

# Workers' solidarity versus the bosses' law

So, finally, the BA strike is on.

To judge from the media, you'd think the whole issue was something that goes on in the courts and in the top level negotiations between BA and union bosses.

First the courts issued an injunction against the strike—the latest in a series which have blocked even the most carefully organised official strikes, the most recent being the RMT strike a few weeks ago. Then the Court of Appeal overturned the injunction.

Is this because the courts can really be on the side of the workers? No. Most likely it's because parts of the ruling class have realised that if you legally abolish even the appearance of a 'right to strike', workers will have no alternative but to take matters into their own hands. The example of the unofficial oil refinery strikes, which spread so rapidly across the country, is very fresh in their memory.

The truth is, however, that the ruling class have already made all effective strike action illegal. The law on ballots – aimed at preventing workers from taking decisions in mass meetings where they feel strongest and can launch struggles on the spot. The law on secondary action – aimed at preventing workers from going directly to workers from other categories and companies and asking them to join their fight.

These laws are often described as 'Thatcher's anti-union laws'. In reality, Thatcher only carried on where the previous Labour government had left off; and the laws are really designed to increase the unions' grip over the workers, by outlawing all spontaneous, wildcat actions.

So now the BA workers are on strike. And there's no doubt that there is a strong will and determination on their part. Coming out on strike and losing pay at a time when many are struggling with rising living costs is not an easy decision to make. And the media, with their incessant campaigns about all the 'inconvenience' caused by the strikes, are doing their best to make workers feel guilty and isolated.

The problem is that the strike is taking place inside the cramped confines of the law and the union rule book, which are tailor-made to isolate workers even more.

## The BA workers are not alone

Over the last decade and, especially since the September 11th attacks in New York, there has been a crisis in the airline industry. This has

lead to the loss of hundreds of thousands of jobs, for example a report in the eTurbo News website (posted 24th February) states "As the U.S. airline industry lost tens of billions of dollars over the past 10 years, it also lost a tremendous number of employees. Nearly one in every four U.S. airline jobs disappeared in the 10 years that ended Dec. 31, and the largest airlines were among the hardest hit, according to new data." As it says, the largest airlines have been the hardest hit leading to huge job losses, 'voluntary' redundancies, agreements for the suspension of pay, changing shift patterns and attacks on travel 'perks' for airline employees. And this was before the current debt crisis hit the world. We are now seeing the bankruptcy not just of the big financial institutions but of entire nation states: Greece is in the front line but the whole Eurozone is under threat, as is Britain itself.

None of the election parties made any secret of the fact that they were preparing to make huge cuts to deal with Britain's debt. The new government has already set the ball rolling. The public sector will be hardest hit, but no workers' job is safe today.

So BA cabin crew are in the same situation as the entire working class. But the present strike is being limited even within BA – to the cabin crew, as if the thousands of other BA employees from pilots to baggage handlers and catering and cleaning staff – haven't also got their grievances against the company. And as if hundreds of thousands of other workers employed by other airlines aren't facing the same attacks on their conditions.

There's a crying need for solidarity, for workers raising common demands and fighting together. But experience has shown that they can only get this solidarity if they act on their own behalf. The best example in the airline industry was supplied by the baggage handlers in 2005, when they walked out in solidarity with Gate Gourmet workers who were being trampled on by management. No ballots, no separation between workers with different jobs or bosses.

This kind of solidarity is what workers need now, and it will mean 'illegally' making decisions in mass meetings, 'illegally' sending pickets and delegations to workers in other categories and asking them to join the struggle. The law is there to protect the bosses and their state. Workers' solidarity can only develop if we develop our own power against them. **WR 25.5.10**

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## ICC Public Forum

### The crisis and the struggles are not confined to Greece

**BIRMINGHAM**  
Saturday 12th June at 2:00pm  
Friends of the Earth,  
54A Allison Street, Digbeth, B1

**LONDON**  
Saturday 3rd July at 2:00pm  
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square,  
(Nearest tube: Holborn)