



family support

NEWSLETTER

www.balpa.org

Update on the OpenSkies Dispute

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On Wednesday January 30th BALPA despatched ballot papers to our membership on the OpenSkies dispute. These will have arrived with you now and no doubt have resulted in a great deal of discussion amongst BA pilots and their family members.

BALPA and your representatives have received a very positive response to the beginning of our campaign. You will have received a great amount of information to enable you and your families to make an informed decision on whether to support the union in our call for Strike Action.

We commit to continuing to keep you informed and to address any particular areas of concern that you or your families may have, not least around the consequences of actually participating in Strike Action.



Your feedback so far

We have had lots of requests for information and some common questions have arisen. We will cover some of these in detail here and others in future newsletters.

The most common request has been to explain the dispute in the simplest way possible.

The dispute is about British Airways recruiting pilots for the new OpenSkies airline that are not part of our main pilot body. This threatens the long term job security or the terms and conditions of BA's pilots.

The company put a "take it or leave it" final offer that fell far short of addressing our concerns.

Many of you have asked about the risks and effects of taking strike action. BALPA remain committed to trying to find a solution that doesn't result in strike action but we cannot do that alone. BA must recognise the importance of the seniority issue and the significance of it to pilots careers.

We have been working for the best part of a year to avoid a dispute but we are now forced into asking you to support a call for strike action. We'll concentrate here on how strike action might affect you and your family and in our next newsletter we will cover financially preparing for any strike that is called.

Legal Protections when going on strike

Employees and trade unions participating in official Strike Action enjoy a number of protections under the law.

BALPA is a professional Trade Union and as such every step is being taken to ensure that our proposed strike action complies with the legislation on industrial action and is therefore "official".

During the first 12 weeks of a strike the company cannot lawfully dismiss a striking employee. To do so would be considered Unfair Dismissal.

However the greatest protection to a Striking employee is the solidarity shown between members of the union. What the company does to one of us it effectively does to all of us and therefore the greatest protection we enjoy comes from relying on our colleagues.

At work we are used to this teamwork but when contemplating voting YES in the ballot when sat around the breakfast table it may feel as if you are personally taking on the company.

Every one of us feels this way but every one of us is part of an organisation dedicated to protect and promote our members best interests. When the union does call for the support of its members it is clearly in everyone's interests to support that action.

In return the Union will not end the dispute, or cancel the Strike Action until such time that EVERY pilot is returned to their position of employment on the same terms and conditions as they were previously employed upon.

What is at Stake?

We have already outlined the principle reason for the dispute. The dispute however is about more than the simple issue of seniority for a group of pilots. The BA pilot community are being asked

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to support this strike ballot because to not do so would weaken our ability to defend and maintain our terms and conditions.

The pilot in your family will be balancing the importance of supporting the union against the cost of participating in the action. Here we highlight some of the key areas that may be of concern to you.

Finances

It is likely that BA will make or threaten to make a deduction from Salary for the periods of work affected by Strike Action. Individually we may stand to be affected financially.

For those members for whom financial concerns alone might affect their willingness to support the action BALPA have put into place some protections. We will set up a Strike "pledge fund" which will ensure that no member or their families suffer financial hardship during and after the Strike. Full details of these will be sent to you shortly and in our next family awareness publication we will provide some advice on how to prepare financially for the consequences of a strike.

Stress at home

There is little doubt that the nearer we get to the prospective dispute the greater the level of anxiety will be about participating in the action.

This will have a negative impact on quality of life because of the extra stress you will be under. BALPA and your representatives will be available to discuss any concerns with you and we have professionals able to help in many areas of concern.

The company will seek to exploit this as a method of undermining support for the action.

You will receive letters from the company explaining the consequences of supporting or participating in a strike. These are intended to increase the pressure on your whole family and try and

deter you from supporting the union.

This is an extremely unpleasant tactic, but one which the company demonstrated it was willing to use back in our last ballot for strike action in 1996. We will share with you some of the threats that BA made then and how we will counteract them during this ballot and any subsequent strike.

Career Opportunities

This will be a fear for many members, particularly Junior pilots and their families. BALPA will not end any dispute with the company until any such threat is lifted from an individual or groups of individuals. If we stand together such threats will be rendered ineffective.

Carefully consider how you will vote

BALPA will give you all the information that you need to use your vote.

Please do not vote YES in the ballot if you and your family are not prepared to support the industrial action that the BACC calls for.

In return the BACC commits to you that the action will be reflective of what our members tell us they are prepared to support. This isn't just a sample of the opinions of the activists who write on the various electronic forums or communicate directly with the BACC.

We have just finished a second round of telephone polling of BALPA members, ensuring that we have a representative cross section of viewpoints from the pilots we represent. The support expressed in these polling results firmly endorses the stand that we are taking on this matter.

Any action we call for will be measured, appropriate and supported by our pilot community and their families.

Carefully consider the future for BA Pilots if we don't win this dispute together.

Industrial action may be against your normal instincts or you may be fearful of the consequences of supporting it.

These are very valid concerns and reasons to consider your vote carefully.

However please consider another possible outcome, one where we don't win what is widely recognised to be an honourable and justifiable dispute with the company.

Anyone who has worked for BA over recent years has seen an increasingly emboldened employer, constantly looking for concessions and sacrifices from its employees. Where they cannot negotiate they interpret agreements to their benefit or impose changes to established practices.

What sort of pensions solution might BALPA have been able to secure in the event of losing a dispute with the company? What sort of changes to our terms and conditions might BA be tempted to impose in the post strike climate if we do not stand together?

Every one of us must stand together with the support of our families on this issue. Only this way can we ensure our mutual protection and safeguard the long term interests of British Airways pilots now and in the future.