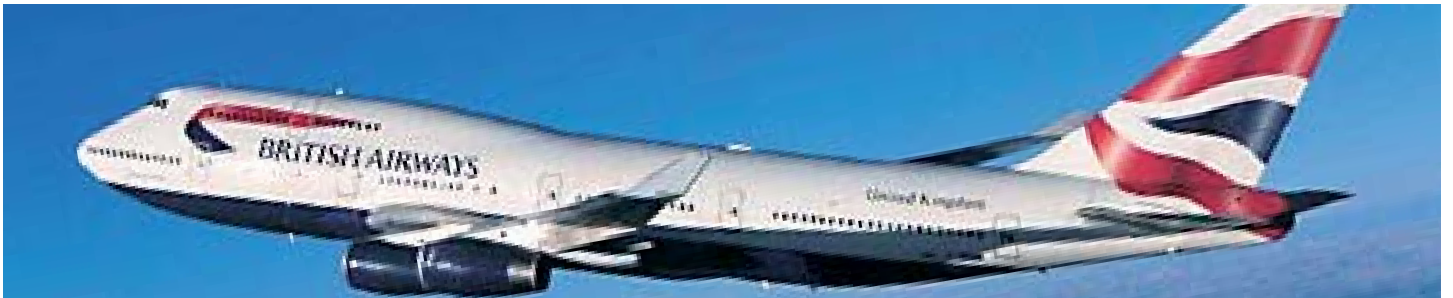


# Socialist Party

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## Send a message to Willie Walsh: Vote YES to strike action



- **Defend every job**
- **No to new contracts, No to New Fleet**
- **Joint action across British Airways to defend terms and conditions**

**B**ritish Airways announced redundancies for 1,700 cabin crew this October. 1,000 workers are expected to take voluntary redundancy and a further 3,000 will be moved to part time work. Significantly BA has informed staff that it will employ additional cabin crew on terms and conditions inferior to those who will lose their jobs.

UNITE, which represents the bulk of cabin crew, has warned BA they risk “a serious, drawn-out confrontation”. BA management have ignored these warnings.

UNITE are entirely correct to begin balloting for strike action to resist this attack on cabin crews jobs and hard won terms and conditions. A high turn out in favour of strike action will deliver a clear message to Willie Walsh and Tony McCarthy that these attacks will not go unanswered. However this is a fight that affects all BA workers.

If BA is able to impose worse conditions on cabin crew it is only a matter of time before they attempt to impose them on the rest of BA staff.

Willie Walsh and his crew of spin doctors are constantly in the media telling anyone who will listen

that British Airways is on the brink of financial ruin. Staff pay and conditions must be sacrificed to save the company. The figure of £401 million lost in the last year is used to fool gullible Labour politicians and journalists into accepting that the resistance of unions to so-called ‘modernisation’ is endangering the company. But is BA really in crisis?

The reality is very different. If BA is in crisis why is it angling to buy British Midland and Japan Airlines? Why is it in merger talks with Iberia? These are not the actions of a company on the brink of liquidation. In reality BA is sitting on a £1 billion cash pile that it disguises through a simple accounting trick. It claims the cash must be held in reserve in case it goes bust overnight and has to refund all its customer’s tickets. In the real world no airline has ever gone bust over night. The rhetoric from the likes of Walsh is quite simply a con trick to create a false sense of crisis in order to force staff into accepting inferior pay and working conditions similar to those on offer at Ryanair or Easyjet.

So what is British Airways agenda?

Willie Walsh’s real target is the 1948 Agreement



(also known as the Redeployment Agreement) which bars compulsory redundancy and ensures pay, and therefore pensions, can never be reduced. BA management are looking to pick

off sections of staff one by one in order to destroy the 1948 Agreement and fundamentally change the way it does industrial relations. With more profit sweated from the workforce alongside mergers and buy outs of its rivals, BA will then be in a position to dominate the global airlines industry. So while staff work longer hours for less pay in an atmosphere of permanent insecurity, Willie Walsh and BA shareholders will be laughing all the way to the bank thanks to juicy bonuses and dividends. Willie Walsh claims to be a 'moderniser' but what is so modern about returning British Airways to work practices that have more in common with Victorian times than the 21st century?

This attack on cabin crew is an opening salvo by management in a war against the 1948 Agreement. Cabin crew should not be left to face this alone. Cabin crew may well beat off this particular attack but management will simply regroup and then go after some other section of the workforce. There

needs to be a united front of all the unions present at BA in defence of the agreement. A good first step would be a joint statement from the national leaders of BA unions pledging mutual support for action taken in defence of the agreement. However workers at BA should not rely on action by national union leaders alone. The future of the agreement will depend on workers willingness to get organized and fight. There is an urgent need to set up a joint shop steward committee to co-ordinate united resistance to any attempts to impose redundancies or to change terms and conditions. BA management needs to get the message that any moves to turn British Airways into a global version of Ryanair will not be tolerated. Sectional action is to be applauded but the one thing management fears more than anything is united action. If management continues to follow its policy of wearing down the workforce through salami tactics then a 24 hour cross company warning strike should be seriously discussed.

That BA uses the crisis in the economy to attack staff will come as a surprise to no one. It is a well worn tactic by politicians and employers across the country. After the general election, no matter who wins, cuts in public services will soar as working people are expected to pay the price for the banker's greed.

A determined response at BA, as with the postal workers, could profoundly effect the confidence of other workers to draw a line in the sand and fight to defend jobs, conditions and services in the months to come.

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