

THE WORKERS' RUNWAY

Newsletter No.6 from HEATHROW SOLIDARITY NETWORK



BRITISH AIRWAYS CABIN CREW RECRUITMENT?!



British Airways have tied the knot on their obvious and predictable 'back door fire and rehire scheme,' that they started in spring 2020. The first part of this not so secret plot was to aggressively demand that shell-shocked staff accept large reductions in pay and conditions or face the sack.

The next phase was to continue to plead extreme poverty to staff and demand huge redundancies, while simultaneously with their other face, reassuring shareholders of the companies cash reserves and healthy liquidity. The company was never in much actual difficulty. Banks will lend almost indefinitely to a company like BA. There will always be UK aviation and no matter what the circumstances, when all the other smaller airlines have folded, one of the last standing will almost certainly be BA.

Now, barely a year after making 4700 cabin crew redundant and not even a month after furlough has finished, BA are trying to rehire 3000 crew, on contracts far inferior to the ones they left on. While some of the media are parroting BA spokespeople, saying that the announcement is positive news,

that BA are drawing on their 'talent pool' and that workers should basically feel lucky for the jobs, the FinancialTimes is much closer to reality when it reports that '...the new BA hires and the potential new subsidiary from Gatwick reflect how airline bosses will look to rebuild their workforces and operations, while cementing the considerable cost savings achieved during the pandemic.'

These latest developments clearly expose the mass attacks on jobs and contracts at BA for what they always were – barefaced opportunism. Simply an opportunity to do what companies are always looking to do – reduce labour costs as much as possible.

While companies profits return to 'normal,' workers pay and conditions, will be expected to stay where they are – cemented down below their pre-pandemic levels.

Why should we tolerate this? As things pick up and bargaining power increases, we should remember what's happened, and figure out how we can reflect it in our demands.

**THIS IS NOT
A CAR PARK
FOR THE
AIRPORT**

WORKERS!

HEATHROW STAFF PARKING CHARGES!

Workers are being made to pay up to an extra 135% for the privilege of parking at work. From £57 a month for a parking pass, to £135! Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) say this is to make up for a £7 million shortfall caused by a drop in demand for parking passes. Most workers only alternative is public transport. This was made more expensive last year when HAL forced more losses onto workers by removing the free bus services around the airport. The £7 million shortfall is nothing to the shareholders that have received £4 billion since 2012 and got £100 million paid out in April 2020!

The GMB union has started a petition, written to MP's and council leaders, but the campaign hasn't advanced much further. Workers have been balloted 3 times but aside from 400 people signing the petition and a couple of letters, no pressure has been applied to the bosses. If the unions aren't up to the job, we need to get together and sort it ourselves.

Let us know what's happening where you are. Has this affected you? How has the union performed? How can we escalate the dispute?

ALITALIA (ITA) WORKERS FIGHT!

On 20th October we met workers from the Italian state airline, Alitalia. They are fighting to save jobs and pay and conditions, in the wake a far reaching restructure. Agreements on pay and conditions are not being honoured, with staff transferring or being rehired by ITA are signing up on inferior terms. All this has been decided upon with little or no worker input.

The Italian government will claim that workers voices have been heard, because the unions agree to the plans. Like the UK, union officials in Italy have been persuaded by promises of more members and national recognition agreements, giving them guaranteed dues and prestige. But this is no substitute for workers genuine involvement. There have been a number of official strikes, but the actions are hampered by management's awareness of them long in advance.

The workers we spoke to are from the independent worker collective Tutti A Bordo (Everyone on Board). They come from different departments, job



In Italy an array of what are called 'base unions' has developed. These unions pride themselves on being more militant and encouraging much more rank and file participation within the organisation. These unions called for a general strike on 11th October, trying to draw together struggles from different workplaces. Many thousands of workers participated



in the strike. Ports and roads were blockaded and demonstrations held across Italy. The workers we spoke to were quite clear however that the 11th October had serious limitations. Alongside the GKN workers, they are committed to building towards a much bigger and more effective general strike that draws in far more workers.

Port workers, air or sea, have lots of power. When supply chains appear to be under pressure, as they do at the moment, they have even more power. If people and stuff doesn't get to where it needs to be, it can have serious effects on companies and throughout the economy in general. The most successful labour dispute at Heathrow during the pandemic was the strike at BA Cargo. The Cargo workers got most of their demands met. BA workers in other departments had to accept mass redundancies and large cuts to pay and benefits. With a better organised workplace, the increased bargaining power at BA Cargo, could have been utilised for the benefit of workers at the whole company and beyond.

Aviation workers can play an important role in the battle to return our environment to health. Tutti A Bordo say one of the main reasons for being against budget airlines is that they help to produce excessive polluting flights. The pandemic showed us what the 'essential' work in society is. We carried on pretty well with only about 40% of people going to work. In aviation, we've seen that lots of the air traffic is unnecessary and harmful. Business flights have plummeted and the temptation for airlines will be to ramp up demand for leisure travel. Unless we can begin to use our positions at work to put environmental concerns at the centre of how we run aviation, the likelihood of real change is small.

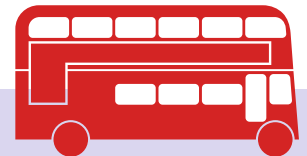
The motto of the workers at Tutti A Bordo and GKN was used by resistance fighters against fascism during the war – 'Insorgiamo'. It means 'let's



rise up.' We should do our best to learn from the experiences of workers in Italy and do what we can to help them. Follow them on social media and send them your solidarity. What other ways might we be able to help? What do you think of the situation in Italy in comparison to our situation at Heathrow? We will be following the situation closely and trying to build support for a solidarity action here in the UK. Get in touch if you want to get involved! Insorgiamo Heathrow!!!

**Follow them on Facebook at:
Tutti A Bordo – no al piano Ita**

REMOTE SIGN-ON!



Bus drivers all over London and beyond are facing major attacks on the way they work. Companies are looking to impose remote sign-on. A practice that requires drivers to report to a particular bus stop rather than a bus depot at the beginning of each shift. It will not only mean being at the companies beck and call, more hours for less money and a decline in access to toilet and rest facilities but potentially paves the way to the full 'casualisation' of the job. Bus drivers being completely 'self employed' and stripped of the benefits of being employed is a predictable outcome of this practice. Speaking with bus drivers on our leafleting sessions it appears the company Metroline has already pushed the changes through and others are in the process.

**When are ballots going out for strike?
How can we support the bus drivers?**

JET ZERO: A MASSIVE CON

In July 2021 the Department of Transport published their proposals for achieving net zero carbon emissions in aviation by 2050. This was a part of the preparations for the COP26 climate change conference in Glasgow. You may or may not be surprised to hear that it's all bollocks. The basic message is 'carry on as usual, we've got people working on it.'

We shouldn't waste time pretending that these people can be convinced to act any other way, or that they are even fully in control of how this will pan out. As long as profits need to constantly expand, and the system is not replaced by one in which people democratically decide what our needs are, and produce according to that, our mental and environmental health will continue to get worse.

The honest truth is that people need to fly less. Most of the flights are taken by the wealthy. Some form of rationing is required, that's not just based not just on your ability to pay. As workers we can think of ways to force this into happening and not accept the 'jobs v climate' blackmail. This shouldn't result in job losses or working people penalised in anyway to protect the profits of shareholders. Working class people can bring this about, but we'll need to get organised and work together.

At Heathrow we should know what to make of these promises. At every turn, since the inception of the airport, airlines and governing bodies have insisted that there will be no

more expansions – and have every time been proven liars. The construction of terminal 4 and terminal 5 faced heavy opposition from locals due to concerns over noise, air pollution and destruction of habitats. Before each was constructed they were given assurances that no further expansion would be pursued. And now the same authorities are pushing hard for a 3rd runway and a 6th terminal. It is never enough. If the whole of the Thames Valley was a landing strip, it still wouldn't be enough to satisfy the insatiable appetite and parasitic nature of money. Take a look at aerial photos of Heathrow over time and you get a visual representation of this process in action. Lush green countryside consumed, step by step, by an ever expanding grey mass, polluting and devouring its host and destroying the basis of its own existence. The climate crisis in microcosm.

Just as we shouldn't be appealing to corporations to solve the climate crisis they created, we shouldn't appeal to the media to report on it properly. After all, they are corporations and can't be trusted. An alternative is workers creating their own media, that reflects our values and interests. Do our own research and reporting for our own sake, not to make a buck out of it. We all have knowledge and experience that needs to be shared and that would be enriched by the debate and discussion it could create. Workers can develop the power and skills necessary to reshape the way we produce everything. And if we want to maintain an environment capable of supporting us, we will have to!

WHOSE SOLIDARITY?

On Monday 8th November, to celebrate the restarting of long-haul flights to the US, British Airways and Virgin put their rivalries aside and staged a simultaneous take-off from Heathrow. The seemingly bitter adversaries decided the media attention attracted by the stunt made this rare collaboration worthwhile. The rich know when to show class solidarity for one another and work together when needs be.

Heathrow Solidarity Network is trying to help build and develop our own, workers solidarity. When bosses or landlords start messing with our fellow workers, our class, we should be getting together and

fighting back. If you need help with unpaid wages, bullying or discrimination at work, landlord trouble, we offer to do what we can as workers to help. Contact us on the details below. If you just want to share some information or get involved with what we're doing, get in touch. We hold regular leaflet sessions at local transit hubs. See you around.

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