trying to improve the media image of the strike. The corporate mainstream media has been very hostile. For all the carefully crafted press statements and slogans of the strike, the media continues to paint you as greedy, short-sighted, mindless militants. It is shocking to find yourself on the end of this hostile coverage. But it is very doubtful that the media can be won round – the press has never been the friend of organised workers.

The current approach of trying to appear oh-so-reasonable is clearly not working. We do not live in a reasonable world. If we did, then the likes of Walsh would be a probably be behind bars. As it is he is free to run roughshod over the lives of 12,000 people and appear like the reasonable one.

In saying this, the union has made itself look weak. There is a reality that BA has just made £600 million losses and has a £3.7 billion pension deficit. The union needs to have something to say about this that goes beyond the current approach that accepts Walsh's logic that workers (and mostly future workers) should pay for the current financial difficulty. This response will not come from the Unite negotiators – it needs to be talked through and argued out amongst rank-and-file workers. Mass meetings should democratically decide the demands.

So what do you say about the losses and the pensions deficit? What about Virgin workers on lower pay and worse terms and conditions? Here are some questions to get things started:

- BA was privatised in 1987, in the last 10 years alone the work of BA staff has produced profits of £5.3 billion? Profit is not created by management. It is created by hours and hours of work. Where is all this money now?
- During the boom period of the 1990s, interest rates were high and pension funds were doing very well. Many firms used this as an excuse to cut down on their contribution to the pension pot. Was BA one of those firms?
- Your bosses need you - but do you need your bosses?

Taking action gets results

We understand many of you are worried about jeopardising the legality of the strike but there are alternatives. Make links with other aviation workers, airport residents, trade unionists and activists, who will broaden support for your cause and who can take action on your behalf. You can use links with other workers and activists to protest on your behalf.

You can use links with other workers and activists to protest on your behalf if management intimidation is too much. The rules of the strike are rigged against you so think about how to get around these rules.

- ▶ Set dates for further strike action.
- ▶ Demand proper picket lines where you can intervene with scabs.
- ▶ Don't let Unite give in to petty victimisation of pickets that are larger than 14.
- ▶ Make the solidarity march happen! Pressure your reps to re-arrange the strike march. If you can't march, get others to march for you.

For public ownership and democratic control of BA!

At last Saturday's rally, Len McCluskey was reminiscing about the golden days of British Airways. It's problematic that he is showing such pride in a company that bullies the membership he represents. This dispute should not become about safeguarding a "noble British brand"! British Airways profits from victimising its workers – this is not something to fight for.

What is worth fighting for is a publicly owned BA, run by its workers for the benefit of everyone, not the few. If there's money to bail out the banks, where's the will to save decent jobs? As climate change activists, we feel that a publicly owned, democratic BA could have a real discussion about how we fight climate change. But until then, it's just the same old boss's tactics of bullying workers and private profit.

Transition Heathrow

Just solutions to climate change must come from grassroots workers and communities. A strong workers' movement can implement the kind of new jobs, new training and new technologies necessary in the fight against peak oil and climate change.

That's what Transition Heathrow is all about. The food we are serving was brought to you from our newly occupied community market garden in Sipson. We hope that this space can support residents and workers to discuss, plan, and prepare for the challenges ahead. Feel free to join us any time at **Grow Heathrow on Vineries Close, off Sipson Lane, Sipson** or call **07890 751 568** www.transitionheathrow.com

Strike social and film night at Grow Heathrow - 7.30pm, Saturday 27th The High Court decision to call for a review of the Third Runway is a victory for local residents. We'll be showing a film 'Rocking the Foundations', about when Australian building workers built links with residents and environmentalists.