

Wildcat Strike by Catering Staff Sparks a Solidarity Wildcat Strike by Baggage Handlers and Ground Crew at London's Heathrow Airport

August 13, 2005

“LONDON (Aug. 12) - At least 70,000 travelers were left stranded Friday as British Airways canceled all flights to and from Heathrow Airport after a wildcat strike among catering staff spread to baggage handlers and other ground crew...All BA flights from Heathrow were canceled and arriving flights were diverted to other British airports as the dispute escalated.... nearly 100 aircraft and 1,000 pilots and cabin crew were left 'in the wrong places around the world' because of the dispute. -- AP”

As usual the newspapers try to turn the public against the workers by playing up the inconvenience to passengers and by not interviewing the striking workers to give their side.

The “wildcat” (unauthorized by the union) strikes began when the airport’s caterer, Gate Gourmet (which is owned by the Fort Worth, Texas, buyout firm Texas Pacific Group) insisted on “restructuring working practices” – in other words, speedup. Gate Gourmet thought they could bully their employees since they are almost all low-paid Asian workers. Surprise! On their own, without the permission of union officials, Gate Gourmet workers went on strike. Then Gate Gourmet fired 800 of them. And then – surprise! surprise! – baggage handlers and other ground staff – also without the permission of union officials – walked out in support of the fired caterers, shutting British Airways down in an inspiring display of good old-fashioned working class solidarity.

Instead of supporting the workers carrying out exactly the kind of solidarity that unions supposedly aim to promote, the union did the opposite. The union for most of the airport's workers, Britain's Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), issued a statement saying the action was not backed by the union and had not been planned. "This is not action we have recommended nor is it an approved strike," a press officer in the union's headquarters told CNN. "It's not something we've organized." She said it was an unlawful dispute as far as the union was aware. A real working class movement would spread the strike, unlike these union officials who use anti-working class laws as an excuse to not even support their own striking members!

With “friends” like that, who needs enemies? This is just one more piece of evidence that the big unions are tools of management for controlling workers, and not at all on our side in the class war that goes on everyday in every workplace. But as Heathrow workers have shown, we don't need these sellout unions! We can win the class war with our own solidarity. We can revolutionize the world so that instead of it being shaped by the values of jerks like the Gate Gourmet bosses, it will be shaped by working class values of equality and democracy and commitment to one another like the workers at Heathrow are demonstrating.

If you want to spread this kind of solidarity in your workplace and community, join with us in Solidarity Now.

Please copy and pass it on.

SOLIDARITY NOW: Cam Austin, UAW Local 751, kickc@consolidated.net; Michelle Bland, ex-UAW Local 2036, tomchtrbl@hotmail.com; Tom Laney, UAW Local 879 (ret.), tlaney@localnet.com, 715-962-4365; Billy Robinson, ex-UAW Local 2036, WRobi27316@aol.com, 270-835-2111; Larry Solomon, UAW Local 751 (ret.), LIBERTYWON@NOVANET1.COM, 217-763-4451; Dave Stratman, newdem@aol.com 617-524-4073.