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British Airways strike almost over

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13 August, 2005

THE ARTICLE

British Airways strike almost over

BNE: A strike by catering workers at London's Heathrow airport has created turmoil and disruption for thousands of air passengers and crippled the operations of British Airways (BA). Up to 70,000 travelers have been stranded, not knowing when, or if, they will fly. BA canceled all of its 535 flights in and out of Heathrow as several hundred baggage handlers, cargo staff and other workers went on strike. The snap industrial action was called in support of 800 employees sacked by the US catering firm Gate Gourmet. A meeting is expected between unions and Gate Gourmet to break the deadlock. The strike is now nearing its end with two-third of the strikers resuming work and a skeleton service of flights. The massive backlog of flights will take days to clear.

BA's Chief Executive Rod Eddington said: "I urge the management of Gate Gourmet and senior [union] officials to find a speedy resolution to this crisis and end the misery they are heaping on our customers.... This is not our dispute. Our customers must come first and everyone involved in creating this chaotic situation must come to their senses." The airline has already put up thousands of passengers in local hotels. Another logistical nightmare for BA is that nearly 100 airplanes and 1,000 pilots and cabin crew are still at the wrong airports around the world. BA has pledged to rebook or refund all passengers caught up in the crisis, which is thought to be costing the airline \$18 million a day.

WARM-UPS

1. FLIGHT CREW: Imagine you are a pilot or part of the cabin crew for British Airways (or another airline). Walk around the classroom and talk to the other “pilots / flight attendants” about your job and lifestyle.

2. AIRPORTS: What are your experiences of airports? In pairs / groups, talk about how the following could be improved at an airport you all know:

- Getting to and from the airport
- Check-in
- Departure tax
- Security controls
- Duty free stores
- Restaurants
- Departure gates
- Other

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Strike / airports / catering services / travelers / baggage / industrial action / crises / chaotic situations / nightmares / airline pilots / cabin crew

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. PASSENGER: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word “passenger”. Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. BA STRIKE OPINIONS: In pairs / groups, talk about how far you agree with these opinions on striking workers:

- a. Any airline worker who goes on strike should be immediately fired.
- b. Airlines should have much better back-up plans to deal with strikes.
- c. British Airways is the best airline in the world.
- d. British Airways makes big profits. It should pay its staff more.
- e. I don’t understand people who go on strike. They have signed a contract.
- f. If caterers go on strike, passengers should take their own food on the airplane.
- g. If workers go on strike, it’s because employers are bad.
- h. If I were a stranded passenger, I would be absolutely furious.

6. QUICK DEBATE: Students A think traveling by air is a wonderful way to travel. Students B think traveling by air is a terrible way to travel. Change partners often.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. Striking catering workers crippled British Airways' operations. | T / F |
| b. Around 700,000 travelers are stranded at the airport. | T / F |
| c. Snap industrial action was taken by staff to get higher salaries. | T / F |
| d. The massive backlog of flights will take a month to clear. | T / F |
| e. BA's CEO said the strike has heaped misery on BA customers. | T / F |
| f. BA has put up many passengers in its staff dormitories. | T / F |
| g. Many BA pilots have suffered from nightmares because of the strike. | T / F |
| h. The strike is costing BA \$180 million a day. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| a. turmoil | implore |
| b. crippled | stalemate |
| c. snap | promised |
| d. deadlock | sudden |
| e. skeleton | piling |
| f. urge | chaos |
| g. heaping | headache |
| h. put up | basic |
| i. nightmare | disabled |
| j. pledged | accommodated |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. created turmoil | industrial action |
| b. crippled the | in local hotels |
| c. snap | operations of British Airways |
| d. break the | of flights will take days to clear |
| e. massive backlog | their senses |
| f. find a speedy | caught up in the crisis |
| g. come to | and disruption |
| h. put up thousands of passengers | resolution to this crisis |
| i. logistical | deadlock |
| j. refund all passengers | nightmare |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the correct space.

British Airways strike almost over

BNE: A strike by catering workers at London's Heathrow airport has created _____ and disruption for thousands of air passengers and _____ the operations of British Airways (BA). Up to 70,000 travelers have been _____, not knowing when, or if, they will fly. BA canceled all of its 535 flights in and out of Heathrow as several hundred baggage _____, cargo staff and other workers went on strike. The _____ industrial action was called in support of 800 employees sacked by the US catering firm Gate Gourmet. A meeting is expected between unions and Gate Gourmet to break the _____. The strike is now nearing its end with two-third of the strikers resuming work and a _____ service of flights. The massive _____ of flights will take days to clear.

BA's Chief Executive Rod Eddington said: "I _____ the management of Gate Gourmet and senior [union] officials to find a _____ resolution to this crisis and end the _____ they are heaping on our customers.... This is not our dispute. Our customers must come first and everyone involved in creating this _____ situation must come to their _____." The airline has already put up thousands of passengers in local hotels. Another _____ nightmare for BA is that nearly 100 airplanes and 1,000 pilots and cabin crew are still at the wrong airports around the world. BA has _____ to rebook or refund all passengers caught up in the crisis, which is thought to be _____ the airline \$18 million a day.

deadlock

handlers

stranded

backlog

turmoil

skeleton

snap

crippled

costing

senses

misery

pledged

urge

chaotic

logistical

speedy

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'cabin'** and **'pilot'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "FLYING" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about airplanes, airports and flying.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- catering
- operations
- stranded
- snap
- deadlock
- backlog
- urge
- speedy
- senses
- nightmare
- crew
- costing

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What were your initial thoughts on this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. What are your thoughts on striking workers?
- d. Do you / Would you belong to a union?
- e. Are strikes common in your country?
- f. If you were a passenger, would you have sympathy for the workers who were fired?
- g. What would you do if you had to spend 48 hours at an airport?
- h. What do you think of catering services on airlines?
- i. Do you like flying?
- j. Have you ever had to wait a long time for a plane, train, or bus?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. Are you impressed with the service on airlines?
- d. How does flying compare with other means of transport?
- e. Would you like to work as part of the cabin crew on an airline?
- f. Have you ever experienced disrupted travel services?
- g. What is your impression of British Airways?
- h. What's the biggest nightmare you've faced in your life?
- i. What do you think of your country's national airline?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

FLYING: You have been asked by the airline industry to make recommendations on how to improve air travel. In pairs / groups, identify the major problem with each of the categories below and decide on three suggestions for their improvement. Agree on and circle the extent of the “present problem” (1 = very bad, 5 = excellent).

CATEGORY	PRESENT PROBLEM	RECOMMENDATIONS
Food	1 2 3 4 5	1. 2. 3.
In-flight entertainment	1 2 3 4 5	1. 2. 3.
The seat	1 2 3 4 5	1. 2. 3.
Baggage	1 2 3 4 5	1. 2. 3.
Checking in	1 2 3 4 5	1. 2. 3.
Other	1 2 3 4 5	1. 2. 3.

Change partners and explain what you discussed with your previous partner(s). Give each other feedback on your ideas. Combine your ideas to make your recommendations even better (you have to agree on the three best recommendations).

Return to your original partners and discuss any revisions you made.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

British Airways strike almost over

BNE: A strike by _____ workers at London's Heathrow airport has created turmoil and _____ for thousands of air passengers and _____ the operations of British Airways (BA). Up to 70,000 travelers have been _____, not knowing when, or if, they will fly. BA canceled all of its 535 flights in and out of Heathrow as several hundred _____ handlers, cargo staff and other workers went on strike. The _____ industrial action was called in support of 800 employees sacked by the US catering firm Gate Gourmet. A meeting is expected between unions and Gate Gourmet to break the _____. The strike is now nearing its end with two-third of the strikers _____ work and a _____ service of flights. The massive _____ of flights will take days to clear.

BA's Chief Executive Rod Eddington said: "I _____ the management of Gate Gourmet and senior [union] officials to find a speedy _____ to this crisis and end the misery they are _____ on our customers.... This is not our _____. Our customers must come first and everyone involved in creating this chaotic situation must come to their _____." The airline has already put up thousands of passengers in local hotels. Another _____ nightmare for BA is that nearly 100 airplanes and 1,000 pilots and cabin crew are still at the wrong airports around the world. BA has _____ to rebook or refund all passengers caught up in the crisis, which is thought to be costing the airline \$18 million a day.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on British Airways (or any other airline). Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. LETTER: Imagine you were stranded at London's Heathrow airport for 48 hours, waiting for a flight to return to your home country. Write a letter to the British Airways CEO complaining about your ordeal. Ask him for compensation. Read your letters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all have similar complaints and demands for compensation?

4. DIARY / JOURNAL: Imagine you are stranded at London's Heathrow airport for 48 hours. Write your diary / journal entry for that time. Read your entry to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. F d. F e. T f. F g. F h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| a. turmoil | chaos |
| b. crippled | disabled |
| c. snap | sudden |
| d. deadlock | stalemate |
| e. skeleton | basic |
| f. urge | implore |
| g. heaping | piling |
| h. put up | accommodated |
| i. nightmare | headache |
| j. pledged | promised |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. created turmoil | and disruption |
| b. crippled the | operations of British Airways |
| c. snap | industrial action |
| d. break the | deadlock |
| e. massive backlog | of flights will take days to clear |
| f. find a speedy | resolution to this crisis |
| g. come to | their senses |
| h. put up thousands of passengers | in local hotels |
| i. logistical | nightmare |
| j. refund all passengers | caught up in the crisis |

GAP FILL:

British Airways strike almost over

BNE: A strike by catering workers at London's Heathrow airport has created **turmoil** and disruption for thousands of air passengers and **crippled** the operations of British Airways (BA). Up to 70,000 travelers have been **stranded**, not knowing when, or if, they will fly. BA canceled all of its 535 flights in and out of Heathrow as several hundred baggage **handlers**, cargo staff and other workers went on strike. The **snap** industrial action was called in support of 800 employees sacked by the US catering firm Gate Gourmet. A meeting is expected between unions and Gate Gourmet to break the **deadlock**. The strike is now nearing its end with two-third of the strikers resuming work and a **skeleton** service of flights. The massive **backlog** of flights will take days to clear.

BA's Chief Executive Rod Eddington said: "I **urge** the management of Gate Gourmet and senior [union] officials to find a **speedy** resolution to this crisis and end the **misery** they are heaping on our customers.... This is not our dispute. Our customers must come first and everyone involved in creating this **chaotic** situation must come to their **senses**." The airline has already put up thousands of passengers in local hotels. Another **logistical** nightmare for BA is that nearly 100 airplanes and 1,000 pilots and cabin crew are still at the wrong airports around the world. BA has **pledged** to rebook or refund all passengers caught up in the crisis, which is thought to be **costing** the airline \$18 million a day.