

HEATHROW WORKERS' POWER

An independent voice for workers during the strikes

*******STRIKE DAYS ANNOUNCED:** 4000 Heathrow workers - baggage handlers, security, engineers and fire fighters - have now voted to strike! They will be walking out for four days: 1st, 14th, 17th and 18th December.
SEE YOU AT THE PICKET LINES!*****

Heathrow is a city...

...all of its own. A giant concrete storage heater, a stones throw away from beautiful countryside. It has the widest variety of people and professions as it's possible to find in the UK. As a result, it also shows up many of the contradictions in modern life. As well as being a testing ground and hot bed of privatisation and outsourcing, it is also still home to some of the best contracts and working conditions that working class people can aspire to. While its' offices house some of the highest flying CEOs in the world, many people in the surrounding areas are blighted by poverty and insecurity. And while the airport has been a stronghold of working class militancy and resistance in the past, such as the Gate Gourmet dispute and past BA strikes, we've nevertheless seen a sustained decline in workers' influence and control.

Why is this?

1. Management always seem to be on the offensive, and us workers are on the defensive. This always puts up on the back foot.
2. There are too many competing unions. They need to work together. When they don't, it's easy for management to pick groups of workers off one at a time.
3. While there are solid reps and small groups of workers who fight hard against management's daily crap, there is no bigger, independent workers' strength and voice at Heathrow. This needs to cut across departments and it shouldn't matter what union we're in. Workers need to take control and be in the driving seat. We can't afford to simply leave it up to other people to speak on our behalf.



What can we do?

1. Speak to your co-workers. If you want your voice heard, try and discuss together what is happening and what you want to see happening.
2. Don't allow yourselves to be kept in the dark. Demand more information from your company and union.
3. Make your own demands, to the union and beyond. Open letters are good, they can be anonymous. Make public what the management and union are doing so everyone has a clear picture of what's happening on the ground. We can support you to do this.
4. Try and speak to other groups of workers and exchange information with people you trust. If management are making deals with individual departments, we all should know about it.
5. Join us on Facebook and Twitter! @Heathrow Workers Power. **How is this affecting YOU??** We want to know! Drop us a line about what you think about the dispute and what is happening in your department. We can print it (anonymously) in the next edition of this newsletter!
heathrowworkerspower@protonmail.com

The word on the street (or should it be runaway?!)

We know that people are scared and worried about the future. Why rock the boat when things look bleak? But a crisis can also bring opportunity - if we're willing to put our heads together and fight! Here are some answers to some of the depressing stuff we've heard co-workers say in and around Heathrow:

"Those junior doctors have had it far too good for far too long. They're arguing over getting double time and stuff. Who even gets that these days?"

That's because no one does what the junior doctors are doing anymore. Fight back and go on strike!

"Of course they're going to go after staff on the "old contract," they're the ones that smash their profits!"

British Airways made 2 billion profit last year, how is that harming the company's profits?

If you think our responses are unrealistic, it isn't because they are. It's because, at the moment, we don't have enough power to make them seem possible. But if the pandemic taught us one thing, it's that we only need a small proportion of workers to do the necessary things to keep us going. If we could organise society in a different way,

"One of the good things to come out of the pandemic is the fact that those on legacy contracts will be the same as us mixed fleet guys now."

Wouldn't it be better if all staff contracts were improving instead of a race to the bottom? Why are you on an inferior contract compared to workers that started 20-30-40 years ago? Has the country gotten poorer?

"It'll be good when they make all those furloughed staff redundant. Think of all the overtime we'll get."

Why is it that you need to do so much overtime in the first place? And would you want other workers to speak about you in the same way?

if we shared the work out equally, we could free up more time to do what we wanted to do, not just be wage slaves. The first step is to be more in control of our work lives. We need to take responsibility ourselves and not trust that other people will sort out things for us. Reach out to your co-workers and start pushing for what YOU want!

COMPANY UPDATES



Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL)

HAL is the conglomerate that owns and operates Heathrow. At the same time as boasting of huge cash reserves, they decided to permanently cut staff pay by up to 20%. Workers on the older, better contracts face the worst cuts. 4000 staff, including baggage handlers, security, engineers and fire fighters, have voted to go on strike. They will be walking out for four days: 1/14/17/18 Dec. HAL believe they can weather the storm and keep operations running. How do we support the strikers? How many will cross the picket line? Will there even be a picket line?! Will there be meetings of strikers? Will there be attempts to reach out to other workers?

And as if things weren't bad enough, HAL have just announced that from January 1st, they're "suspending" the subsidy that allows free travel on public transport within and around the airport. This will hit low-paid workers hard. They claim they'll reintroduce it when things 'get back to normal' so I think we can assume this won't exactly be a 'short-term' measure! HAL has been paying massive dividends to its shareholders for years, some years paying out far more than it put into maintenance and development of the airport. So we know where their priorities lie...

British Airways (BA)

Almost immediately after the pandemic struck, BA announced that they intended to make huge amounts of redundancies and "fire and rehire" the remaining staff on inferior contracts. BA staffs' main union, Unite, responded by launching a PR campaign accusing the company of "betraying Britain." No mass meetings were called. No unified response, other than the PR campaign, was pursued. Departments were left to bargain for their pay cuts and jobs individually.

Without a unified voice, departments were forced to make deals in their own narrow self interest. The worst example of this was the communications that came to light showing that one set of Cabin Crew reps (BASSA) was proposing to BA that they make redundancies within other sets of Cabin Crew (Mixed Fleet) in order to save their "own members." The lack of a united front against the company has no doubt left everyone worse off in the short, medium and long term. It has emboldened BA to carry on the threats of "fire and rehire," picking on departments one by one. Around 850 BA Cargo staff have been told to accept pay and benefit cuts, and the breaking up of their collective bargaining unit, with the added threat of outsourcing thrown in for good measure. They're now balloting for strike action. The ballot ends on 7 December. Cargo staff probably have the best bargaining position of workers at the company, as freight has not declined to the same degree that passenger numbers have. But will they have enough power to push the unions to be as militant as they can be..?

Catering, Logistics, Maintenance and Baggage

Workers with OCS, DO&CO, CBRE, Menzies, Baxter Storey, AlphaLSG and many others are facing large numbers of redundancies and attacks on contracts. It is not yet clear how many companies will hold off on these cuts now that furlough has been extended to the end of March and news of a vaccine is pushing up share prices. Many may try and push ahead. Baxter Storey staff on the BA contract have been told that their redundancy consultation will be put on hold. Huge losses were expected at DO&CO, amounting to nearly 75% of the workforce. The furloughing and possible redundancies of cleaning and maintenance contractors (OCS and CBRE) at British Airways is causing mounting H&S issues. Cleaning and ventilation systems are crucial for keeping us all safe, but are currently being neglected.

Jobs vs. health and the environment

As you would expect, air quality around Heathrow has improved dramatically since the first lockdown. This would be all the sweeter if everyone didn't have the threat of the sack hanging over them! A much-needed discussion should take place among workers and the local community to decide whether we want to simply 'go back to normal' or if there are other options.

We have to transition away from mass air travel but it has to be done in a way that doesn't leave large parts of our communities jobless, penniless and having to move away. Bosses, unions, politicians and the rich 1% (who take over half of ALL flights!) will continue to push hard for a third runway - but our children, lungs and the health of the planet are too important for us to just trust them.

Workers' control?

It doesn't have to be a choice between our jobs or the environment. We can have both. It needs to be discussed and will take a lot of fighting for. In the past, workers, in collaboration with community groups, have come up with proposals of how to best use the skills and knowledge of a workplace and community when the existing industries are deemed no longer necessary, harmful or unprofitable. A prime example is the Lucas Plan. In 1976 the Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards Committee

produced an Alternative Corporate Plan for Lucas Aerospace that advocated the production of socially useful products. This was in response to management announcing the need to cut jobs. It wasn't perfect. Its main focus was on skilled workers and it didn't consult enough of the union's rank and file, but the list of products they came up with (new high-tech products in renewable energy, transport, healthcare etc) clearly showed the need for production to be directed by the workforce and for the social good, rather than the military or defence.

The Lucas Plan was not implemented, but could have been with more pressure and support. The plan relied too much on appeals to the Labour Party and the company and not enough attention was paid to workers' resistance as a method for pushing it through. There are institutions and groups proposing a 'Just Transition' from aviation and fossil fuels more generally, like the TUC (Trade Union Congress), Stay Grounded, Extinction Rebellion and People before Profit. But it's unlikely any decent and meaningful change will happen until the workers and communities directly effected start taking a leading role in the transformation.

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For international aviation news check out our blog:

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Rolls Royce

Rolls Royce are planning to offshore production from Lancashire to Singapore. 350 jobs will be lost. Workers there have been on strike to prevent this. But now the company have decided to close the factory over Christmas, in effect, locking the workers out. Can Heathrow workers link up with Rolls Royce workers? Are the BA cargo workers looking to collaborate with HAL to make their actions more effective? Secondary picketing is illegal but there are surely some creative ways to get round this?!

Heathrow Workers' Power is creating a space where workers can have these conversations and figure out ways of taking action together. Check out our Facebook page and Twitter account for more information on the topics above and keep an eye out for meetings and actions coming up.