

The Unite logo, featuring the word 'Unite' in white, slanted text on a red background.

ACTION LERT



www.unitetheunion.org

BRITISH AIRWAYS – DISPUTE UPDATE

British Airways cabin crew voted last month overwhelmingly, and for the third time, to take industrial action against their employer on a number of issues relating to the company's conduct of industrial relations.

The result of this ballot, which asked if members were prepared to take strike action, was as follows:

- ▶ Number voting YES 5,751 (78.5%)
- ▶ Number voting NO 1,579 (21.5%)
- ▶ The overall turnout in the ballot was 75%

As this dispute enters its third calendar year the above result demonstrates once again and by a huge margin, the determination of our members to obtain a fair and just settlement from the company. It was indeed further proof, if proof were needed, of the fact that management at this blue chip British company has completely lost the trust of thousands of their key staff – loyal, professional and customer-facing. This clear message to British Airways management – that their cabin crew cannot be cowed or crushed – we had hoped would have led to meaningful negotiations to resolve the issues between them, therefore preventing any further industrial action.

In announcing the ballot result, Unite immediately appealed to management to meet the union for negotiations to resolve the outstanding issues which could have avoided any further disruption to the airline's operations.

We have repeatedly told British Airways that it is only through negotiation, not litigation, intimidation or victimisation, that a lasting peace can be achieved. Instead of playing games they would be better served in addressing the grievances of their frontline staff. Sooner or later British Airways will get the message that we are not going away. Sooner or later they will have to account for the damage they are doing to the British Airways brand.

Instead, BA took the unprecedented step of launching a legal blitz against the independent scrutineer used to conduct this ballot, the Electoral Reform Society. This doubtless reflects BA's decision to place its chief legal officer in charge of employee relations. While not addressing the union directly, BA advised the ERS that the ballot was unlawful and that any industrial action taken on the basis of it would be unprotected. This is merely an assertion by BA – however, the ERS decided, on the basis of protecting its own legal position, to issue a qualification in its official report on the industrial action ballot.

*Keeping you up to date and informed
Supporting our members **fighting back***

“this dispute will only be resolved by goodwill, cooperation and agreement, not imposition, legislation or intimidation”

Unite therefore cannot call industrial action based on this ballot, since such a move could expose our members to sanctions by a bullying employer.

BA has vilified and misrepresented its own cabin crew. It has painted crew as overpaid and unwilling to accept change. In reality the vast majority of crew earn less than £25,000 and have been willing to accept change, providing that change is negotiated with their union. For the union's part, various options have been proposed that would have seen significant financial savings for the company alongside structural changes to the in-flight operation. None of these have been acceptable to the company however, who appear determined to impose the changes they want to see, without any agreement and at whatever cost.

BA has vilified and misrepresented its own cabin crew. It has painted crew as overpaid

So far BA have sacked 18 members of Unite and suspended another 70, including a third of the local union leadership.

However, if BA management believes that it can secure industrial harmony by these methods it is living in a fools' paradise. Only negotiation, not litigation or intimidation, can place industrial relations on a sound footing and start to heal the wounds caused by this dispute.

It is, of course, a matter of dismay and regret that it has proved impossible to place our relations with the company on the fresh and positive footing we would all want. We have made every effort in prolonged negotiations to resolve this dispute.

These unnecessary and unwarranted attacks on our members, their agreements and our union organisation at BA have led the union to be in dispute with the company for a period entering a third calendar year. Throughout we have been guided by our representatives and if we could achieve a settlement then peace would at long last be at hand.

“to resolve this dispute costs nothing, it's become vindictive, personal and hugely damaging to BA's reputation”

BA cabin crew have repeatedly shown that they will not be browbeaten by bullying and legal intimidation. We have therefore immediately set in hand preparations for a further industrial action ballot on the issues arising from management's breach of agreements and policies of industrial intimidation.

Given the on-going failure of British Airways management to take its employment relations seriously and start negotiating, we have today given the company formal notice of this fresh ballot. BA management needs to understand that it will never break the spirit of cabin crew, and that customer uncertainty and confusion will continue until it starts listening to its staff.

We will keep you informed of progress and thank you for the support and assistance you have, and continue to give, our members at British Airways over this very difficult period.

Yours sincerely



Len McCluskey
General Secretary

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What do you think of when you think British Airways?

Class? Comfort? Cost?

Or confrontation?

Our members want you to always think positively about BA. They care passionately about caring for you.

But three times in the past two years they have voted overwhelmingly to take industrial action at the airline.

How could this happen at a once-great British brand?

These are the same courteous, professional people that take care of passengers and help you choose to fly with BA.

Other airlines are proud of their cabin crew. They choose them to be their public face.

Not BA. It is now better known for industrial confrontation than for passenger comfort.

What a turnaround for what was once the "world's favourite airline".

Unite cabin crew members at BA are mainly female, working mums. They are proud of their airline and proud of the qualities that make it admired the world over.

The vast majority will dedicate 25 years or more service to the airline. Many will never earn more than £25k per annum for skills that stretch from life saver to linguist. In return, they expect respect.

They are the professional, friendly people that make BA what it was – a world class brand.

They will also not tolerate bullying. That is why they are standing up against the sacking of 18 cabin crew and disciplining of scores more as BA exacts revenge on the thousands of crew who took lawful industrial action last year.

Bullying, intimidation, legal threats – anything but listening to their own employees from BA's lawyer-led management. That is what stands in

the way of peace at BA – a board that prefers litigation to negotiation.

Two years ago, a battle over standards at the airline began; it was never about money. Indeed it could still be solved without costing BA a penny.

But it will never be solved by bullying. As many times as BA force us to rebalot our members, we will do so.

The spirit of BA cabin crew will never be broken.

This advertisement appeared in the Daily Mirror, Daily Mail and Guardian newspapers on Thursday 10th February 2011



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Find out why this dispute is now in its third year.
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