

BA: United we stand campaign

British Airways strike letter to *The Guardian* newspaper: 'Macho Walsh wants to break the union'

This is a copy of the full letter sent by 95 leading industrial relations academics to the Guardian condemning BA's tactics in the BA strike.

23 March 2010

Dear editor,

As academics in the field of employment relations our expertise includes the analysis of the causes, process and outcomes of industrial disputes and particularly the dynamics of strike action. Given the near certainty of further strikes (Follow up strike will go ahead says union, March 22nd), it is clear to us that the actions of the Chief Executive of British Airways, notwithstanding his protestations to the contrary, are explicable only by the desire to break the union which represents the cabin crew. What other possible interpretation can there be for Willie Walsh tabling an inferior offer to BA's previous offer or indeed of his marshalling of resources, including those of bitter industry rival Ryanair, to undermine the action of his staff? Walsh and now Prime Minister Brown have made the error of underestimating the deep seated and justifiable anger of a loyal and dedicated workforce, whose continued trust and goodwill is a vital ingredient of customer care.

Overwhelming majorities in two strike ballots in the face of tabloid opprobrium testify to employees' understanding that a victory for Walsh's macho management strategy would precipitate a race to the bottom in terms of working conditions and job quality. In the process, this would damage beyond repair the high standards of customer service for which BA cabin crew are renowned. The wider significance of a triumph of unilateral management prerogative would be a widening of the representation gap in UK employment relations, and a further erosion of worker rights and of that most precious of commodities - democracy. For all these reasons, BA's cabin crew and their union, Unite, deserve our support rather than knee-jerk vilification.

Professor Philip Taylor, University of Strathclyde
Professor Jim Arrowsmith, Massey University
Professor Sarah Ashwin, London School of Economics
Professor Chris Baldry, University of Stirling
Professor Greg Bamber, Monash University Australia
Professor Harriet Bradley, University of Bristol
Professor Robert Carter, De Montfort University

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Professor Linda Clarke, University of Westminster
Professor Christine Cooper, University of Strathclyde
Professor Andrew Danford, University of West of England
Professor Ralph Darlington, University of Salford
Professor Jan Druker, Canterbury Christ Church University
Professor Tony Elger, University of Warwick
Professor Bradom Ellem, University of Sydney
Professor Keith Ewing, Kings College London
Professor Patricia Findlay, University of Strathclyde
Professor Irena Grugulis, University of Bradford
Professor Jane Hardy, University of Hertfordshire
Professor Nigel Haworth, University of Auckland
Professor Geraldine Healy, Queen Mary University of London
Professor Ed Heery, Cardiff University
Professor Debra Howcroft, University of Manchester
Professor Jeff Hyman, University of Aberdeen
Professor Richard Hyman, London School of Economics
Professor Steve Jeffreys, London Metropolitan University
Professor John Kelly, Birkbeck College London
Professor Rosemary Lucas, Manchester Metropolitan University
Professor Miguel Martinez Lucio, University of Manchester
Professor Sonia McKay, London Metropolitan University
Professor Doug Miller, University of Northumbria
Professor Dennis Nickson, University of Strathclyde
Professor Peter Nolan, University of Leeds
Professor Jackie O'Reilly, University of Brighton
Professor Anna Pollert, University of the West of England
Professor Valeria Pulignano, Universities of Leuven and Warwick
Professor Al Rainnie, Curtin University, Australia
Professor Helen Rainbird, University of Birmingham
Professor Keith Randle, University of Hertfordshire
Professor Paul Stewart, University of Strathclyde
Professor Mark Stuart, University of Leeds
Professor Paul Thompson, University of Strathclyde
Professor Martin Upchurch, Middlesex University
Professor Chris Warhurst, University of Strathclyde
Professor Geoffrey Wood, University of Sheffield
Professor Zander Wedderburn, Heriot-Watt University
Sue Abbott, Northumbria University
Dr. Maurizio Atzeni, Loughborough University
Dr. David Beale, University of Manchester
Cecilie Bingham, University of Westminster
Paul Brook, Manchester Metropolitan University
Dr. Peter Butler, De Montfort University

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Dr. Iona Byford, Portsmouth University
Liam Campling, Queen Mary University of London
Dr. Ian Clark, University of Birmingham
Nick Clarke, London Metropolitan University
Dr. Tim Claydon, De Montfort University
Dr. Rachel Cohen, University of Warwick
Dr. Hazel Conley, Queen Mary University of London
Dr. Heather Connolly, University of Manchester
Nick Creaby-Attwood, Northumbria University
Dr. Alf Crossman, University of Surrey
Dr. Andrew Cumbers, University of Glasgow
Dr. Ian Cunningham, University of Strathclyde
Steve Davies, Cardiff University
Dr. Tricia Dawson, University of Westminster
Demet Dinler, School of African and Oriental Studies
Janine Duvier, London School of Economics
Dr. Peter Dwyer, Ruskin College Oxford
Dr. Vaughan Ellis, Edinburgh Napier University
Ian Fitzgerald, University of Northumbria
Dr. Chris Forde, University of Leeds
Dr. Debbie Foster, Cardiff University
Dr. Steve French, Keele University
Jo Grady, University of Leicester
Dr. Ian Greenwood, University of Leeds
Dr. Anita Hammer, De Montfort University
Dr. Geraint Harvey, Swansea University
Dr. Jason Heyes, University of Birmingham
Dr. Jane Holgate, London Metropolitan University
Dr. Jean Jenkins, University of Cardiff
Eleanor Kirk, University of Strathclyde
Dr. Lefteis Kretsos, University of Coventry
Dr Alex Law, University of Abertay
Dr. Dave Lyddon, Keele University
Dr. Jo McBride, University of Bradford
Dr. Patricia McCafferty, University of Strathclyde
Erin van der Maase, London School of Economics
Dr. Matteo Mandarini, Queen Mary University of London
Jim Main, University of Strathclyde
Dr. Abigail Marks, Heriot-Watt University
Douglas Martin, University of Strathclyde
Dr. Kim Mather, University of Wolverhampton
Dr. Gerry Mooney, The Open University
Dr. Sian Moore, London Metropolitan University
Dave Napier, London Metropolitan University

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Dr. Kirsty Newsome, University of Strathclyde
Dr. Jane Parker, Auckland University of Technology
Dr. Anna Pollert, University of the West of England
Dr. Andrew Perchard, University of Strathclyde
Dr. Elke Pioch, Manchester Metropolitan University
Dr. Peter Prowse, University of Bradford
Michael Pye, University of Hertfordshire
Dr. Helen Richardson, University of Salford
Dr. Michael Richardson, University of the West of England
Dr. Ian Roper, Middlesex University
Alan Ryan, De Montfort University
Dr. Devi Sacchetto, University of Padua
Dr. Peter Scott, University of Portsmouth
Dr. Melanie Simms, University of Warwick
Bob Simpson, London School of Economics
Bob Smale, University of Brighton
Dr. Andrew Smith, University of East London
Dr. Ian Towers, Euro-Business-College, Berlin
Dr. Alan Tuckman, Nottingham Trent University
Charles Umney, University of Leeds
Dr. Matt Vidal, Kings College London
Dr. Steve Vincent, University of Leeds
Dr. Roger Welch, Portsmouth University
Dr. Glynne Williams, University of Leicester
Dr. Stephen Williams, Portsmouth University
David Wray, University of Northumbria

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