

HEATHROW WORKERS' POWER

An independent voice for workers during the strikes

*****STRIKE DAYS ANNOUNCED*****

14th, 17th and 18th December for firefighters, campus security and engineers.
Cargo workers vote YES to strike! Let's have some coordinated action!

*****SEE YOU AT THE PICKET LINES!*****

"When Heathrow sneezes, everywhere else catches a cold..."

"I've seen communities torn apart when their industries are destroyed overnight. I don't think people around here realise what's coming down the tracks, unless we start getting our act together."

Heathrow worker from South Wales

On the 1st December, Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) staff took part in the first of four strikes against the company's attacks on their pay and conditions. It was great to see workers, in these tough times, willing to stand up to their bosses, take a further hit to their pay packet, and muster the bravery required to go on strike.

"As well as protecting our pay, we're doing this to try and set an example to the youngsters coming through. They need to see that you don't just roll over when the company attacks your contract..."

This is a good example of the sense of purpose and the common good, that often ends up getting people out on strike.



How can we make our strike stronger?

During the 45-day 'negotiation' that followed HAL's proposed "fire and rehire" program, the company weren't budging. This was despite the union putting forward four of their own cost-cutting counter-proposals. In doing so, the union can say, 'look at us, we're the reasonable ones here.' We would question this approach. The union itself has said that the company is using the pandemic to push through changes that they've always intended to make. And by appearing 'reasonable,' do we really think the right-wing press will like us more?! In the end, we think the union's counter-proposals to co-manage the cuts have more negative effects than positive ones: the negotiations drag on for longer and the union are seen as co-managers of cuts to T&Cs.

The strike came too late to actually stop the new contracts being imposed. The strike was not coordinated with workers in other departments at Heathrow. BA Cargo staff, also with Unite, balloted later, so their strikes won't coincide. Another missed opportunity. A further setback occurred when HAL offered Terminals Security staff, a department with



a large chunk of the workforce in it, and whose strike participation really could have shut the airport down, a 5-7% pay increase in an attempt to make sure they didn't vote to strike. They succeeded.

We have to make an extra-effort now to convince other workers to support the strike, especially if they are not union members. There are various ways workers can show their anger, which doesn't require an order from your union boss: from work-to-rule, to calling in sick together.

The pickets also appeared to suffer from rules imposed by the current laws surrounding industrial action and COVID. Pickets had no more than 6 workers at a time. And were very quiet! There must be ways round this. Around the time of the last BA cabin crew strikes, even though the strikes were still unfortunately largely symbolic, at least the pickets were quite a spectacle. Well attended, extremely noisy, homemade flags, banners, music and dancing. We need strike assemblies where we can discuss our next steps.

We're not alone, are we?!

It will be interesting to see how what has been labelled the new 'winter of discontent' will play out in the next few months. There are strikes coming up by BT, Rolls Royce, BA and Eddie Stobart. While strikes might be on the increase, this alone won't say much about workers' confidence and power. We need to look deeper. How are they being organised? Are workers making the decisions? Are workers calling the shots? Or just being led? We can be sure that as long as strikes remain hollow shells, as long as they remain isolated within their own companies or departments, and if most workers remain spectators rather than participants in the running of these strikes, the chances of them improving the general situation for the working class is slim.

Any strike to defend our conditions is necessary. If we can manage to control our own struggles, we can ask the question, who controls society? Key workers have managed to pull society through the pandemic – the supermarket shelves were refilled, the sick were cared for, the water and heating kept running. We survived a 'natural calamity' and now we are supposed to suffer from a 'man-made' one: a crisis in the form of pay and job cuts. How to handle the fallout from this pandemic should be the decision of the workers and the communities affected, not handfuls of rich managers and shareholders. If we took control of our workplaces and the technology and infrastructure that keeps them running, we would make better use of them. We could abolish bullshit jobs and all work much less. We could finally re-organise society in the interest of everyone and future generations. The struggle at Heathrow seems far away from this goal, but it is a small step forward. In the meantime we should say no to job and pay cuts and yes to a reduction of working hours, at the same rate of wages.

What should we do?

We think all workers should have a say how to organise this struggle. We need assemblies, forums, newsletters for all workers to discuss the future of this strike. We need to expand the dispute to other workers in local warehouses or hotels who will also be affected by the cuts. We need to establish direct links with other workers who face attacks on pay and conditions.

We hope this newsletter can be a space to think about these kinds of questions. We welcome your contributions! Up the workers, and see you on the picket lines!

BA CARGO WORKERS VOTE TO STRIKE

BA cargo workers voted by a whopping 98% to go on strike over the company's plans to cut their pay by 20-25%, as well as some of their T&Cs. The nine days of strike action will take place from Christmas Day. This is great news. These workers can really shut the airport down. Even if a strike's effectiveness is limited if passenger numbers are down (like the HAL strike), cargo has remained largely unaffected. This means we can really hit the company's profits. This is all they care about.



With a Brexit no-deal around the corner, and cargo playing a vital role in getting goods into the country, this is the perfect time to use our POWER as workers and hit the company where it hurts. But how can

HAL and BA workers come together over their common issues? How can we coordinate our actions for maximum impact? A united workforce is a stronger one so let's start pushing for this

The bigger picture

As much as this pandemic is highlighting working people's lack of power and agency, it is also cause for optimism. Lockdown was terrible for some but gave many people an opportunity to appreciate and enjoy things that had evaded their attention for ages. Time with their children, walks in their green spaces, the joy of helping loved ones in need and the sense of community from working in unity for a common purpose. Why can't life be more like this, more of the time?

The praise and clapping that key workers received back in April could be turned into a recognition that far from being powerless, workers potentially have all the power. Workers working together across borders, across industries, across unions, could radically change the current perception of what is reasonable and possible.

Our problems aren't addressed by "speaking truth to the powerful." Those in charge are well aware of the power workers have, which is why they spend so much time and money distracting and dividing us. What's needed is for us to speak honestly with each other. We need to write and run our own newsletters, papers, podcasts and educational groups to break through the corporate media and conspiracy theories that fill our heads with rubbish. Let's find each other, discuss our problems, find the root causes and then figure out ways to fight back.

Let's stop letting the bosses and their media divide us. The diversity and variety of our experiences of living and working around Heathrow are our greatest assets. If you're sick of the same old pessimistic, defeatist conversations about how, "There's nothing we can do," get in touch!

Airport news from across the UK and beyond...

Disruption was expected at Liverpool Airport after tanker drivers voted to strike against redundancies. After discussions between the tanker drivers company Hoyer and Unite, the outcome of which has remained confidential, the strike has been called off. The strike would have apparently caused a great deal of disruption. Hopefully the drivers got what they were asking for!

100 jobs were under threat at Leeds Bradford airport and a further 900 at Manchester airport. As yet there doesn't appear to have been any proposed strike action. Contrary to the line taken by the unions at Heathrow with HAL, the union in Leeds and Manchester have been placing the blame firmly at the feet of government and not the airports themselves.

Workers outside of the UK have been taking part in numerous acts of resistance during the current crisis. Some have been particularly inspiring.

* Airport workers in Nigeria staged a one-day strike demanding the restoration of full pay, while the government and police were brutally putting down protests against police violence and inequality. More recently, Arik Air operations were grounded by the National Union of Air Transport Employees over poor

working conditions and contract negotiations over severance pay. They blocked the entrance to the airline's headquarters. Good idea!

* The people of Belarus are protesting and striking against the disputed election of Alexander Lukashenko and the authorities are reacting to the peaceful demonstrations with violence. Grounds maintenance staff with Lufthansa in Germany refused to maintain the plane of Lukashenko, stating that "while we maintain his plane, he order his workers to be beaten up." Now that's what we call international solidarity!

* Workers of Aviance Ghana are threatening to go on strike in January after being forced to continuously overwork while taking home half salary since the lockdown period from March till date.

* Air traffic controllers in Greece took strike action over unpaid wages in early October. The dispute escalated, eventually including many other airport workers and public sector workers generally.

* Airport workers in Bolivia, Holland, Mexico, Ireland, New Zealand, Spain and doubtless many other places have been battling the same issues as workers in the UK- pay cuts, unpaid wages, redundancies, outsourcing. With companies able to constantly threaten workers with outsourcing and offshoring, discussions between workers across borders is absolutely necessary if we are going to find a way of stopping the downward trend in the quality of our contracts and workplaces generally. We have more in common with our fellow workers abroad than we do with our bosses, so let's start teaming up and working together.

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