

This work is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights and duplication or sale of all or part is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for research, private study, criticism/review or educational purposes. Electronic or print copies are for your own personal, non-commercial use and shall not be passed to any other individual. No quotation may be published without proper acknowledgement. For any other use, or to quote extensively from the work, permission must be obtained from the copyright holder/s.

Organising to win: the role of trade union leadership in the
2016-17 Mixed Fleet Unite-British Airways dispute

Richard Gallagher

Keele University

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Human Resource
Management and Industrial Relations

October 2023

Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to add to the industrial relations literature on strikes by conducting a case study of the 2016-17 Mixed Fleet – BA industrial dispute and answer the principal research question: How do trade union workplace representatives and officials organise effective strike action? The research objective was to gain insights into strikes in the UK given the range of factors potentially undermining and restricting industrial action. The research contributes to the industrial relations literature by examining in detail the longest strike in UK civil aviation history, and the first major dispute to take place in the context of the Trade Union Act 2016. Additionally the research includes detailed qualitative data gained from in-depth interviews with the key participants at workplace, regional and national level, and addresses a research gap regarding contemporary analytical case studies of strikes. The key findings reinforce the theoretical association between trade union membership and strikes, as well as the under-researched association between strikes and union membership growth. The research also builds on Kelly's (1998) Mobilisation Theory by detailing the social processes of mobilisation and the critical role played by a small group of union representatives in the 'micro-mobilisation' context. Crucially, social media and other online communications were the principal methods used in the mobilisation towards the strike. The research findings contribute to an understanding of new forms of collective action taking place alongside strikes, including the protests, campaigns and demonstrations so effectively used. The case study contributes to the literature on strikes by examining the range of tactics used including discontinuous action, 'protest points' replacing the traditional picket lines, and the importance of strike pay in financially supporting union members.

Finally, the research contributes to the literature on the legal regulation of industrial action, and specifically the impact of the Trade Union Act 2016. The new legislation had the effect of legitimising ongoing strike action, providing the union with the ability to broaden strike demands, and crucially resulted in increased mobilisation to meet the ballot threshold of 50 percent.

Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: Strikes, industrial conflict, and the employment relationship	15
Introduction	15
The nature and purpose of strikes	16
Conflict and the employment relationship	19
The pattern of strike activity	23
Explaining strike patterns	28
The declining level of strike activity in the UK	34
The legal regulation of industrial action	38
Summary	47
Chapter 3: The social organisation of conflict, mobilisation and the 'strike process'	48
Introduction	48
Mobilisation theory	49
The social organisation of strikes	56
The 'strike process'	63
Case studies of strikes	67
Summary	84
Chapter 4: Research strategy, design, and methods	88
Introduction	88
Research philosophy	89
Approach to theory development	91
Research design	94
Research methods	96
Research ethics	101
Gaining access	102

Conducting the interviews	103
Research Issues	107
Summary	107
Chapter 5: The pre-dispute context	109
Introduction	109
The global civil aviation industry	110
British Airways	117
Industrial relations: British Airways and BASSA	120
The 2009-11 BA-BASSA dispute	126
Mixed Fleet Unite (2011-16)	131
Summary	133
Chapter 6: The Mixed Fleet Unite – British Airways dispute 2016-17	134
Introduction	134
The ballot for industrial action: November – December 2016	136
The ballot result, strikes for Christmas and a new offer	138
Strikes: January – March 2017	141
April -June 2017: The ‘Pause for Peace’, the second ballot, and another cancelled strike	145
Strikes: July – August 2017: ‘BA ... a ship you can’t sink with one hit’	147
Settlement: September – November 2017	153
Summary	154
Chapter 7: Strike Organisation: perceptions, insights and reflections	155
Introduction	155
Growing the union (2011-16)	160
Strike causes, mobilisation, and the first industrial action ballot	171
The strikes	180
Membership growth and industrial action	197

Morale building, protests, and solidarity	202
BA counter-mobilisation	211
The legal context	217
Settlement and aftermath	224
Summary and discussion	230
Chapter 8: Conclusion	239
Introduction	239
Research aims and objectives	240
Key findings: Theory and Practice	243
Research limitations	262
Recommendations for future research	264
Bibliography	267
Primary sources	267
Secondary sources	282
Appendices	298
Appendix 1	298
Appendix 2	302
Appendix 3	306

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr Steve French for all his valued support and advice over the years.

I would also like to thank my supervisor Dr Xuebing Cao for his all his support and help.

Finally, I would like thank my wife Stacey and children Ross, Elle and Abe for standing by me throughout.

Chapter one: Introduction

One of the more prominent features of industrial relations since the late 1970s in the UK has been the decline of strike activity as measured by the three statistical indicators; the number of strikes, workers involved, and working days lost (Hyman, 1989; Goddard, 2011; Lyddon, 2015). Strike activity based on these measures has always been cyclical since recording began with peaks observed in the early 1890s, before and after the First World War, during the 1940s and in the period 1968-1979 (Kelly, 2015: 721). This last major strike wave would also witness the highest number of strikes in one year with 3,906 recorded in 1970, and the highest number of working days lost in half a century with 27.5 million recorded in 1979 (Smith et al, 1978; Hyman, 1989).

However, while the 1980s was still characterised by some major industrial disputes the decade would also see a sharp decline in the frequency of strikes and by the early 1990s strike activity had reached historically low levels on all three measures. Indeed, over the following decades the number of strikes per year would stabilise at around 100 to 250, while in only four years between 1991 and 2014 have there been over one million working days lost (Lyddon, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2018). At 79 the number of strikes in 2017 was the lowest ever recorded, and the number of working days lost at 276,000 was the sixth lowest; confirming this as the longest period of declining strike activity on record (Kelly, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2018).

Crucially, alongside the decreasing levels of strike activity over these years there has also been a decline in academic interest shown in the subject (see Atzeni, 2010; Goddard, 2011; Lyddon, 2015; Kelly, 2015; Seifert, 2015), although there are some notable exceptions to this overall trend which will be discussed throughout this thesis. Nevertheless, while academic interest in

the subject may have diminished, it has been argued that strikes can still be viewed as ‘an important, and in many ways essential feature of the fabric of working life’ (van der Velden, 2007: 12). As Knowles (1952: xiv) argues, under capitalism strikes will always occur and be necessary both as a direct defence against injustice and oppression, and as the only way of compelling the public to give its attention to the ‘hidden evils’ in industrial relations.

Moreover, for Kelly (2015), the topic remains an important one to study because of the economic and political consequences of strikes, their ability to reflect the fundamental conflict underlying the employment relationship, and by providing insights into the labour movement more generally *and* the shifting patterns of class relations within society. Furthermore, Siefert and Sibley (2005: 131), make the important observation that detailed studies of strike activity can serve as a reminder that in terms of ‘social action’ workers still have the potential to exercise potent power, and as such present a challenge to the conventional narrative regarding the immutable demise of collectivism in the UK.

Indeed, as Blyton and Turnbull (2004) have noted, to draw conclusions from a general decline in strike activity to predict the eradication of industrial conflict is undoubtedly simplistic. For a start, it is possible to ‘explain’ both strike trends over time and the decline of strike activity through an analysis of various *proximate* variables including the changing economic environment, developments in the labour market, the decline in trade union membership, density and collective bargaining coverage, and changing relationship between employees, their unions, and the state (see also Hyman, 1989; Edwards, 1995; Howell, 2005; Lyddon, 2007, 2009). Furthermore, throughout all of these developments the *underlying* causes of industrial conflict - the structural realities of capitalist economic relations, the nature of the labour process, inequalities of income and wealth, and the relations of power and control

within and beyond the workplace – have remained fundamentally unaltered or even intensified (Harvey and Turnbull, 2004).

This argument is reinforced by the Marxist analysis of capitalism, which for Seifert (2015: 750) exposes work *under any conditions* fundamentally as a relationship based on *exploitation* and *alienation* - the 'twin peaks of worker experience'. As Marx (cited in Kamenka, 1983) argues, the exploitation of workers under capitalism occurs because one class appropriates the labour (or surplus value) of another, in distinction to economic arguments over what is reasonable, fair or just in relation to wages and the state of the market over time. Additionally, instead of people determining for themselves the conditions of social production and social organisation, they are determined *by* them. The products of labour belong to another, and workers therefore become *alienated* from the very activity of working itself which they separate from their life and sell by the hour on the labour market (Marx, cited in McLellan, 2000: 88-89).

For Marx and Engels (1967) as feudal society developed into modern capitalism existing class antagonisms simplified and divided into two opposing classes, the bourgeoisie (the ruling class) and the proletariat (the working class) – a class of labourers who live as long as they find work and work as long as their labour increases capital. As industrial society developed the working class increased in number and became concentrated in greater masses. Fundamentally, trade unions came into existence to protect workers from the 'exigencies' of capitalism, fostering class solidarity and acting *collectively* to protect and improve the living standards of people who sell their labour power against people who buy it. It follows that while the structural conditions giving rise to class division in society and industrial conflict remain (Allen, 1964: 158), there is always the *potential* for worker resistance to manifest in one form or another (Meredeen, 1988; Atzeni, 2010). As Cronin (1979) argues, while the strike may change in form

and meaning as society and economy alter, there, will always be two constants: 'the basic division of labour that gives rise to conflict, and the persistent function of the strike as the fundamental statement of humanity and intelligence of the working class'.

Building on the above discussion, the purpose of this thesis is to add to the diminishing body of industrial relations literature dealing with workplace conflict and strikes by examining a contemporary occurrence of strike activity and asking the overarching research question: *How do trade union workplace representatives and officials organise effective strike action?* In doing so the objective is to gain a better understanding of what it means for trade union members to strike in the UK given all the factors potentially undermining and restrict such action. This will be achieved by conducting an in-depth case study of the 2016-17 Mixed Fleet – British Airways industrial dispute with a specific focus on the activities of the union representatives and officers at regional and workplace level who mobilised the membership, organised the strikes, and then built up the necessary morale and solidarity required to sustain a major episode of collective action over such a long period of time. In fact, the Mixed Fleet dispute lasted for almost one year from the first industrial action ballot in November 2016 to the eventual settlement in October 2017 and incorporated 85 days of strikes ranging from periods of two days to two months (Allday, 2017a).

The Mixed Fleet dispute is rooted in the 2009-11 industrial dispute between British Airways and the British Airlines Stewards and Stewardesses Association (BASSA) a branch of the Unite trade union, which itself has been described as one of the most protracted and bitter strikes in recent years (Darlington, 2017). As part of the settlement that ended this dispute in 2011, BASSA members reluctantly accepted the introduction of a new 'Mixed Fleet' of cabin crew who would be employed on inferior pay and working conditions to the existing BA cabin crew

in the company's 'legacy' Worldwide and Eurofleets (Harvey and Turnbull, 2017; Taylor and Moore, 2019). Over five years later in an initial attempt at closing the gap in wages between the lower paid Mixed Fleet and the other crews, thousands of union members, now organised in the Mixed Fleet Unite (MFU) branch of the Unite trade union embarked upon a series of strikes that would escalate throughout 2017 to eventually become the longest aviation strike in UK history (Allday, 2017a).

Because of the number of strike days involved, the size and overall duration of the dispute, and the eventual positive outcome for those union members involved, this episode of industrial action stands out as a rare example of a major 'trial of strength' (Hyman, 1989) during a period of historically low levels of strikes. What is also interesting about this dispute is the age of union members involved who were overwhelmingly young, and for many this was their first involvement in a trade union and almost their first experience of going on strike. This was also the case for the trade union representatives among the cabin crew in Mixed Fleet who with little or no prior experience found themselves challenged with leading and organising a major industrial dispute against an organised and financially well-resourced employer determined to resist the strikes. As well as these important features, as the dispute progressed from the initial ballot for industrial action, through the periods of strikes during 2017, over 1000 Mixed Fleet cabin crew joined the Unite increasing the MFU branch density from 50 to 77.5 percent by the end of the dispute (Allday, 2017a). Such displays of mobilisation, collectivism, solidarity and leadership alone are worthy of analysis, and even more so as they were undertaken in an industrial relations framework that has been largely de-collectivised over the previous four decades (Howell, 2005).

A further objective of this thesis is to contribute to the industrial relations literature on strikes by conducting qualitative research into a major dispute that has not been covered in the academic literature. More specifically, as well as an overall account of events, the case study will focus specifically on the organisation of the strikes themselves - the 'strike process' (Lyddon et al, 2015), and the crucial leadership role of the trade union representatives and officials involved. Hartley et al (1983) commented nearly 40 years ago during a period when strikes and industrial conflict were a central feature of UK industrial relations that studies examining the strike process explicitly were very rare, and research into this important topic has diminished even further alongside the decline of strike literature more generally. The rest of this chapter will proceed to outline the structure of the thesis and provide an overview of the main chapters that follow.

Chapter Two: Strikes, industrial conflict and the employment relationship

Chapter two will introduce a number of important arguments in the literature relating to strikes, as a means of providing a foundation for the discussions that follow throughout the subsequent chapters in the thesis. After defining in more detail the key features of strikes as well as some of their different types, their occurrence will be discussed as a manifestation of conflict between workers and employers in the capitalist employment relationship, albeit one of many individual and collective forms that can exist. The *underlying* causes of this conflict will then be explained by outlining the three frames of reference used in the industrial relations field of study (Fox, 1966; Hyman, 1975, 1989), although the analytical merit of the Marxist approach in explaining how such conflict is *structured* into the employment relationship will be highlighted from the outset (Edwards and Scullion, 1982).

After briefly discussing how strikes are measured and recorded using the three official statistical indicators (the number of strikes, working days lost, and workers involved) the broad pattern of strike activity in the UK since consistent recording began in 1893 will then be outlined. This will detail the fluctuating pattern of strike activity up to the late 1970s, followed by sharp decline through the 1980s, and then the historically low levels of strikes that have persisted since the early 1990s. To place these developments in context, the chapter will then discuss some of the various factors traditionally used to explain strike patterns, before focusing specifically on the reasons outlined in the literature for decline of strike activity. This will include a discussion of economic developments and changes in the structure of the labour market over the same period, as well as declining levels of trade union membership, density, and collective bargaining coverage.

The changing legal framework of industrial action will then be considered including the various legislation introduced throughout successive Conservative Governments (1979-1997) which were left intact by the (New) Labour Governments (1997-2010) that followed. Then, after five years of Conservative-Liberal coalition, the first majority Conservative Government in 18 years (2015-17 introduced further restrictions on strikes with the Trade Union Act 2016 (Tuckman, 2018). After introducing the debate in the literature concerning the relative importance of the legislation in comparison to other factors causing decline, the chapter will end with a discussion of how these legal changes have shaped the *nature* of strikes and industrial disputes in a number of key areas which have made going on strike much more difficult for workers and their trade unions.

Chapter Three: The social organisation of conflict, mobilisation, and the 'strike process'

The literature discussed in chapter two is important for locating strikes in the broader context of industrial conflict and the employment relationship, placing recent trends in strike activity within their crucial historical context, and understanding the range of determinants either promoting or inhibiting strikes. However, the causes of strikes are also rooted in the dynamics of the relationship between workers and employers *within* specific workplace contexts (Batstone et al, 1978; Kelly, 1998), and as such it is crucial to also consider the *social* organisation of conflict resulting in strikes (Edwards and Scullion, 1982). Building on these discussions, chapter three will draw attention to literature which considers the social processes involved in transforming worker's discontent with the employment relationship into collective industrial action (Kelly, 1998). Additionally, by examining a number of important *analytical* case studies of some major disputes, an appreciation of the organisation, structure and processes (Hartley et al, 1983) of strikes once they have commenced can also be achieved.

The first section discusses Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory, as well as some of the literature using it as an analytical framework and a number of critiques, before outlining a range of qualitative workplace based case studies examining the social organisation of conflict and strikes in more detail. The next section moves on from focusing on strike causation to examine literature primarily dealing with the 'strike process' (Lyddon et al, 2015) including an outline of two prominent attempts at structuring a theoretical model that applies to all but the shortest of strikes (Hiller, 1928; Meredeen, 1988). After this a number of important analytical cases studies of strikes and major disputes will be considered, and while these studies may differ in their objectives and overall emphasis they all include qualitative accounts of strikes from the perceptions of those workers and trade unionists involved.

The chapter concludes by arguing that other than some important exceptions (for example Gall, 2003; Seifert and Sibley, 2005, Taylor and Moore, 2019) there is a scarcity of detailed and analytical case studies of UK strikes and industrial disputes over recent years. This is even more so in relation to studies that deal explicitly with the actual strike process, and the activities of those union representatives (at various levels) involved in mobilising the members, organising the action, and navigating the changing terrain (Fantasia, 1988) brought about by layers of legislation designed to restrict industrial action.

Chapter Four: Research strategy, design, and methods

Chapter four will move on from the discussion of the literature in the previous chapters and consider a number of issues relating to the conduct of the research undertaken. The first outlines the critical realist philosophy underpinning the research as a means of combining the crucial objective and subjective elements necessary for the investigation into incidences of strike activity. Building on this, section two will discuss theory development and outline the benefits of using the abductive approach before considering Langley (1999) and Langley et al's (2013) strategies for theorising from process data.

Section three will consider the rationale for focusing on one case in detail the potential for generalising to wider developments in the field of study, before explaining the rationale for focusing on the BA-Mixed Fleet dispute. In section four, the main research methods used in the case study are outlined including documentary sources and semi-structured interviews. Section five considers research ethics and the related issues of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity when carrying out qualitative research. Section six will move on to discuss how access was gained to the interview participants, and a number of the problems that were encountered during this process. The eighth section will outline how the interviews were

conducted, how they were prepared for as well as including a reflection on the process. Finally, in section nine, research issues relating to validity and reliability will be briefly discussed.

Chapter Five: The pre-dispute context

Chapter five will provide the essential background context to the Mixed Fleet – BA dispute by examining its underlying and longer-term causes. The first chapter will locate the establishment of the Mixed Fleet as a separate category to existing cabin crew at BA employed on inferior pay and conditions, within broader developments taking place in global civil aviation since the late 1970s. After briefly outlining the history of BA throughout the 20th century from its origins in the post-World War One era, to its time as a state-owned company, and then privatisation from the 1980s onwards, the chapter moves on to discuss how the company responded to these wider global and sectoral factors impacting civil aviation. The main focus will be on the history of industrial relations between BA and the main cabin crew trade union BASSA, and after discussing a number of the important disputes and events within this relationship, the events of the 2009-11 industrial dispute with BASSA will be outlined.

The chapter will then discuss the new Mixed Fleet category of cabin crew as it emerged during and in the immediate aftermath of the 2009-11 dispute, the two-tier system of pay behind its formation, as well as the inferior working conditions in comparison to the established cabin crew employed in the Worldwide and Eurofleet. Finally, this last section will cover the early years of Mixed Fleet up to 2015, as Unite recruited enough members to sign a recognition agreement with BA in 2013 for the cabin crew. After recognition was secured, the newly formed MFU branch gradually started to challenge BA over their member's low pay and inferior working conditions, a process culminating in the 2016-17 industrial dispute which will be explored in greater detail throughout chapters six and seven.

Chapter Six: The Mixed Fleet Unite – British Airways dispute 2016-17

The purpose of chapter six is to outline the Mixed Fleet dispute as it unfolded during late 2016 and throughout 2017, building on the previous discussion concerning the longer-term causes of the dispute. The aim of this is to ground the qualitative research material within a broader discussion of the underlying issues in civil aviation and company specific factors in BA, as well as the events that took place over the course of the dispute. Chapter five concluded with a discussion of the early years of Mixed Fleet as the workforce started to join the Unite trade union in increasing numbers, recognition was secured and the MFU branch structure built. This chapter will start by discussing the outcome of the pay negotiations in autumn 2016 resulting in the industrial action ballot during November and December, after the Mixed Fleet Unite branch rejected BA's two percent pay offer to all employees. After the ballot result was announced with a turnout of 60 percent and 79 percent voting in favour of taking industrial action, strikes were announced for Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and then suspended as further negotiations took place.

With an improved offer made, and subsequently rejected by the membership, the chapter moves on to discuss the 26 days of discontinuous strike action that took place between January and March 2017. The next section will briefly cover the 'pause for peace' from April to June 2017 during which a number of crucial developments occurred. With the Trade Union Act 2016 implemented on the 1st March 2017 (Tuckman, 2018), Unite were legally required to re-ballot their members as the mandate from the first ballot had expired after six months. This resulted in another successful vote in favour of industrial action, with turnout well above 50 percent legal threshold required by the legislation (Labour Research Department, 2018), and

Unite also started legal action on behalf of 1,400 members who had bonuses and travel concessions removed for taking part in the earlier strikes.

The chapter then outlines the almost continuous period of strikes that followed throughout July and August 2017. With BA 'wet-leasing' fully crewed aircraft from Qatar Airways, and MFU members and their union determined to escalate the conflict, this series of strikes would ultimately see BA forced to return to the negotiating table in September 2017. The chapter concludes by detailing the settlement agreement which ended the dispute in late October 2017 after further negotiations between BA and Unite. This included a pay deal on crew's basic pay of 11 per cent, as well as the introduction of a new £10 daily overseas allowance and all docked bonuses and travel concession returned to those 1,400 MFU members sanctioned by BA (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

Chapter Seven: Strike organising - perceptions, insights and reflections

Building on the pre-dispute context included in chapter five, and the narrative account that followed in chapter six, this chapter will present the findings from the in-depth semi-structured interviews carried out with the eight union representatives at workplace, regional and national level in the Unite union. The chapter is organised around eight themes with the first section 'Growing the union: 2011-16' discussing the early years of Mixed Fleet following the end of the BA - BASSA dispute in June 2011, and up to the pay negotiations in late 2016. This section will outline how the regional officer assigned to the new workforce gradually recruited enough union members over the following years for Unite to sign a voluntary recognition agreement in 2013. After this, the MFU branch started to organise and recruit

among the cabin crew and by the time of the pay negotiations in late 2016 there were around 2,000 members (50 percent density).

Section two will cover 'Strike causes, mobilisation and the first industrial action ballot', and outlines why the pay offer of two percent made to all employees was overwhelmingly rejected by the MFU members, as well as some of the other underlying causes of the dispute. It will then move on to discuss how the majority of members were mobilised to vote yes in the industrial action ballot during November – December 2016. The third section, 'the strikes' will focus on a number of issues relating to the 85 days of strike activity. This includes the various methods of mobilisation in the early period of strikes, with a focus on how the strike organisers utilised modern communication methods including social media to communicate to their members. Strike tactics will be considered, before discussing how strike breakers were dealt with and the difficulties in establishing effective picket lines around the airport. Finally the crucial issue of strike pay from Unite will be discussed, and the impact this had on the ability of these low paid workers to stay out on strike for so long.

In section four the relationship between 'Membership growth and industrial action will be considered with over 1000 cabin crew joining Unite during the dispute. This section explores the reasons for this from the perspective of the strike leaders, and the various methods employed to recruit members as the dispute progressed. Section five will discuss 'Morale building, protests, and solidarity', and includes a discussion of the range of protests, rallies, marches and other events planned by the strike organisers. These activities had three key objectives; building and maintaining morale among the cabin crew, protesting against BA as a means of placing additional pressure on the company, and attempting to raise the profile of the dispute in the face of media and public indifference.

The sixth section examines 'BA counter-mobilisation' and considers the various strategies BA adopted to try and divide the cabin crew during the dispute, including punishing those who had gone on strike and at the same time rewarding those who worked. As well as this, the various measures used to mitigate the effects of the strikes will be discussed with a particular focus on how BA re-directed Mixed Fleet routes to the legacy fleets in the early period of the dispute, and the wet-leasing of fully crewed aircraft from Qatar Airways during the longer periods of strikes in July and August. Section seven outlines 'The Legal Context' of the dispute and focuses on the restrictive nature of the law on industrial action, the impact of the Trade Union Act 2016, as well as a discussion concerning the issue of labour injunctions with a specific focus on the reasons why BA did not choose this strategy as a means of stopping the strikes (in contrast to the events of 2009-11). Finally, in section eight, the 'Settlement and aftermath', the interview participants reflect on the dispute, and more specifically the settlement and the aftermath in the immediate period following the end of the strikes.

Chapter Two: Strikes, industrial conflict and the employment relationship

Introduction

This purpose of this chapter is to outline the important debates in the literature relating to strikes within a broader analysis of industrial conflict, the capitalist employment relationship, and developments that have taken place in UK industrial relations over recent decades. The first section will define the key features of strikes and outline some of the important distinctions between their different types, before discussing strikes as a manifestation of conflict in the employment relationship and other individual and collective behaviours in this context. The next section will explain how this conflict is generated by the capitalist employment relationship and will introduce the three perspectives or frames of reference (unitary, pluralist, and Marxist) used in the industrial relations field of study. The chapter will then move on to discuss how strikes are measured, and some of the issues relating to the official statistics before outlining the broad trend of strikes since official recording began in a consistent form in 1893. This will focus on the fluctuating pattern of strikes up to the late 1970s and early 1980s, and then the rapid decline and continuing low levels of strike activity that followed.

Following this, some of the factors which have traditionally been used to explain the pattern of strikes over time will be introduced focusing on the different 'structural' and 'institutional' factors highlighted in the literature. Next, the specific reasons identified in the literature for the decline of strikes over recent decades will be discussed, including an outline of economic and compositional changes to the UK labour market and the influence of declining levels of

trade union membership, density and collective bargaining coverage. Within this discussion, a broader outline of the developments in industrial relations since 1979 will be included, and specifically the legal changes relating to industrial action that have been introduced throughout four successive Conservative Governments (1979-1997), the New Labour years (1997-2010), and then again during the first majority Conservative Government in 18 years (2015-17). Finally, the chapter will end by discussing some of the ways the legislation has changed the *nature* of strikes in the UK, focusing on injunctions, balloting procedures, the decline of unofficial action and a number of other crucial areas.

The nature and purpose of strikes

While a strike has been defined in a number of valuable ways in the literature (Hiller, 1928; Knowles, 1952; Batstone et al, 1978; Karsh, 1982; Durcan et al, 1983; Seifert and Sibley, 2005) the following definition outlines the key features for the purpose of this thesis: A strike is a ‘temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance or enforce a demand’ (Griffin, 1939: 20). For Hyman, (1989: 17), each aspect of this definition is important. A strike is *temporary* as the workers intend to return to work when it ends, it is a *stoppage* of work which distinguishes it from other forms of industrial action such as an overtime ban or work-to rule, and it is a *collective* act undertaken by a *group* of employees. The fact that the group concerned are *employees* is also crucial, and as Knowles (1952) insists, while the word ‘strike’ has been used to describe many kinds of activity such as a hunger strike or rent strike, in relation to this discussion there must be a definite employer-employee relationship between the parties involved.

Strikes are also purposeful and calculative acts undertaken to ‘express a grievance or enforce a demand’ (Hyman, 1989: 17). For example, in the UK, going on strike (or threatening to) is

overwhelmingly used as a sanction to exert pressure on an employer to achieve a collective bargaining objective ('the continuation of collective bargaining by other means', Edwards, 1995: 456) or, to articulate frustration over some other aspect of the employment relationship (Clegg, 1979; Batstone et al, 1978; Lyddon, 2007). It has also been pointed out that there is no reference to trade unions in the above definition (Coates and Topham, 1988), and while strikes by non-union workers are not unknown in the UK, they are extremely rare (Hyman, 1989; Kelly, 1998; Gall, 2006). As Williams (2014) argues, industrial action is difficult to organise and maintain without the presence of a union which is able to mobilise workers, organise the action, offer financial support, as well as coordinate responses to employer (and sometimes government) counter-mobilisation strategies. Indeed, over recent decades, official trade union involvement in strikes and industrial action has become even more necessary given the complex legal barriers and hurdles that must be adhered to since the election of the Conservative Government in 1979 (Howell, 2005); a development that will be returned to in greater detail below.

However, while the presence of a trade union is usually necessary if grievances and discontent are to lead to collective action, the relationship between strikes and trade unions is a complex one in practice (Edwards, 1983). For example, while in workplaces where trade union organisation is weak strikes are likely to be rare, it may also be the case that where there is a strong organised union presence strikes still may not occur as the union provides an institutional means of resolving issues (Batstone et al, 1977, 1978; Edwards and Scullion, 1982), or possibly the ability to achieve significant counter-controls over management through the *threat* of strikes (Darlington, 2005). There is also a significant difference between a strike by workers with a tradition of taking industrial action, and a situation where strikes are very rare or even non-existent. In the former case, going on strike could simply be viewed

as an accepted means of the workforce pursuing their bargaining objectives, whereas in the latter example a strike could reflect a major breakdown in industrial relations (Edwards, 1995).

A strike has also been described as a social phenomenon of enormous complexity (Gouldner, 1954), and therefore they should not be discussed as if they are a single category of social action. There are 'varieties of strikes' (Eldridge, 1968: 3), and while common elements may be identified between them, no two are identical (Lane and Roberts, 1971; Lyddon, 2015). This can be illustrated by considering the difference between a long and drawn out 'trial of strength' involving a whole industry or sector, as compared to a small and short 'token demonstration' involving relatively few workers (Hyman, 1989). As Batstone et al (1978) assert, it would be wrong to treat these as essentially similar as the level of organisation involved as well as the economic and social impact are quite different.

A distinction can also be made between strikes that are 'official', or 'unofficial' (whether the strike is recognised by the Executive Committee of the trade union involved); or 'constitutional' or 'unconstitutional' (is the strike in breach of an agreed dispute procedure) (Hyman, 1989). It is estimated that on average, some 95 percent of recorded strikes were unofficial in the 1960s and 1970s (Lyddon, 2015), and many of these strikes were also classified as unconstitutional (Hyman, 1989). However, unofficial strikes are rare in the UK now since legislation introduced by successive Conservative governments during the 1980s and 1990s made trade unions legally accountable for the actions of their officers and committees, and consequently to call a strike 'official' now generally means it has complied with the law on industrial action (Salomon, 2000).

While going on strike tends to be the most visible and measurable expression of conflict between workers and employers there are many other forms which this conflict can take

(Coates and Topham, 1988). As Bélanger and Edwards (2013) argue, in this context the word 'conflict' has two meanings. First, there are *underlying* antagonisms or clashes of interest between workers and their employers, and second, this conflict can be expressed in a variety of concrete behaviours or actions. For instance, individual and 'unorganised' expressions of conflict include behaviours such as quitting, sabotage, absenteeism, fiddles, working slowly and grievances. In contrast, as well as the strike, 'organised' and collective expressions of conflict could consist of alternative types of industrial action like an overtime ban and/or 'working-to-rule', but also other forms of collective activity such as occupations, demonstrations and protests (Hyman, 1989; Williams, 2014).

Whether such underlying conflict eventually results in a strike or not depends on a whole range of factors which will be explored throughout this and the following chapter, by examining the broad pattern of strikes historically, the various 'structural' and 'institutional' determinants either causing or inhibiting strikes (Edwards, 1995), and the 'social' organisation of conflict resulting in industrial action (Batstone et al, 1978; Edwards and Scullion, 1982; Kelly, 1998). However, before moving on to discuss these issues in more detail it is necessary to briefly make sense of how the capitalist employment relationship *engenders* this conflict in the first place, and this can be achieved by considering the competing industrial relations 'perspectives' or 'frames of reference' (Edwards, 2003: 10). In doing so, a broad theoretical framework of the causes of industrial conflict can be introduced at the outset to make sense of the debates in the literature that follow, as well as locating this thesis more specifically within the Marxist tradition of industrial relations.

Conflict and the employment relationship

It is common place in the industrial relations 'field of study' to refer to the 'unitary', 'pluralist' and 'Marxist' frames of reference, as a means of understanding the different perceptions, or perspectives people might have, including their attitude towards conflict in the workplace and strikes (Rose, 2004). From the unitary perspective with its emphasis on teamwork and cooperation, there is no *underlying* conflict between workers and their employers as they are all on the same side and working towards the same goal, although all authority and loyalty should obviously reside in management. Any conflict that does exist is caused by 'frictional' issues such as personality clashes, poor communication and ignorance, or more significantly by 'agitators' (for example trade union activists) provoking the otherwise content majority (Fox, 1966).

In contrast to this, the pluralist perspective recognises the existence of a basic antagonism in the employment relationship, and hence the *potential* for conflict (Fox, 1966). The employment relationship is a 'wage-work' bargain characterised by both 'market relations' (wages, hours, and other terms and conditions), and 'managerial relations' (the myriad ways in which workers are actually controlled on their jobs) (Flanders, 1965). Additionally, while conflict is always a possibility, it is not *caused* by trade unions which instead provide a legitimate and organised form of expression for these sectional interests that already exist (Fox, 1966). The principal concern of those advocating a pluralist approach is with ensuring that any conflict that does arise is managed appropriately and contained in a way that prevents it from causing too much disruption (Williams, 2014). Thus, an emphasis is placed on 'institutionalising' conflict by promoting the joint regulation of the employment relationship, for example through collective bargaining between trade unions and employers and encouraging the use of disputes procedures to prevent events such as strikes occurring (Flanders, 1965; Fox 1974).

As Burchill (2008: 4) argues these positions are not merely 'abstract concepts', and broadly speaking this emphasis on promoting joint regulation as a means of containing industrial conflict informed state policy in peacetime Britain from at least the mid-1890s until the election of the Conservative Government in 1979. Since then, successive government policies towards trade unions and legal constraints on industrial action in particular have been underpinned by the unitary frame of reference (Smith, 2009; Howell, 2005). However, while an appreciation of the unitary and pluralist perspectives are essential for understanding such developments, an understanding of the Marxist analysis is required to sufficiently explain the *material* sources of conflict in capitalist society and thus facilitate a more rational discussion of the legitimacy of workers collective action and strikes (Edwards and Scullion, 1989; Hyman, 1989).

For Hyman (1975), work in a capitalist society, one in which the means of production are for the most part privately owned and the pursuit of profit the basic dynamic, takes the form of 'wage-labour'; it is a commodity to be bought and sold in the labour market. Conflict will inevitably emerge over the price of labour as the wages sought by the worker to maintain a decent standard of living incur a cost to their employer, cutting into their profit. Thus, from a Marxist analysis there are two fundamental classes in society: the majority of the population who have to sell their capacity to work, and the minority whose wealth and power allows them to live off others labour; and between these two classes there exists a radical conflict of interest that underlies everything that occurs in industrial relations.

Furthermore, the unequal power differential between the individual worker and their employer when agreeing an employment contract results in an *asymmetry* in its content. Whereas the employer's commitments in this exchange are specific (for example, a wage,

holidays, sick pay, a pension), the obligations on the worker are imprecise and *indeterminate*. What they have sold is their *capacity* to work which must then be converted into purposeful activity during working hours. While there are a vast array of managerial control systems to ensure this happens, the employer's power is also reduced at this point as relentless supervision is virtually impossible in most situations. Consequently, there is also the potential for conflict to also develop over the 'frontier of control' that exists in every workplace (Hyman, 1975; see also Goodrich, 1920; Nichols and Armstrong, 1976; Batstone et al, 1977, 1978 Beynon, 1984).

However, the Marxist analysis goes further than simply indicating that conflict is *inevitable* because of these divergent interests. As Edwards and Scullion (1982) insist, an understanding of industrial conflict requires progressing from this axiom to an appreciation of the *material* basis of such conflict. This is realised by observing that when the employer buys a person's capacity to work, or 'labour power', it only creates value in use; and it is the employer's objective to extract as much effort as possible from the labour they have bought. For Braverman (1998), this human capacity to produce 'surplus labour' is exploited in the capitalist 'labour process' to generate the greatest possible profit. Therefore, unlike other costs expended which are for the most part fixed, the capital paid out on labour power is 'variable' and only undergoes an increase during production. Conflict then, is 'built into the process in which value is created' (Edwards and Scullion, 1982: 5).

As discussed above, this underlying conflict can be expressed in a variety of individual and collective actions or behaviours which include going on strike (Bélanger and Edwards, 2013). It is also the case that conflict may not be expressed at all due to counteracting sources of cooperation in the employment relationship, for instance, workers shared interest in the

survival of their employing organisation (which after all they depend on for a living), sheer force of habit, an element of moral pressure to conform, and dominant social values existing in capitalist society which legitimise managerial prerogative (Batstone et al, 1977; Hyman, 1989; Kelly, 1998; Godard, 2011). Additionally, conflict may become institutionalised by joint regulation and other pluralist procedures, or just completely repressed as the power of capital/management over the labour process appears to be so great that no opposition seems possible (Edwards and Scullion, 1982).

Thus, while any investigation into strikes must also recognise this 'dynamic' element within the capitalist employment relationship (Atzeni, 2010), as a *dialectical* process characterised by conflict *and* cooperation (Hyman, 1989; Goddard, 2011), from the Marxist perspective it must also be stressed that while the material causes of industrial conflict remain in capitalist society – production for profit, injustice, exploitation, and inequalities of power, income and status – there is always the *potential* for worker resistance to manifest in one form or another (Meredeen, 1988; Atzeni, 2010). Fortunately, it is possible to understand the broad extent that workers have converted this 'in-built' conflict into collective industrial action in the form of a strike, as a statistical series of strike activity has been recorded in the UK in a consistent form since 1893 (Bennet, 2000).

The pattern of strike activity

The statistical series reports annually the 'number of strikes', the number of 'workers involved', and the number of 'working days lost', which is calculated for each strike by multiplying the duration in days by the number of workers involved. The statistics exclude small strikes involving less than ten workers or lasting less than one day, unless the working days lost total at least 100 (Hyman, 1989), and strikes not related directly to terms and

conditions of employment (i.e., 'political' strikes) are also excluded, although in most years this has not been significant (Durcan et al, 1983). Until 1996, this information was collected and reported by the Department for Employment (DE), although with its abolition this is now carried out by the Office for National Statistics (Lyddon, 2007).

There is a debate in the literature regarding the accuracy of the statistics, and as the reporting of strikes is not compulsory it is possible that stoppages meeting the above criteria have not been included in the published figures. Figures for working days lost and workers involved are also thought to be more accurate than the number of strikes as they tend to be concentrated in a few large stoppages, whereas some small and short strikes may escape detailed search. (Edwards, 1983). Hyman (1989) adds that some employers may be more efficient than others in recording disputes, as well as being either more liberal or restrictive in their recording for 'ideological' reasons. For example, an organisation wishing to give the impression of harmonious industrial relations may not report certain disputes, whereas an employer keen to provide evidence of the need for legal restrictions on strikes could record minor incidences. Additionally, too many strikes may reflect poorly upon a manager or supervisor's ability to control their workforce, providing an incentive not to report (Eldridge, 1968).

Brown (1981) investigated this issue of under-recording, and in a survey of 903 establishments found that of the 332 reporting a strike eligible for inclusion in the official statistics, only 68 percent were detected and included. Additionally, workplace studies, such as Turner et al (1967), Batstone et al (1977, 1978) and Edwards and Scullion (1982) observed many strikes which were not officially recorded, although it is important to note that some of these would have been too short and small to have met the criteria anyway. Nevertheless, the general consensus remains that despite these inaccuracies the series is consistent in its methods, and

as such it is a useful guide for studying broad trends in strike activity over time (Edwards, 1983; Durcan et al, 1983; Coates and Topham, 1988; Hyman, 1989).

The annual number of strikes based on these statistics has been described as uneven and fluctuating since recording began up to the 1970s (see Table 1, page 25-6), with upsurges in particular years followed by periods of stability and decline. However, despite the irregularity of the series, an underlying upward trend has been identified with these peaks attaining higher levels in succeeding periods. For example, strike numbers would exceed 1000 for the first time in 1913, between 1918 and 1920 and again in 1937 before increasing during the Second World War to over 2,293 in 1945. After declining briefly from this post-war peak, the number of strikes began to climb again in the mid-1950s reaching 2,832 in 1960, before dropping off again and then increasing to 3,116 in 1969, and 3,906 in 1970 – the highest number ever officially recorded (Smith et al, 1978; Lyddon, 2015). The aggregate number of strikes would then decline to 2080 in 1979, although due to the heavy concentration of strikes in the early part of the decade the annual average of strikes for the 1970s (2,601) was still higher than during the 1950s (2,119) and the 1960s (2,446) (Kessler and Bayliss, 1998).

Table 1: The level of strike activity in the UK, 1900 – 1979

	Strikes	Workers involved (00 0s)	Working days lost (000s)
1900-10	529	240	4,576
1911-13	1,074	1,034	20,908
1914-18	844	632	5,292
1919-21	1,241	2,108	49,053
1922-25	629	503	11,968
1926	323	2,734	162,233
1927-32	379	344	4,740
1933-39	735	295	1,694
1940-44	1,491	499	1,816
1945-54	1,791	545	2,073
1955-64	2,521	1,116	3,889
1965-69	2,397	1,215	3,929
1970-74	2,917	1,573	14,077

1975	2,332	809	6,012
1976	2,034	668	3,284
1977	2,737	1,166	10,142
1978	2,498	1,041	9,405
1979	2,125	4,608	29,474

Annual averages

Sources: Smith et al (1978); Hyman (1989); Office for National Statistics (2019); Williams (2020)

It is argued that as the number of working days lost is influenced by particularly large or protracted disputes in individual years a trend is harder to identify. Prior to the General Strike defeat in 1926, such stoppages would see working days lost recorded in the tens of millions in some years, for instance in 1893 and the late 1890s, in the years before and after the First World War, and most notably in 1926 itself which recorded a historic high of 162 million days lost to strikes (Smith et al, 1978). After the General Strike, with the trade union movement demoralised and the economic situation rapidly deteriorating, the strike weapon was largely put aside at national level and the amount of working days lost declined significantly. In fact, there was not one official national dispute between 1933 and 1953 (Cronin, 1979; Hyman, 2003), and while these types of strikes started to appear again after this period due to some large official wage disputes, their occurrence was erratic and as a consequence working days lost per year would not go over 10 million again until 1970 (Smith et al, 1978; Durcan et al, 1983). For the remainder of the 1970s working days lost and workers involved would remain high due to some exceptionally large strikes, such as those witnessed in the coal industry in 1972 and 1974, and the so-called 'Winter of Discontent' in 1978-79. In fact, at 27.5 million, the number of working days lost recorded in 1979 was the highest for more than 50 years (Kessler and Bayliss, 1998; Waddington, 2003).

Then, after 1979, the number of strikes declined sharply to 1,344 in 1981 and still further to 903 in 1985, falling below 1000 for the first time since 1940 (Hyman, 1989) (See Table 2, page 27). The annual average of strike numbers for the 1980s was 1,129, more than half of the annual averages for the 1960s and 1970s, and there were also major reductions in the other two indicators, although still 72 million working days lost throughout the entire decade. Again, when looking at working days lost account must be taken of the major strikes in this period, with 26 million days lost to strikes in the 1984-5 miner's strike alone (Kessler and Bayliss, 1998). The 1980s can now be considered as a period of *transition* from very high to historically low levels of strikes, and since the early 1990s strike numbers have stabilised at around 100 to 250 per year while in only four years between 1991 and 2014 have there been over one million working days lost (See Table 2 and 3, page 27-28) (Lyddon, 2015). Indeed, since the early 1980s the longest period of declining strike activity on record has been witnessed and the level of strike activity in the UK is now lower than at any time since recording began (Kelly, 2015).

Table 2: The level of strike activity in the UK, 1980 - 2009

	Strikes	Workers involved (000s)	Working days lost (000s)
1980	1,348	834	11,964
1981	1,344	1,513	4,266
1982	1,538	2,103	5,313
1983	1,364	574	3,754
1984	1,221	1,464	27,135
1985	903	791	6,402
1986	1,074	720	1,920
1987	1,016	887	3,546
1988	781	790	3,702
1989	701	727	4,128
1990-94	334	223	824
1995-95	193	180	495
2000-04	163	350	750
2005-09	131	454	633

Annual averages

Sources: Smith et al (1978); Hyman (1989); Office for National Statistics (2019); Williams (2020)

Table 3: The level of strike activity in the UK, 2010 – 2018

	Strikes	Workers involved (000s)	Working days lost (000s)
2010	92	133	365
2011	149	1,530	1,390
2012	131	237	249
2013	114	395	444
2014	155	733	788
2015	106	81	170
2016	101	154	322
2017	79	33	276
2018	81	39	273

Sources: Office for National Statistics (2019); Williams (2020)

Explaining strike patterns

There have been a number of attempts made to explain these variations in strikes over time and between different industries (Burchill, 2008), and as Edwards (1983) argues, the debate about strikes also takes place at several levels ranging from the general issues discussed above relating to industrial conflict, arguments concerning different strike prone industries, frequency and length of strikes, to the immediate level of level of assessing the various determinants identified as influencing strike patterns. As well as this, the reasons given for striking as recorded in the official statistics provide some indication of the various issues that have caused strikes to occur, although as will be discussed, these need to be treated with caution. This section will briefly focus on some of the arguments that have traditionally been used to explain the pattern of strikes in the period since recording began in 1893 up to the late 1970s, early 1980s. Then, in the following section, the specific factors identified in the

literature as causing the decline and historically low levels of strikes over the last four decades will be considered.

As discussed above, a key theory from the unitary perspective is that strikes are caused by agitators (such as trade union representatives) who incite the otherwise content majority (Fox, 1966), and while this view has broadly influenced the legislative agenda concerning industrial action from the Conservative Government elected in 1979 through to the current legal framework, it is easily refuted by those pluralist and Marxist accounts that stress the *underlying* conflict of interests that exists in the capitalist employment relationship (Flanders, 1965; Hyman, 1975, 1989). For Knowles (1952), it is difficult to agitate for industrial action successfully without the existence of widespread grievances and viewing trade union representatives as agitators ignores the conciliatory role that they can often play in *resolving* conflict in the workplace (Batstone et al, 1977).

However, Darlington (2002: 106) argues that while it is correct that strikes are not *caused* by trade union representatives (at whatever level), by dismissing the agitator theory completely there is also a danger of ‘throwing the baby out with the bathwater’ as it downplays the important role of such activists in strike situations. As such, while social processes should never be explained *exclusively* in terms of the interventions of influential individuals, there is also an *element* of truth in the agitator theory as for conflict to be transformed into collective action it is usually necessary for someone to take the lead in articulating it and providing an organised form to workers’ discontent (Hyman, 1989). The dynamics of these *social* processes will be covered in greater detail in the following chapter, and this will include a discussion of the crucial role of trade union representatives and activists in the process of mobilising

workers, as well as during the 'strike process' itself (Hiller, 1928; Kelly, 1998; Lyddon et al, 2015).

On the surface, the reasons given for going on strike as recorded in the official statistics reflect how underlying issues in the employment relationship are then translated into immediate strike demands, although these statistics have been criticised for classifying complex multi-causal events by a single cause (Smith et al, 1978; Coates and Topham, 1988). There are studies which have categorised the various reason given, for instance Knowles (1952) who used three groups, 'Basic' (wages and hours), 'Frictional' (working arrangements, rules, discipline), and 'Solidarity' (trade union principle, sympathy action), and in the period studied (1911-47) observed a slight decline in basic pay and hours issues. Smith et al (1978) used an alternative classification to update Knowles's research up to the mid-1970s focusing on a number of 'Direct' issues such as 1) pay, hours, manning, 2) job security redundancy, dismissals, internal job relocation, 'manning' issues, 3) Work environment, shift patterns, disciplinary disputes; and 'indirect' issues, 4) Collective strength (wider union solidarity). They found in the period 1925-74 that pay was the main reason for half the strikes recorded and three quarters of working days lost, whereas between 1966-73, 56 percent of strike numbers and 82 percent of working days lost concerned pay.

However, Hyman (1989) makes the crucial point that in a capitalist society, it is no surprise that strikes can centre around wage demands as workers aspire to a higher standard of living. Moreover, it is also important to understand the processes which can lead from *latent*, or *underlying* sources of conflict via workers perceptions and expectations to the immediate or *manifest* issues in the dispute. In this context, wages can take on a symbolic character, as well as falling within the realm of legitimate bargaining demands. Gouldner (1954) illustrates this

point in an account of an unofficial (or 'wildcat') strike. When the management violated the 'indulgency' pattern of lenient industrial relations in the plant studied, this 'latent' issue was displaced onto what the workforce (and the employer) regarded as a legitimate wage demand which then became the 'manifest' issue in the dispute.

A similar theme was developed by Lane and Roberts (1971) in their account of the Pilkington Glass Workers strike. In this dispute, the only way the strikers could make themselves understood was by putting a price on their return to work, even though the original reason for striking had a tenuous relationship to money. As Hiller (1928) argues, the reason given for striking is merely the point upon which attention is fixed and is often a 'symbol of cumulative grievances', thus the causes of a strike are complex and can usually lie much deeper than the immediate and stated disagreement.

The fluctuating pattern of strikes over time has also been explained by a range of 'structural' and 'institutional' determinants either causing or inhibiting strike action (Edwards, 1995), although it has been pointed out that explanations of strikes which rely *solely* on these single-factor determinants are generally inadequate as they fail to consider the full complexity of a strike situation (Edwards, 1983; Hyman, 1989). A central structural argument traditionally used has been to focus on the relationship between the economy and strikes, for example, the connection between levels of employment and workers' bargaining power (i.e. unemployment deters strikes and full-employment encourages them), or economic indicators such as incomes policies and levels of inflation (see Hiller, 1928; Cronin, 1978; Edwards, 1983; Hyman, 1989).

As Coates and Topham (1988) argue, the period of full-employment in the UK from around 1940 to 1967 was characterised by an increase in strike numbers as workers confidence grew,

whereas in contrast the prolonged period of unemployment from 1929 to 1937 witnessed a period of declining strike activity as workers were scared of taking industrial action for fear of losing their jobs. However, economic theories are complicated as high levels of employment which could increase workers bargaining power may also enable them to gain their demands without the need for a strike. Additionally, cross-national analysis shows high unemployment being correlated with low strikes in some countries like the UK and the United States, but high strike rates in other European countries (Edwards, 1983).

Other structural factors highlighted in the literature include the effect that changes in technology can have in either causing or reducing strikes (Gouldner, 1954; Cronin, 1979; Meredeen, 1988; Hyman, 1989), as well as Kerr and Siegal's (1954) attempt at explaining why workers in some industries (coal miners, dockers and maritime workers, and to a lesser extent textile and lumber workers) are more 'strike prone' than others. While a number of economic and technical factors were highlighted, Kerr and Siegal's central argument relates to these workers forming an 'isolated mass' apart from wider society, as they often live in separate communities with their own codes, myths, and ways of living. In contrast, workers with a lower propensity to strike are more closely integrated into wider society, living in multi-industry communities and associating with people with different working experiences to their own.

This thesis has been critiqued by Hyman (1989) as there are some industries such as steel manufacture that are highly strike prone in some countries but not others, whereas studies of UK coalmining strikes provided by Knowles (1952) and Church et al (1990) both found regional differences, hence some parts of the coal industry were strike prone and others were not. Edwards (1977) argued Kerr and Siegal's methods were wrong for focusing on working days lost rather than strike numbers as a measure of strike propensity, and additionally in reality

industry groups are very heterogeneous and all groups of workers within an industry cannot be expected to display the same degree of 'massness'.

Institutional determinants have included changes in collective bargaining and payment systems (Clegg, 1979; Edwards, 1983) various legal measures (Cronin, 1979; Durcan et al, 1983), as well as developments in trade unionism itself (membership growth or decline), employers' associations and the emergence of disputes procedures and negotiating machinery (Knowles, 1952; Lyddon, 2007). An interesting example of how changes in the structure of collective bargaining and payment systems can result in a reduction in strikes, is the experience in the coal mining industry from the mid-1950s to 1970. In 1956, out of 2,648 recorded strikes 78 percent took place in the coal industry (Smith et al, 1978) and these were predominately local disputes over rate-fixing in the decentralised system of incentive payments. However, with the onset of alternative fuel sources such as gas and oil, the bargaining power of the miners was reduced, and these strikes started to decline. This trend was reinforced by the 1966 Power Loading Agreement which centralised wage bargaining and thus ended the proliferation the localised pay disputes (Coates and Topham, 1988; Edwards, 1995). Consequently, out of the 3,906 strikes recorded in 1979 – the peak year of strikes - only four percent (160 strikes) took place in the coal industry (Smith et al, 1978).

The above discussion has drawn attention to a number of debates in the literature which have attempted to explain the fluctuating trend of strikes in the period up to the late 1970s. As the broad outline of this pattern shows, there have been periods in which strikes have both increased and decreased, although as discussed a general underlying upward trend in strike frequency was identified over the long-term (Smith et al, 1978). Taking these considerations into account, the period of sharp decline throughout the 1980s and into the early 1990s,

followed by the continuing and historically low levels of strikes that have persisted since, has resulted in literature which specifically attempts to account for this phenomena. The next section of the chapter will outline these core arguments.

The declining level of strike activity in the UK

For Lyddon (2007), the initial decrease in strike numbers in the early 1980s was caused by a combination of mass unemployment and declining inflation, both a consequence of the Conservative Government's 'monetarist' economic experiment. Unemployment increased from 1.26 million (5.2 percent) in December 1979 to 3.07 million (13.2 percent) by September 1982, while inflation declined from a peak of 21.9 percent in May 1980 to 3.7 percent in May 1983. It is argued that declining inflation helped reduced the pressure for wage increases, while the threat of unemployment severely weakened workers bargaining power during these years (Edwards, 1995; Dix et al, 2008). Another recession in the late 1980s and early 1990s would tip the balance of power further in the direction of employers as more jobs were lost (Kessler and Bayliss, 1998).

These economic developments reinforced longer-term changes in the UK labour market since the mid-1960s, away from extractive and manufacturing industries towards service sector employment (Arrowsmith, 2010). For example, between 1964 and 1999, the primary sector declined from 5.1 percent to 1.6 percent, the secondary sector from 42.4 percent to 21.9 percent, whereas in the same period service sector employment increased from 54.5 percent to 76.5 percent. When the Conservative Party came to power in 1979 there were 7.25 million manufacturing jobs in the UK, and by 1990 this had plummeted to 4.7 million (Lyddon, 2007). The changing composition of employment over these years has resulted in less strikes for the simple reason that jobs were lost in the most 'strike prone' industries of the post-Second

World War era such as coal mining, the docks, manufacturing (especially motor vehicles), engineering and shipbuilding. Crucially, job growth over this period has been concentrated in *private* sector service industries where trade unionism is weaker and strike action less common place (Edwards, 1995; Williams, 2014).

As well as impacting strike activity throughout the 1980s, this process of ‘de-industrialisation’ (Arrowsmith, 2010) also contributed to a reduction in trade union membership and density (membership as a proportion of all employees), which in turn further influenced declining strike levels over the long term. As discussed, UK strikes have overwhelmingly occurred where there is a trade union presence (Hyman, 1989; Kelly, 1998; Gall, 2006), and between 1979 and 1997, aggregate membership declined from 13.3 million to 8.2 million and density from 54 percent to just over 30 percent (Kessler and Bayliss, 1998). While this rapid decline had slowed down by the late 1990s, three terms of a Labour government did little to reverse the downward trend, and by 2010 membership was still only 6.5 million and density 26.6 percent, of which 14.2 percent was in the private sector and 56.3 percent was in the public sector (Achur, 2011). The years of coalition government (2010-15) resulted in further decline and by 2016 union membership stood at 6.2 million, with a density of 23.5 percent of which 13.4 percent was in the private sector and 52.7 percent in the public sector (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2017).

Wanrooy et al (2011) build on these broad changes in membership levels by providing detailed insights into the workplace concentration of trade union membership during the New Labour years. They found that in workplaces with five or more employees the proportion of all employees who belong to a trade union changed little between 2004 at 29 percent and 2011 at 31 percent. However, the percentage of all workplaces with any union members fell six

percentage points from 28 percent in 2004 to 24 percent in 2011, while the percentage in which a majority of workers were union members fell from 13 percent to 10 percent. Like the figures above, the decline in the percentage of workplaces with union members was restricted to the private sector and unions now have *majority* membership in only three percent of all private sector workplaces. In contrast, public sector workplaces account for 52 percent of all workplaces that recognise unions, despite the public sector accounting for only 12 percent of all workplaces in the survey population.

Collective bargaining had become the dominant method of regulating the employment relationship by the early 1980s, with over 70 percent of workers covered by collective agreements (Kessler and Bayliss, 1998). By 2010, only 30 percent of workers had their pay and conditions affected by a collective agreement and mirroring developments in union membership and density, this decline was more pronounced in the private than public sector at 16.8 percent and 64.5 percent respectively (Achur, 2011). As Lyddon (2007) argues, unions are still recognised almost everywhere in the public sector, so the deficit of bargaining and union recognition is in the private sector. Again, the downward trend continued over the years of coalition government with collective bargaining coverage falling to 26.3 percent (Office for National Statistics, 2019), of which 59 percent was in the public sector and 15 percent in the private sector (Statista, 2021).

Wanrooy et al (2011) detail further changes in collective bargaining between 2004 and 2011 highlighting the deteriorating situation for UK workers and unions. For example, by 2011 only 7 percent of private sector workplaces bargained with trade unions over pay for any of their employees, and only 16 percent of private sector employees had their pay set by collective bargaining although these figures have remained fairly stable since 2004. However, the last

seven years has also seen a significant decline in collective bargaining coverage in the public sector. In contrast to 2004 in which collective bargaining took place in 70 percent of public sector workplaces, in 2011 this figure was 57 percent - setting pay for 44 percent of public sector employees. Indeed, while strongly unionised workplaces where 100 percent of employees have their pay set by collective bargaining have been a rarity in the private sector for some time, they are becoming increasingly uncommon in the public sector too.

As well as bargaining coverage, changes have taken place in relationship to the scope of collective bargaining. Managers were asked if they negotiate, consult, or inform the union on seven issues (pay, hours, pensions, training, grievance procedures, and health and safety. In 2004, 63 percent of unionised public sector workplaces normally negotiated over at least some of these items and this remained unchanged by 2011. However, the scope of bargaining was narrower in the private sector and has been falling. The percentage of private sector unionised workplaces that normally negotiated with unions over at least some terms and conditions fell from 43 percent to 38 percent. Furthermore, the percentage of all unionised workplaces normally negotiating over pay, hours and holidays (the three items covered in the statutory recognition procedure) fell from 32 percent in 2004 to 25 percent in 2011. This fall was concentrated in the private sector where the percentage declined from 27 percent to 18 percent suggesting a hollowing out of recognition in that part of the economy.

Alongside the decline in trade union membership, density, and collective bargaining coverage there has also been a significant decline in union representation in the workplace. By the end of the 1970s it is estimated there were 250,000 shop stewards in the UK (Williams and Adam-Smith, 2010), and in contrast by 2004 it was reported that union representatives were present in only 13 percent of workplaces, although again there are differences between the public

sector where representation is stronger and the private sector where union representatives are far fewer and concentrated in large workplaces (McIlroy and Daniels, 2009). By 2011, non-union workplace representation remained relatively uncommon and while still declining the most prevalent arrangement through which employees are represented at work is still the trade union. Furthermore, on-site representatives (shop stewards) still tend to be more prevalent in larger establishments with some 27 percent of workplaces that had union members also had at least one on-site lay union representative in 2011 (Wanrooy et al, 2011).

A further long term factor has been the attempt by the state to reduce strikes by greater use of disputes procedures (Lyddon 2007). The main types of third party intervention available in a dispute are conciliation, mediation and arbitration (Burchill 1989), and with the establishment of the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (Acas) in 1974 by a Labour Government, requests for conciliation rose sharply from 2,564 in 1975 to 3,338 in 1978, the peak year before declining to 1,475 in 1986. Crucially, over the following two decades as strikes continued to decline, requests for conciliation in disputes remained stable, never dropping below 1,000 until 2005 (Lyddon, 2007). Furthermore, over this period there has been a rise in the statutory regulation of industrial relations with the expansion in the scope and coverage of individual employment rights enforceable in employment tribunals which individualises what are essentially collective issues (Gennard 2009; Goodman 2000).

The legal regulation of industrial action

In the UK there is no '*right*' to strike and the freedom to take industrial action from the Trade Disputes Act 1906 onwards was provided by granting unions immunities from common law liabilities (torts) if the action was 'in contemplation or furtherance of a trade dispute' (Dickens and Hall, 2003). Central to the neoliberal ideology of the Conservative Government elected in

1979 was to use the law to weaken perceived trade union power, which marked a break from the pluralist approach that had broadly existed in the UK since the late nineteenth century (Howell, 2005). Rather than create a new legal framework, as they had previously attempted with the Industrial Relations Act of 1971, successive Conservative Governments amended the existing law passing six major pieces of legislation (in 1980, 1982, 1984, 1988, 1990 and 1992) restricting the ability of trade unions to take industrial action in the key areas of picketing, secondary action and balloting before a strike (See Appendix 1 for an overview of legal changes relating to strikes: 1980-2017) (Lyddon, 2007).

As Wedderburn (1986) argues, the lynchpin of this strategy was The Employment Act 1982, which made trade unions liable in tort, exposing them to legal injunctions and claims for damages. Although a limit was set on damages, the real threat to unions was injunctions which if not obeyed could lead to fines for contempt of court and sequestration of assets (Kessler and Bayliss 1998). Employers in a dispute could now also make use of the 'interlocutory' procedure which in effect stops any action while a judge examines the case, benefiting the employer in the simplest way by stopping the strike (Wedderburn 1986).

Crucially, when the Labour Party returned to power as New Labour in 1997 the leadership under Tony Blair had significantly transitioned into what became known as the 'third way' which attempted to combine social democratic policies with a broad acceptance of Conservative neoliberalism (Undy, 2001; Smith 2009). On the one hand this included legislating in the area of employment relations including introducing the statutory National Minimum Wage, ending Britain's opt-out from the European Social Chapter, and creating a number of individual and collective rights in the Employment Relations Act 1999 (ERA 1999) which included a statutory recognition procedure for trade unions (Howell, 2005).

On the other hand, New Labour abandoned any commitment to collectivism by announcing they would retain the bulk of legislation restricting industrial action introduced by their Conservative predecessors (Undy, 2001; Howell, 2005). Indeed, apart from legislation in the ERA 1999 making provisions that dismissal of employees engaged in lawful industrial action of less than 8 weeks duration was automatically unfair, extended to 12 weeks in the 2004 Employment Relations Act this proved to be the case throughout their three terms in office (Lyddon, 2009). As will be discussed below, legal amendments in 1999 and 2004 to preserve union member anonymity in a dispute only complicated matters further for trade unions (Lyddon, 2013).

While the years of Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition Government between 2010-15 would not witness any new legislation relating to industrial action, one of the first announcements made in 2015 by the first majority Conservative Government since 1997 was related to proposed legislation on trade unions and specifically in relation to strikes (French and Hodder, 2016). The Trade Union Act 2016 legislation came into force on 1 March 2017 and ensured that the most restrictive strike laws in the developed world became even harder to comply with. Some of the key changes included at least 50 percent of those entitled to vote must now participate in a strike ballot, and a majority of those voting must vote in favour of industrial action. Furthermore, for strikes in important public services, at least 50 percent of those entitled to vote must participate in the ballot, and at least 40 percent of those entitled to vote must vote in favour, the period of validity of a ballot is limited to six months (or nine months if both sides agree), the period of notice of industrial action the union must give to the employer has doubled from seven to 14 days giving employers extra time to prepare, and there is a new requirement to appoint a ‘picket supervisor’ willing to give their contact details to the police (Labour Research Department, 2018; Tuckman, 2018).

The central debate in the literature concerns the extent to which the restrictive legislation has had an impact on declining levels of strikes in comparison to the other factors identified. Edwards (1995), Waddington (2003) and Dickens and Hall (2010) broadly argue that these various causes of decline have acted in combination, and while the legal changes may have had a less direct influence, it is hard to separate their impact from the other determinants. For Kessler and Bayliss (1998), the compositional factors causing job insecurity were more important than the legislation which although tending to discourage strikes did not have a clear effect on their own. Indeed, the sharp decline in strikes in the early 1980s took place before the legislation could have exerted a significant influence.

Dix et al (2008) argue that while legislative change may have played some part in decline, the fact that most countries experienced similar reductions in strike levels over this period suggests other factors were also at work. As Williams (2014) argues, it is difficult to quantify the contribution made by the restrictive legal framework to declining strike activity as many other European countries that did not enact draconian legislation also witnessed declining strike levels. This suggests that while the 'anti-strike' laws may have *contributed* to decline, broader economic and industrial trends, the changing composition of the workforce, and the reduction in the number of people employed in the former 'strike-prone' industries in particular exercised more of an influence.

However, for Lyddon (2007, 2009), the legal framework *reinforced* rather than *created* workers' weaker labour market position and the subsequent decline in strike activity. The influence of the other factors (such as compositional changes, the decline of union membership, density and collective bargaining coverage) over the long term are acknowledged. However, it was economic restructuring in the early 1980s, and in particular

mass unemployment and declining inflation, together with the tactical use of injunctions in some important strikes which set up a powerful demonstration effect and broke the 'habit' of striking. In this context it is important to note that during the 1980s sections of the trade union movement in Britain suffered major defeats in disputes with the government and employers, notably in steel, the civil service, mining and newspaper production, which set up a 'demonstration effect' to other workers contemplating strike action.

As Hyman (1989) argues, in this period of 'coercive pacification', economic restructuring (i.e., mass unemployment, manufacturing jobs destroyed, cuts in public sector employment) combined with the restrictive legislation and was deliberately intended to undermine workers' collective strength and confidence, and this determination to take on and defeat unions was another major cause of declining strike activity which has persisted since (Kessler and Bayliss 1998: 266). The most important defeat in this sense was the miners' strike during 1984-5, which has been described as 'a catastrophe, seared into the soul of the trade union movement' (Lyddon 2009: 317). These developments were *reinforced* by the legislation creating an 'erosion of the will to resist' and the 'demonstration effect' has been reversed. Previously, the successful struggles of other workers would encourage others to take strike action whereas by contrast, in the 1980s, each defeat discouraged others from the risk of a strike (Hyman, 1989).

As a consequence of the developments discussed above, where strikes have occurred in recent years they have *mainly* been confined to areas of the economy where trade union membership and collective bargaining coverage remain intact; a phenomenon that has been described as the 'tertiarisation' of industrial conflict (an international phenomenon). As discussed above, whereas in the past strikes in areas such as coal, manufacturing, motor

vehicles, shipbuilding and the docks were a relatively normal extension of collective bargaining, during the 2000s they became more considered and less organically a part of industrial life. Because of the legislation, in some industries disputes can now go on longer than usual with protracted planning, balloting and action, along with the tactical use of ballots (Lyddon, 2009, 2015).

As Blyton and Turnbull (2004) argue, New Labour appeared to enjoy something of a 'honeymoon' period and by the time they came to power strikes were at an all-time historical low. While unions seemed reluctant to strike during the first Labour Government for 18 years the factors discussed above were still influential, when the government had consolidated its hold over the political scene some unions became more confrontational (Gallas, 2018). Where strikes did take place they were often 'token' or 'demonstration' stoppages lasting one day or less, and strike action was dominated by public sector disputes. In 2001, over half (57 percent) of all days lost were due to stoppages in public administration, health, and social work and in 2002 76 percent of days lost were due to stoppages in public services. The causes of these disputes included pay and in particular the gap between public and private sector pay, cuts in services, privatisation, new contracts and the threat of redundancy (Blyton and Turnbull, 2004).

Lyddon (2009) argues that Labour's 'miners' strike' was its battle with the firefighters whose demand for a £30,000 salary led to several strikes (one 24-hour, three 48 hour, and one eight day) in the winter of 2002-03 (see also Seifert and Sibley, 2005). Overlapping this dispute were strikes among school teachers, local government workers and postal workers and the large one-day pensions strike in March 2006 in local government. Additionally, disputes occurred

among PCS members in job centres in 2001-02, and in The Department of Work and Pensions in 2004-05.

The other main location of strikes during this period occurred in the communication, distribution and transport sectors which are particularly relevant for this dissertation. Strikes took place in post and rail where fragmentation into separate companies following privatisation resulted in widely varying pay rates. Airports are particularly vulnerable to strikes as it takes time to resume flight schedules afterwards and consequently most strike threats occur during busy holiday periods and are settled before action takes place. Various groups of workers took action including pilots, cabin crew (discussed in greater detail in chapter five of this thesis), check in staff, in-flight caterers, baggage and cargo handlers, security staff, and maintenance workers (Lyddon, 2007; 2009). The Gate Gourmet dispute involving members of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU) in 2005 stands out as the sacking of the in-flight catering workers resulted in an 'illegal' solidarity strike of ground personnel and baggage handlers shutting Heathrow Airport down for 24 hours (Gallas, 2018).

Once strikes are called employers may instigate court action and 56 injunctions were granted against unions from 1997-2005 usually stopping or delaying strikes. However, when strikes proceed 'discontinuous action' is the dominant form and notice periods create 'pre-strike' deadlines which encourage negotiations and the cancellations of strikes to facilitate talks. Such action conserves funds, reduces the likelihood of dismissal, and gives the impression of responsibility to what were once described as 'token strikes' (Lyddon, 2009).

For Gallas (2018) the strikes occurring in oil refineries (2009), Royal Mail (2009), the London Underground (2010, 2014, 2015) as well public sector strikes in 2011, 2012 and 2014 took place against the backdrop of the 2007-8 global financial crisis to which the Gordon Brown led

Labour Government responded by nationalising around half of the retail banking sector in the UK as the country entered into a deep recession. The Conservative – Liberal Democrat coalition government between 2010-15 embarked upon an agenda of deep cuts to public spending with 600,000 public sector jobs lost, and this took place alongside decreasing levels of real wages and an increase in precarious employment.

After outlining some of the changes in strike activity over recent years the chapter will now proceed to a more detailed discussion concerning the impact of the legal changes. Regardless of the debate above regarding the influence of the law on the decline of strike activity, it has also been argued that the legislation has changed the *practice* or *character* of industrial action, and this is evident in the return of injunctions and changes to balloting before strikes (Edwards, 1995; Kessler and Bayliss, 1998). Injunctions during the 1979-83 Conservative Government concentrated on picketing and secondary action, and this reflected the changes in law brought about by the 1980 Employment Act (Evans 1985). However, legislation in 1984 relating to pre-strike ballots provided more grounds for employers to seek injunctions in a dispute, and from the mid-1980s onwards this issue came to dominate (Evans 1987; Gall 2006). The Employment Act 1984 removed immunity if a ‘secret’ ballot of members had not taken place before a strike and further legislation in 1993 changed this from workplace to postal ballots. Additionally, a series of notices must be given to the employer, such as seven days before a strike, and a list of all workers called on to vote and take action (Kessler and Bayliss 1998), now extended to 14 days by the TUA 2016 (Tuckman, 2018).

As discussed above, the Labour Government amended this to preserve union member anonymity, with legislation in 1999 and 2004, although this was interpreted by the courts as requiring unions to supply detailed information identifying the number and grade of workers

involved in a dispute. An example of this was the National Union of Rail, Maritime, and Transport Workers (RMT) being prevented from striking on the London Underground in 2001 due to providing inadequate information of its membership (Lyddon 2013). Injunctions have also been granted on the grounds that not all workers called on to strike had been balloted, such as the injunction granted to Midland Mainline against the RMT in 2001 (Gall 2006). As will be discussed in greater detail in chapter five, in the dispute between British Airways and Unite the Union between December 2009 and May 2011 Unite sent ballot papers to some workers who were likely to have taken voluntary redundancy before any action would start and an injunction was granted to stop the strike (Lyddon 2013). Although this reinforces Wedderburn's (1986: 686) comment that the 'labour injunction can become a great engine of oppression against workers and their unions', it is important to qualify this with the fact that injunctions are relatively rare and concentrated in a few sectors such as print, the public sector, transport and communication. However, the threat of injunctions is still a reality for workers and trade unions organising or contemplating industrial action (Gall 2006).

Furthermore, where union organisation remains strong the obligation to hold a ballot can work to a union's advantage. A large vote in favour of industrial action can be used to exert pressure on employers to grant concessions, and in situations where they are confident they have the support of the workforce ballots are sometimes used to strengthen a union's bargaining position in negotiations (Williams and Adam-Smith 2010). For example, in wage negotiations the employers offer may be put to members and rejected as recommended by the union's negotiators. A ballot is then held in which a high proportion vote in favour of strike action and the union negotiators can return to the table with the authority to call a strike if there is no improvement in the offer. This strengthens the unions hand in many cases and

faced with the choice between a strike and a better offer the employer usually chooses the latter (Kessler and Bayliss 1998).

Due to the legal constraints described above, once the decision has been made to ballot, the process can take weeks or even months. Furthermore, the requirement to provide advance notice of every separate incidence of action creates deadlines encouraging negotiations and cancellations of strikes to enable talks. Official statistics show more ballots than strikes suggesting that the incidence of balloting as an attempt by unions increase their leverage over employers has become a marked feature of collective bargaining, and that the strike threat resulting from a successful ballot can often act as a substitute for a strike itself (Lyddon 2009, Gall 2006).

Summary

This chapter has defined strikes and located them as one potential manifestation of conflict in the capitalist employment relationship, before explaining how this conflict is generated from the three perspectives used in the industrial relations field of study. The measurement of strikes was then covered, focusing on the three main statistical indicators used and some of the issues relating to inaccuracies that have been highlighted in the literature. The broad pattern of strikes since official recording began in 1893 was then outlined, highlighting the fluctuating pattern up to the late 1970s, early 1980s and then the sharp decline and continuing low levels by all measures since. Following on from this, some of the theories traditionally used in the literature to explain strike trends were discussed before moving on to outline the specific factors identified as causes for the decline of strikes over recent decades. This included the debate over the relative importance of legal changes compared to the other structural and institutional determinants covered. Finally, the effect of the legislation on the *nature* or

form strikes take was discussed, focusing on the impact injunctions, balloting legislation, and notice periods before strikes has had on industrial disputes.

Undoubtedly such literature is vital for understanding historical movements in workplace conflict and introducing the various structural and institutional conditions which might promote or constrain strike activity in the UK. However, it is important to recognise that the occurrence of strikes is also rooted in the dynamics of the relationship between managers and workers in particular organisational environments (Batstone, 1978). As Karsh (1982) insists, since a strike is first and foremost a form of human behaviour acted by individuals who are the immediate participants in groups, the *causes* of strikes cannot be treated as apart from those who do the striking. The next chapter will therefore shift the focus away from these broader developments in economics, politics, industrial relations and law, towards literature which *also* considers the 'perceptions, intentions and strategies' of the men and women involved in episodes of collective industrial action (Hyman, 1989: 179).

Chapter Three: The social organisation of conflict, mobilisation and the 'strike process'

Introduction

Building on the debates covered in chapter two, the objective of this chapter is to gain a fuller understanding of strike causation by examining the processes of mobilisation (Batstone et al, 1978; Kelly, 1998) or *social* organisation of conflict (Edwards and Scullion, 1982), which transforms worker's individual unrest and discontent into collective industrial action. Additionally, by examining a number of important analytical case studies of some major disputes, an appreciation of the organisation, structure and processes (Hartley et al, 1983) of

strikes once they have commenced can also be achieved. To return briefly to the Marxist analysis of industrial relations, it is only through an awareness of the dialectical relationship between these *objective* and *subjective* elements of conflict; both the structural and institutional influences outlined previously in chapter two, and the analysis of human ‘action’ discussed below, that a multi-dimensional analysis of strikes is possible (Hyman, 1989; Darlington, 2002).

The chapter begins by discussing Kelly’s (1998) mobilisation theory, one of the more recent attempts at applying an analytical framework to the social processes involved in how workers are mobilised to take collective action. After outlining the theory’s central features, some of the literature that builds on mobilisation theory will be discussed, before considering a number of notable critiques. Finally, the section will end by considering Benford and Snow’s (2000) account of ‘framing’ during episodes of collective action. The next section will examine a range of qualitative workplace-based case studies which examine the social organisation of conflict and strikes in more detail, as a means of gaining further insight into the mobilisation process. The chapter will then move on from strike causation to examine literature dealing primarily with the ‘strike process’ (Lyddon et al, 2015) itself, starting with an outline of Hiller (1928) and Meredeen’s (1988) attempts at structuring an analytical model applicable to all but the shortest strikes, as well as a number of important analytical case studies which vary in their focus. Finally, after summarising the debates and issues included throughout, the chapter will end by identifying the gap in the literature and resulting research objectives of the thesis.

Mobilisation theory

Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory makes an important contribution to these debates by analysing the 'social processes' by which individuals are transformed into collective actors, willing and able to sustain collective organisation and engage in collective action against their employer. Underpinned by the Marxist analysis of industrial relations, mobilisation theory was developed in the context of the observed decline of collectivism (as indicated by the reductions in union membership, political influence, collective bargaining coverage, and industrial action) and the concurrent dominance of neoliberal/unitary ideology throughout the 1980s and 1990s. More specifically, it can be viewed theoretically as a counterbalance to the response to these trends by sections of the trade union movement, for instance, 'new realism' and 'partnership', the Labour Party's eventual acceptance of the Conservative's anti-trade union laws and neoliberal economic policies, as well as the growing dominance of academic Human Resource Management at the expense of industrial relations as a field of study (Kelly, 2000; Undy, 2001; Atzeni, 2010).

Kelly's (1998) central assertion is that collective organisation and activity (including, but not limited to strikes) ultimately stem from employer's actions that generate among workers a sense of 'injustice', or 'illegitimacy'. However, it is not enough that workers feel aggrieved, they must also feel entitled to their demands and expect that there is some chance that their situation can be changed by 'collective agency'. Thus, grievances are *necessary* but not *sufficient* for workers to become collectivised, hence the focus on how a group of individuals with a sense of injustice then come together into a social group with a collective interest. Within this process, workers must acquire a sense of common identity which differentiates them from their employer; they must attribute the perceived injustice to their employer (which could include the Government as an employer); and they must be willing to engage in some form of collective organisation and activity to try and remedy the situation.

It follows from this that discontent is translated into collective action *only* through organisation and mobilisation, and central to this process is the role of small groups of activists and leaders. This 'micro-mobilisation' process involves the leadership group promoting a sense of grievance among workers by persuading them what they may have once considered as 'normal' or 'acceptable' is in fact unjust. Additionally, activists are required to sustain or create a degree of social identity or cohesion and then urge the appropriateness of one or more forms of collective action, as well as legitimating such action in the face of hostile criticism and employer (and in some cases government or 'state') counter-mobilisation. Mobilisation theory also highlights the importance of ideologies in 'framing' issues around which workers can be mobilised to take collective action. Since workers' 'willingness to act' is a key power resource for trade unions, the way they think about workplace and employment issues is a vital part of the mobilisation process. Consequently, injustice or illegitimacy 'frames' are critical in mobilising workers to take collective action as they initiate the process of detaching subordinate group members from loyalty to their employers (Kelly, 1998).

Mobilisation theory has been used as an analytical framework across a wide range of literature focusing on different facets of worker mobilisation. For instance, Blyton and Jenkins' (2013) study of two textile factories facing closure focused on the micro-mobilisation context among the union members and their workplace union representatives, and specifically the interaction between activity at this level, and the 'macro-level' of regional and national union officers. They argue that however mobilisation *begins*, the capacity to develop and *sustain* a 'collective action frame' with any chance of success also requires a supportive response from the regional and national union.

For Brown-Johnson and Jarley (2004), unions can mobilise workers around workplace 'justice' issues even in contexts where class-based political ideologies are not present. Indeed, injustice may be conceptually 'cleaner' than alternative frames such as alienation or job dissatisfaction as it requires a perpetrator who workers construe as acting intentionally, in contrast to issues that can arise outside management and union control. Therefore, injustice not only suggests the commission of an immoral act, but also suggests a moral alternative that workplace leaders can use to persuade members that justice can be fought for and restored through collective action.

Likewise, Buttigieg et al (2008) argue individuals are more willing to engage in industrial action when they have experienced a sense of injustice or unfairness in the employment relationship, as well as holding a collectivist orientation to work. Their case study in the Australian banking and finance sector examined the willingness of union members to take industrial action in support of their union's industrial campaign. They found that successful mobilisation requires organised leadership, and both union officials and workplace union representatives can encourage solidarity by building and promoting a collective response to perceived injustices. Workplace union representatives in particular can play a critical role in facilitating their members involvement in union activities, including strikes, due to their dual role as both a worker and a leader. These representatives have the unique opportunity to understand the issues and concerns of their fellow members, and to shape their attitudes and views. In this case, they built an 'injustice frame' around pay dissatisfaction as way of mobilising members in support of the union's claims and related this to the large wage increases received by senior management, as well as the bank's record profits.

Darlington (2001) also builds on mobilisation theory to explore the extent 'left-wing' leadership in the National Union of Rail Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) influenced mobilisation and collectivisation in an adversarial direction, and whether or not this 'militant' trade unionism was effective compared with a more moderate approach. He observed that a network of left-activists did play a crucial role in successfully articulating the wider membership's sense of injustice, targeting it at management, and organising repeated bouts of collective action. Indeed, in later research (Darlington, 2009), it was found that this adversarial approach by the RMT, including taking frequent industrial action, has won significant pay rises for their members. Additionally, during the period 1999-2007, RMT membership grew from 56,037 to 75,939, a 37.3 percent increase during a period of stable or declining membership for many other trade unions.

Mobilisation theory has been critiqued by Fairbrother (2005) who argued it merely provides an uncritical explanatory basis for assessing the current state of trade unionism, which is reflected in the literature using the theory as a framework as 'suddenly everyone looks for leaders that lead, and the workers who express grievances rooted in a sense of social injustice, and follow'. In addition, Fairbrother describes mobilisation theory as 'vanguardist', one dimensional, and a celebration of a 'leader-led dichotomy' without any reference to participative forms of organisation and struggle in the context of workplace relations. Gall (1999, 2000) also insists mobilisation theory displays no consideration of the processes and dynamics of union democracy, and the relationship between the union leadership and the membership. As well as this, mobilisation theory is described as inadequate in its conception of leadership as it does not sufficiently consider the issue of workers' confidence when they are contemplating taking industrial action. Thus, while union activists *are* crucial for framing issues in certain ways that mobilises union members, this is not enough to fully explain the

movement towards strike action. Instead, a key determining factor in whether workers take strike action is their perception, 'mood', or confidence, which can exist in contradiction to demonstrable facts and reality. Thus, a collective or majority mood where workers believe they cannot strike because it will be ineffective, and/or see no point in striking for fear of being sacked or replaced will not result in the taking of strike action, *regardless* of the quality of union leadership.

Atzeni (2009, 2010) has also critiqued mobilisation theory questioning the central assumption that mobilisation is based on injustice, and that leaders are pivotal in framing this sense of injustice into collective action. Also writing from within the Marxist tradition of industrial relations, Atzeni contends that the centrality assigned to injustice within mobilisation theory is flawed, as it seeks to explain collective phenomena starting from a subjectively determined, morally grounded basis. Instead, while these factors may possibly *influence* mobilisation, they are not the *necessary* conditions as the concept of injustice could be substituted by something else, for instance, dignity, inequality or fairness, or by other arguments relating to any specific dispute. Furthermore, it is argued that mobilisation theory is wrong for placing leadership as a necessary *precondition* for mobilisation as leaders can often emerge *from* episodes of mobilisation. Thus, cases of spontaneous, unorganised collective action call into question the overall validity of mobilisation theory, as mobilisation can occur for reasons not directly depending on individuals' sense of injustice or leaders' persuasive action.

Outside of industrial relations, sociologists and political scientists have also made important contributions to the debate on mobilisation (Blyton and Jenkins, 2013). For example, Benford and Snow (2000) provide an important discussion on framing and specifically in the context of mobilising and counter-mobilising ideas and meanings during periods of collective action. It is

argued that social movements are not simply the carriers of existing ideas and meanings which emerge automatically out of structural arrangements, unanticipated events, or existing ideologies. Instead, these movement 'actors' are viewed as signifying agents actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, bystanders and observers – a process referred to as the politics of signification. Social movement academics have conceptualised this 'signifying work' or 'meaning construction' by employing the verb 'framing', and the resultant products of this framing activity are referred to as 'collective action frames'.

These collective action frames are constructed in part where social movement adherents negotiate a shared understanding of some problematic condition or situation they define as in need of change, make attributions regarding who is to blame, articulate an alternative set of arrangements, and then urge others to act in concert to affect change. Core framing tasks involved in the processes of collective action are referred to as 'diagnostic framing' (problem identification, and attributions), 'prognostic framing', and 'motivational framing', and each is relatable to Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory.

For instance, diagnostic framing refers to 'injustice frames' in which direct action is contingent on identification of the source (s) of causality, blame, and/or culpable agents. Prognostic framing involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem, or at least a plan of attack and strategy for carrying out the plan. This also brings 'counter-framing' into the argument as framing activity by opponents (in the case of industrial action, employers and/or governments). The important point to make here is that opposing framing activity can effect a movement's framings, by putting movement activists on the defensive, or by forcing them to develop elaborate prognoses more clearly than otherwise would have been the case.

Finally, motivational framing, the final core framing task, provides a 'call to arms' or rationale for engaging in ameliorative collective action, including the construction of appropriate 'vocabularies of motive'.

The social organisation of strikes

Regardless of the above critiques, mobilisation theory has gone some way to providing a comprehensive analytical framework regarding the analysis of the collective mobilisation (Darlington, 2009), particularly in relationship to the crucial role of union leadership in the movement towards strike action. However, while the literature following Kelly (1998) touches on these issues to a certain degree, for a more thorough investigation into the processes involved in workplace settings it is also necessary to return to a number of empirically based case-studies published throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Literature within this tradition often provides dynamic, narrative accounts of the events, actions and arguments that take place between shop-stewards and their members about management, their jobs, the union, and crucially for the purpose of this thesis, strikes (Kelly, 1998). This is useful for further developing our understanding of the processes involved in mobilisation towards a strike, and how the presence or absence of effective workplace trade union representation and leadership influences organised collective responses by workers, or alternative individual and unorganised expressions of conflict.

Nichols and Armstrong's (1976) study of a chemical plant during the peak of UK strike activity in the early 1970s details how grievances and discontent among the workforce were more likely to be expressed in individualistic 'indirect' actions such as sabotage and rule breaking. However, while they highlight one incident where the workforce walked off the job in an unofficial protest over the issue of contracted labour, they observed no other stoppages or

strikes during their research. This is partially explained by reference to the shop-steward who was described as holding a compromise conception of trade unionism, and because of this absence of *organised* leadership the workers were left internally divided, isolated from one and other and lacking solidarity.

In contrast, Beynon's (1984) research into the Ford Motor Company's Halewood plant during roughly the same period describes in detail the position of the shop stewards within the factory, and in particular the nature of their relationship with the union members. The shop-stewards are described as *emerging* from the workforce in response to perceived day-to-day injustice and conflict 'on the line'. With a commitment to collectivism, trade unionism, and a 'factory-based' class conscious approach, these shop stewards displayed a dedication to defending their members interests and an ability to impose effective counter-controls over the management.

The first national strike of Ford plants in the UK in March 1969 is outlined in detail, and the shop stewards views are incorporated effectively into the account. This dispute was primarily over proposals to include penalty clauses for unofficial/unconstitutional strikes within a pay deal; and can retrospectively be viewed as a microcosm of developments in national industrial relations throughout the 1970s and beyond. The interaction of the various structural and institutional factors causing the dispute, and the crucial role the shop stewards then played in mobilising support for the strike, countering management arguments, and attempting to keep up the morale of the striking workers reinforces the social processes involved in taking industrial action during this period (Beynon, 1984).

Batstone et al (1977) provide an in-depth detailed analysis of the activities of shop stewards, also in the car industry, comparing two union branches ('domestic organisations') in the same

company; one branch on the shop floor and the other for clerical workers. They found that shop stewards in the clerical branch fostered a more individualistic approach, whereas on the shop floor, union representatives which they categorise as 'opinion-leaders' and 'leader-stewards', played a major role in stirring others to collective action. For instance, they observed 25 strikes or near strikes in their field work and in 20 of these situations the idea of strike action was first proposed by these types of union representative. Thus, on the shop floor the perspectives workers adopt were influenced to a greater extent by their shop stewards, whereas in the clerical branch management played more of a role in determining individual patterns of action.

Additionally, on the shop floor the more central the union's institutional role is in the day-to-day experience of workers, the more leadership is facilitated which resulted in the membership employing collective means. This 'mobilisation of bias' in favour of the union, in turn fostered a further accommodative acceptance of the union and reaffirmed its centrality. On the staff side, the union did not have this institutional centrality and accordingly the methods of achieving goals tends to be more individualistic; consequently, the union received little support. The lack of steward leadership, in part due to this fact, meant members were rarely encouraged to adopt collective strategies (Batstone et al, 1977).

Batstone et al (1978) built on the above research in a further volume set in the same plant, although only concentrated on the shop floor domestic organisation, and consider in greater detail the mobilisation, or 'social organisation', of strike action. The strikes studied were relatively small, short-term strikes or near strikes of an unofficial and unconstitutional nature which as discussed in the previous chapter were typical of the car industry and indeed industry generally at that time. However, they observed that while such strikes may appear

spontaneous they do not 'just happen' and require the development of a degree of unity among those involved, as well as a level of organisation which is not only important once a strike has begun, but also equally necessary in '*creating*' a stoppage of work. Therefore, as particular individuals or groups are likely to introduce the idea of a strike and then persuade their fellow members of the validity of collective action, the mobilisation process becomes a *social* process involving systems of influence and power.

While it is acknowledged that the inherent conflict in the capitalist employment relationship, as well as other material determinants have to be considered in any satisfactory explanation of strikes, the extent to which strikes do actually occur will most immediately be determined by the processes of negotiation among workers themselves. More specifically in the industry studied, the technology of the workplace allowed a small group of workers on an assembly line to easily stop the whole track, because the production of others is directly and immediately related to their work. Additionally, as they found in their earlier volume, the 'institutional centrality' of the union on the shop floor is key in creating a 'mobilisation of bias' in favour of strikes and other forms of collective sanctions.

With these factors in mind, the actual processes and dynamics of strike mobilisation in the plant were then examined to ascertain what distinguishes the strike from apparently similar situations. They found that a crucial part of the movement towards a strike were the 'vocabularies of motive', or 'rationales' in favour of striking put forward by certain people, which in this case study most prominently attributed blame to the management. Alternatively, vocabularies in opposition to strike action were also observed, including the legitimacy of workers' demands and the selection of the strike as a means of pursuing those demands. Therefore, for a strike to develop, a process of defining and creating an issue and creating a

case for a work stoppage generally has to occur and within that process, objections to the idea of strike action are also important. Discussions occurred among the workforce and their representatives concerning the legitimacy of a demand or grievance, and often about whether a stoppage of work was an effective or reasonable means of pursuing a case.

Furthermore, these negotiations take place within a context of social power and influence inside the domestic organisation itself and certain types of actor played disproportionately significant roles in determining whether a group should strike. First, there was the 'griever' who on occasion initiates a strike primarily by articulating a commonly felt grievance; next, for many members an issue is more likely to be seen as legitimate because it is raised by an 'opinion leader'; and finally, there are the shop-stewards who account for the initiation of more strikes than any other group in the plant. While it is argued that shop-stewards are far from being the agitators they are often portrayed, ('lubricants rather than irritants'), there are nevertheless situations in which these stewards felt that strike action was the only means of achieving a satisfactory solution. Among the stewards, a further distinction was made between 'populists' and the more influential 'leader stewards' who along with convenors formed an 'inner-cabinet' (or the 'quasi-elite'). Such actors are described as gate-keepers to the initiation of strikes and their support is vital in the successful mobilisation process (Batstone et al, 1978).

Edwards and Scullion (1982) use a comparative approach in their examination of industrial relations in seven UK workplaces, of which four were in the engineering sector, two in the clothing industry, and one in process production. Rather than attempt to analyse the processes involved in the build up to strike action as covered by Batstone et al (1978), they aim for an overarching analysis of the social organisation of conflict, how it is expressed in

practice, and why some forms of conflict behaviour occur in some settings and not others. While this includes an in-depth investigation into other forms of behaviour such as quitting, absenteeism, effort bargaining, sabotage, and job allocation, the study is useful for illustrating the relationship between the conditions experienced in each workplace and comparative levels of strike activity.

For instance, there was no evidence of any strikes in the clothing industry except one which occurred years before the research began, and in both the Process and Large Metals factories there had only ever been one instance of what both the managers and workers regarded as a proper strike, although in the latter case actions which the authors would consider as strikes (small, short, unofficial) appeared to be quite common. This situation was not considered unusual in the clothing industry as in one plant there was weak workplace union representation and a 'paternalistic/autocratic' management style, while in the other it appears the management adopted a pluralist style and conflict was somewhat institutionalised. This was evident in the inclusion of the workforce in some decisions concerning them, as well as a joint consultation committee consisting of managers and union representatives which met regularly to discuss any industrial issues which could lead to conflict.

What was more surprising was the low levels of strike activity in the Process and Component plants, particularly as both had working conditions conducive to 'spontaneous' stoppages. As the absence of such strikes could not be attributed to a lack of union organisation, the answer was probably related to the manner in which shop-floor relations were conducted. For example, in the Process Factory, management had succeeded in creating an atmosphere of trust, and workers accepted that while conditions were unpleasant management could do

little to alter them and so there was little purpose in striking. The same perspective was found in the Components Factory where shop stewards felt they could get what they wanted without striking.

The contrast between the Components and Electrical factories is revealing as the latter seemed considerably more prone to 'downers' (very short stoppages) despite the absence of a tradition of collective action and a workplace union organisation that was comparatively weak. They describe four such strikes which were very short 'attention getters' rather than actions to obtain economic concessions. One stoppage over a bonus issue lasted 40 minutes, and the other three were even shorter, and in all four the protest element was apparent. These types of strike are then compared to those in the Large and Small Metals Factories in which strike action was undoubtedly more common. Management records in the Large Metals Factory showed that strikes lasting an hour occurred on average 14 or 15 times a year, whereas in the Small Metals factory records show an average of two plant-wide stoppages occurred a year, together with a large number of shop-level disputes. These sanctions at shop floor level are described as part of the 'daily negotiation of consent' in which shop stewards had a range of ways they could put pressure on management, and stoppages for a few minutes were part of this wider process. Thus, in the assembly shops of the Large Metals Factory, sophisticated controls over the labour process and a strong bargaining awareness gave the shop floor the ability to hold brief stoppages which maintained pressure on management without developing into full-scale strikes (Edwards and Scullion, 1982).

The above literature has provided an insight into some of the important factors involved in mobilising workers to go on strike, and thus contributes to an appreciation of the subjective element when considering strike causation. As discussed, mobilisation theory provides a

sufficient analytical framework as well as focusing attention on the leadership function in these processes which is used and built upon in subsequent literature. In addition, the workplace studies outlined are useful for their in-depth observational accounts of the activities of these workplace leaders, and their relationship with the membership and other levels in the unions concerned.

However, it is important to note that for the most part these earlier case-studies are analysing the dominant form of strike activity in the post-Second World War period, and especially from the mid-1960s to the late 1970s; namely small, short strikes of an unofficial and unconstitutional nature (Batstone et al, 1978). While this is not a necessarily a problem *per se* when considering the role social organisation and mobilisation plays in strike *causation*, the often short nature of these stoppages means there is little or no analysis of the organisation and dynamics of strikes once they have commenced. With this in mind, the following section will examine literature which has as its central focus the 'strike process' (Lyddon et al, 2015), before moving on to cover a range of analytical case-studies of major disputes which although varying in their research objectives make an important contribution to the strike literature.

The 'strike process'

Hiller (1928) has been described as one of the earliest known attempts at discovering an analytical model applicable to all kinds of industrial disputes (Meredeen, 1988), as well as one of the best attempts at developing a 'processual model of strikes' (Hartley et al, 1983: 11). Hiller was less interested in the *causes* or *justifications* for strike action than in *how* and *why* a particular situation becomes collective, the *behaviour characteristic* of the striking group itself, and the different techniques used to direct and control a strike once it has begun. As a means of understanding these issues, it is argued there are a number of successive phases of

the strike cycle applicable to all but very short disputes. First, the 'organisation of the strike' is examined, which includes the pre-conditions for collective action such as conflict in the employment relationship, and workers forming and joining trade unions. Second, the 'beginning of concerted action' is discussed, focusing on worker mobilisation and how a strike is initiated. This mobilisation process for Hiller is accomplished by accepting or creating interpretations of the situation which encourage action, for instance, supplying justifications for striking and minimising the risks. This is achieved by using commonly accepted labour movement phrases, or slogans in order to stimulate group action, and as Lyddon et al (2015) argue, it is in this phase that the roots of Batstone et al (1977,78) and Kelly (1998) can be found.

Third, the 'maintenance of group morale' during a strike is outlined, for 'a prolonged stoppage requires a degree of unity which is not necessarily implied in the act of quitting work'. Various methods are used to develop morale including maintaining rapport (mass participation, parades, demonstrations, marches, picketing, wearing badges, arm bands, badges); generating incentives to carry on; lessening incentives to return to work (compensating for the tedium of the strike, supplying a means of subsistence); and imposing restraints upon the strikers. Morale is further maintained by providing facilities to stop strikers getting bored and providing a base, which further maintains collective activity and prevents a return to individualism.

In the fourth stage 'controlling strike breakers' is dealt with, for example picketing and dealing with 'scabs', and the fifth includes a discussion on 'neutralising the manoeuvres of the employer'. This involves using effective 'strike tactics', and crucially, how these tactics can change as the strike develops and in response to the tactics the employers may use to break

it. It is in this context that a simple dispute may grow to proportions unforeseen at the outset. Employers will attempt to delay a strike to a time it suits them, and when one starts use tactics to break it, including persuasion, arousing dissension, spreading discouraging rumours, threatening unemployment, and replacing strikers with other workers.

In stage six, methods of 'manipulating public opinion' are summarised as while in most cases the public are not interested in a strike, if it clearly interferes with the flow of a commodity or service they may become actively interested. Finally, stage seven covers the 'demobilisation' of action and how the strike ends - with the return to work representing a distinct phase in the strike cycle. However, this transition from conflict to peace may take various forms and settlements from the workers perspective could result in success, compromise, postponement, or decisive defeat. Furthermore, when a settlement has been reached and work is resumed the consequences of a strike may manifest themselves in group traditions and in the modified character of conflict itself. Therefore, the motives which inspired action may not find complete release in the settlement of a given issue, subsequently finding expression in a new strike and in this way every strike contributes to a wider cycle of events.

Meredeen (1988) argued that as conflict is inevitable, or even desirable, in capitalist society his investigation is not concerned with analysing why it exists. Rather, the aim is to examine how conflict is managed in practice, and the relationship in this context between managers and workers in an industrial dispute. As already established in chapter two, the vast majority of strikes in the period Meredeen covers (1968-88) were small-scale, short in duration work stoppages of an unofficial and unconstitutional nature, involving relatively few workers. Instead of examining these types of strike, Meredeen builds on Hiller's attempt at an analytical framework in a reconstructive, comparative examination of seven major industrial disputes.

It is argued that any effective dispute analysis must reconstruct its sequence of events, focusing first on the wider economic and political context in which it took place, and then the course of the dispute from its earliest origins to its final settlement and aftermath. To achieve this, a seven-stage analytical framework is developed showing what transpires at crucial chronological stages in the typical configuration of every industrial dispute.

Stage one is the 'pre-dispute context' or the unique historical setting in which the root causes of the dispute are to be found; stage two is the 'challenge' thrown down by one side, which initiates the dispute; stage three is the 'initial responses' made to that challenge by the other side in the dispute which often triggers the conflict; stage four is the 'consequences' which flow directly and indirectly from the interaction of the challenge and the initial responses; stage five is the 'climax', or point of greatest pressure, which immediately precedes the resolution of the conflict; stage six is the 'settlement' which determines the substantive outcomes of the dispute; and finally, stage seven is the 'aftermath' in which the parties count the cost, assess the gains and losses, seek to learn the lessons and resume some new or modified relationship.

Hiller (1928) and Meredeen (1988) have both provided suitable analytical frameworks which can then be used to *structure* an account of a major industrial dispute or strike. Additionally, as Lyddon et al (2015) observe, Hiller's model in particular stands out as it incorporates many of the themes covered in the mobilisation literature. However, what these accounts lack are the inclusion of accounts of strikes which capture the views, strategies and perceptions of those workers on strike *and* the union activists and officials organising the conflict. Therefore, to build upon the literature discussed above it is to a number of analytical case-studies of major strikes that the chapter will discuss.

Case studies of strikes

Before moving on to consider the selected case studies below it is important to make some points relating to cross-national research, as the studies included are both UK and USA based. However, as Hyman (2001) argues, *all* social science research is comparative even if the focus is a single country as an approach is scientific to the extent that it seeks to establish, and account for, similarity and difference in the cases investigated. Thus, while individual cases can be described only in terms which are general in application, this does not mean that all instances similarly classified (for instance strikes) are identical. Furthermore, there are significant problems in constituting trade unions as research objects as they are *contested* organisations, and within any union can be found conflicting views of its underlying purpose, objectives, the appropriate forms of action, and patterns of internal relations; and these problems are compounded when cross-national cases are considered.

Foner's (1977) study of the Great Labour Uprising of 1877 in the USA is an interesting and crucial study as the railroad workers had almost no union as late 1873, and as such is an early example of rapid unionisation leading up to a major industrial dispute. In fact, only one effective union existed among the railroad workers in 1873, the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers although there was hardly any recognition by the railroad companies for the purposes of collective bargaining. However, the poor and hazardous conditions in the industry continued to generate grievances, and the deteriorating economic condition in the early 1870s resulted in wage reductions of between 21 and 37 percent for rail workers with the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad; lowering their wages to 50 percent of what they had formally been. Yet despite this there were only sporadic outbursts between November 1873 and July 1894 on 18 railroads highlighting how workers doing the same job can be more strike prone

than others. However, when these workers walked off the job for a period of a few weeks the strikes were ultimately defeated as unemployed men were brought in and militia deployed to suppress the action.

Yet despite these setbacks, the engineers emerged from the 1873-4 struggles stronger and more militant than before, although the US labour movement was generally in a state of disarray during this period. Of thirty national unions in existence at the time only nine remained by the spring of 1877 with a membership of 50,000 – a small fraction of the total workforce. In these broader conditions, the Brotherhood stood out as the ‘only bright spot in an otherwise gloomy picture’ although this resulted in a counter-mobilisation against the union and a severe wage cutting drive.

These conditions resulted in the formation of the Trainmen’s Union, a solid national body composed of Engineers, conductors, brakemen, and firemen in June 1877 under the leadership of Robert Adams Ammon. However, after the new union began a recruitment drive the various railroad managers began discharging new members including Ammon himself. On that day, the Trainmen’s Union set June 27th at twelve noon as the deadline for a general railroad strike, and the study details how the ‘Great Strike’ developed throughout the country focusing on the various railroads involved – a struggle in which the entire power of the state was used to counter-mobilise against the railroad workers including federal troops and armed militias. Occurring only six years after the Paris Commune the press blamed these outbreaks on the Workingmen’s Party of the United States (WPUS), although Foner details how internal factions in the WPUS prevented them from playing any role in the *instigation* of the Great Strike. However, they were deeply involved once the strikes began and spread beyond the

railroads to other industries in cities such as Chicago and St. Louis where nearly all manufacturing plants were closed.

In contrast to Foner's analysis of a major national dispute, Karsh (1982) focuses on one strike of knitting mill workers in the USA to secure a union contract in the United States, in order to gain an insight into the complex world of trade unions, organisers, conflict and its resolution. The objective was to try to understand how a group of workers, almost all women, rejected their established way of factory life by joining a union and carrying out a bitter and often violent strike that lasted many months. However, within this broader objective Karsh was *primarily* concerned with the activities of the strike organisers and the *conduct* of the strike itself, for instance, how concerted action is achieved, social organisation built up, and then morale maintained during a lengthy strike. The individual unrest, frustration, and discontent in the employment relationship is described as a *fluid* condition with the potentialities for differing lines of action, yet these symptoms of conflict are not *social* until they are organised. Thus, for Karsh, expressions of individual dissatisfaction need to be 'crystalised, defined and focused', and most of all they need to be communicated and shared.

In the *prelude* to the eventual strike the main union organiser tried to find activists inside the mill to try and put forward arguments for joining the trade union, and to transform the workers individual concerns into a collective response. With a number of key activists in place, the process of building union membership began in earnest, and when eventually 80 of 200 workers were recruited into the union the campaign was taken out into the open. In the campaign to win the recognition ballot, the arguments used by the union organisers and activists are described, although the campaign was unsuccessful. This was in the context of employer counter-mobilisation tactics trying to undermine the recognition drive by sending

letters to all employees, delaying certification and increasing wages by 15 percent. It was at this stage that the union organiser knew the struggle for recognition would probably only be won through strike action, and after further negotiations broke down the strike was on.

Crucially, the strike is analysed in detail including activities on the picket line as the police were used to escort non-striking workers into the mill, as well as the strike leaders organising strike pay and renting out an empty store as a strike headquarters/kitchen. At this stage, two more union organisers were assigned to the mill and the 'inside committee' that had been building membership became the strike committee. As the strike progressed, the committee attempted to mobilise community support and embarked on a series of projects designed to maintain morale on the picket lines, as well as holding dances and parties every weekend at the strike headquarters. The major turning point in the strike came as picketing around the clock escalated, leading to a coal shortage which seriously put pressure on the company as winter approached. At this point the lead union organiser thought it wise to bolster morale and invited the union vice-president and a regional organiser to speak to the strikers and make a commitment that the resources of the union were at their disposal. With the strike showing no sign of ending negotiations resumed, and after almost a year and a half of continuous effort including a bitter fourteen-week strike a compromise was agreed and the union had a contract.

Hartley et al's (1983) study of the 1980 three-month national strike at British steel also contributes to an appreciation of the complexity of strikes by gaining unique access to a strike committee in one region during the dispute. Building on Hiller (1928) and Karsh (1958), their study was about *how* the strike was run, not an analysis of its causes or quality of union-management relations in the industry, and crucially the focus was on the centre of decision

making and action. They argue that as much of the strike literature has focused on causation, this leaves only a hazy picture of 'processes', and as the organisation of the strike is generally considered far less interesting it has been very little studied. So, rather than *focus* on the causes of this strike, their central emphasis was organisational, structure and processes, concentrating explicitly how the strike was run in one union branch, and the dynamics between the local strike committee, members, regional/national committees and officials. Using this approach, they attempt to synthesise *structure* and *agency* by trying to understand people's actions by exploring how they made sense of or interpreted the world around them, yet at the same time considering how their reactions are interpreted through their context of structures, roles, cultures and changing events.

McGuire (2017) also provides an analysis of the 1980 steel strike, the first the industry had experienced since the General Strike of 1926, and argues this was a major social, political and industrial event involving over 100,000 workers resulting in almost nine million working days lost. At the time, this was the longest national strike in the post-Second World War period and crucially the first major conflict between the trade union movement and the new Conservative Government elected in 1979. The strike was called in response to a 2 percent pay offer by British Steel at a time when inflation was 17 percent although pay was only a nominal issue in this dispute.

Indeed, the established view of British Steel during the 1970s was that it was overstaffed, uncompetitive, and in need of severe rationalisation, although this consensus was contested first by a group of academics involved in the unsuccessful campaign to save Corby steelworks in 1979, and second by a group of trade unionists employed in the research office of the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation (ISTC). During the dispute, the ISTC researchers produced a

weekly newspaper the 'Steelworkers' Banner' which in some respects followed the traditional pattern of strike journals such providing a rationale for the industrial action, supplying rank and file union members with information about strike activities and news on negotiations, and launching humorous invective in the direction of British Steel. But the aims of the 'Banner' went further and focused on the deeper problems facing the industry targeting the consensus constructed in the 1970s on the causes of decline. Refusing to accept the case for job cuts and plant closures made by the government and British Steel, the Banner constructed and disseminated an alternative programme for the steel industry moving the debate beyond the limited parameters established by the assumptions of journalists, politicians and British Steel officials.

As secretary of the influential Miners' Forum group Allen's (2009) account of the 1984-85 miners' strike in the UK is interesting in light of the authors close proximity to the National Union of Coalminers (NUM) president, vice-president, General Secretary and almost half of the National Executive. Allen outlines how the economic and political environment changed for miners from 1980 onwards following the election of a Conservative government pursuing a free-market agenda after which large-scale pit-closures became inevitable. With the UK moving into a recession with rising unemployment, the market for UK coal also began to collapse as the government removed coal subsidies and allowed cheap imports from the USA, Australia and Poland into the country.

However, after the election of Arthur Scargill as national president in December 1981 following Joe Gormley's retirement, the political climate in the NEC and the head office swung to the left. The NEC became more willing to support militant moves and to call national ballots over both pit closures and wages. With Ian Macgregor appointed chairman of the National

Coal Board (NCB) in September 1983, after overseeing the contraction of the British steel industry following the three-month steel strike, the scene was set for the confrontation that followed.

The year long strike started on the 1st March 1984 when the Cortonwood pit in South Yorkshire was closed without NUM agreement, even though the NCB had invested £1 million into it guaranteeing five more years of work at the pit. The Cortonwood branch immediately called a strike and dispatched flying pickets to campaign for support. The decision was then made by the NEC that under Rule 41 the strikes should continue on an area by area basis, instead of holding a national ballot and the strike over jobs and communities was official. This account focuses on some key areas emerging from the strike including the legitimacy of the action itself, as Conservative ministers, many politicians including some in the Labour Party, and most of the media argued it should not have started without the authority of a national ballot. This is interesting as it draws attention to decision making processes in trade unions where there was strong opposition to holding a national ballot from the strikers themselves as they were not prepared to allow miners from other areas to vote them out of their right to strike.

As well as the legitimacy of the strike itself, picketing and violence is discussed with the argument made that picketing was necessary not only to win support from other miners but also to stop coal movement by sea, railways and road as well as by dockers and power station workers. Additionally, picketing was required to stop the production and distribution of coal from the coalfields that were refusing to strike. Violence became a feature during the strike in large part because of the heavy police presence at picket lines. This was most evident at the Orgreave Coke Plant on the 18th June 1984 when, up to 6,000 pickets were confronted by 3,000 riot police, at least 100 miners were injured and 90 arrested with many on serious

charges. This was followed by an extraordinary example of excessive police presence on 16 August, when 1,000 police escorted a solitary strike-breaker to work at Gascoigne Wood colliery in Yorkshire demonstrating the lengths the Conservative Government would use state power to defeat the miners.

Another focus of this account is the duration of the strike and specifically how the miners were able to stay out on strike for so long, which in large part was made possible once the wives, mothers, girlfriends and other women acting in solidarity formed their own action groups to organise pickets, support miners' pickets, demonstrate, raise money and supply collective provisions of food for children and families. Women first appeared on the picket lines in Yorkshire by the end of March and by the beginning of April women's groups were snowballing from Kent to Scotland. By early May 10,000 women attended a meeting organised by the Barnsley Women Against Pit Closures Group and on the 22nd July, a national conference of Women Against Pit Closures was held at Northern College near Barnsley. The consequence of this was that the striking communities became self-sustaining entities. The role of women in the strike intensified as sympathisers came in from outside the coal communities and joined the action groups, bringing with them special organising and management skills. The vibrancy and effectiveness of the women's groups, however, stemmed from the politicisation of the coalfield women as they became participants in the strike rather than supporters of it.

Richardson's (2003) account of leadership and mobilisation in the 1986-87 News International Dispute is set in the wake of defeat of the 1984-5 miner's strike as the politics of 'new realism' was emerging in sections of the trade union movement. This was the prevailing climate when Rupert Murdoch, the head of News International, and publisher of the Sun, News of the World, The Times and Sunday Times unleashed a well prepared attack on his unionised workforce

culminating in a strike on the 24th January 1986 and the dismissal of 5,500 print workers. Richardson focuses on 'the leadership question' and the role leadership plays in heading (or hindering) workers' struggles and orchestrating union strategy and tactics. This is related to Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory and how leadership plays an important role in giving form and direction to membership demands and grievances – as well presiding over strategic and tactical manoeuvres.

What is interesting in this account is the examination of the efficacy of the Society of Graphical and Allied Trade's (SOGAT) leadership in the context of the tensions and dilemmas that became acute as a consequence of this dispute. It was found that beyond the explanations for the print workers' defeat in the News International dispute, the actions of the SOGAT leadership stand out. This was characterised by division, lack of vision, errors of judgment, and differences between those leaders more inclined to mediate and those in favour of direct action. Additionally, it is argued that the unions involved entered into the dispute with News International without a strategy for victory. The lack of strategic vision and inner cohesiveness among leaders at all levels resulted in the failure to cement the collective interests of SOGAT members in a way that was conducive to mobilising workers in defence of jobs, and working conditions across the country.

Fantasia's (1988) Marxist account of three case-studies (one recognition campaign and two strikes) aims to ground class consciousness, or 'cultures of solidarity', within the dynamics of collective action and organisation against employers. It is argued that the outcome of a strike is of secondary importance and the significance in these examples of class conflict lie in the *processes* of solidarity. The object of the research is to investigate expressions of solidarity and collective action among American workers, focusing primarily on the 'dynamics of

mobilisation', and the complex processes of their formation. The study is relevant for this thesis as it is set in the context of developments in American industrial relations after the 'Taft-Hartley' Act in 1947. This legislation outlawed the closed shop as well as secondary action and solidarity strikes, both described as potent and proven weapons of class solidarity. Because of Taft-Hartley, by 1950 the possibility of the labour movement as a whole embodying a broad culture of solidarity had narrowed significantly. Like developments in UK industrial relations after 1979, industrial class conflict would continue, but on a very different field of battle.

In the first case-study Fantasia describes two 'wildcat' strikes he participated in while working in an iron foundry. These strikes were against the wishes of the plant union leadership, with alternative strike leaders emerging among the rank-and-file. These activists played an important role in mobilising the strikes and then spreading collectivism to other departments, using symbolic gestures designed to communicate and create solidarity to potential participants. Summarising these strikes it is argued that a *praxis* of solidarity emerged in opposition to the prevailing pattern of industrial relations and expressed itself in the dynamics of collective action and developing organisational network. This 'culture of solidarity' was not inherent among the workers, nor did it miraculously appear out of a vacuum. Rather, it was created within the context of a pre-existing pattern of active work-group social relationships. Crucially, in this case, when mobilising workers to strike the struggle within the workgroup proved to be as important as the struggle against the company.

While the second case-study relates to a union organising campaign by a group of women hospital workers, and like Karsh (1958), is useful for outlining the processes in which union organisers identify leaders inside the workplace to build membership, it is the third case-study set in the Clinton Corn processing plant in 1979 which provides a detailed analysis of a major

industrial dispute. While there had been occasional strikes in this company over the decades, by the mid-1970s the management began to adopt an aggressive style creating a particularly bitter labour relations atmosphere at the plant for an extended period. It was in this climate the union leadership recommended the membership reject a contract offer and called for a limited short protest strike.

As it was planned by the union leadership the protest strike was to be a completely controlled affair, and by declaring the limits of the strike action beforehand, management was made aware that it was not being challenged to a 'fight to the finish'. More likely, the strike was being planned as a gesture to the union membership rather than as a message to the management. However, as the strike got under way, the company placed advertisements in the local newspaper for permanent replacement workers and the resultant anger turned a brief protest stoppage into an 11-month strike. In Fantasia's analysis, rather than detail the day-to-day account of events, the key components of the strike community are outlined. This includes a discussion of activities on the picket line, the effect of the strike on family life and the crucial role of women supporting their striking partners, how morale was maintained during the course of the dispute, and the use of the Labour Temple Hall as both the strike 'command centre' and venue for social activities.

As well as these features, the impact of the strike on the wider community and the activities of the police are discussed, particularly their role in providing safe passage into the plant for replacement workers crossing the picket lines. Then the effect of the law is examined, specifically the granting of an injunction against mass picketing, before finally a discussion regarding the publishing of the strikers own newspaper, the 'Voice of Labour', published by the 'Concerned Citizens of Clinton' (wives of the strikers, other trade unionists) throughout

the dispute. Indeed, strikers considered the work of Concerned Citizens a crucial part of the mobilisation effort, with one retired worker describing them as the 'backbone of the strike'. In addition to publishing Voice of Labour the group collected food and raised money for the strike fund, conducted Sunday vigils and marches, as well as a weekly labor history study group.

Gouldner's (1954) in-depth case study of a wildcat strike in the sub-surface mining and surface factory processing sector draws attention to the multiple causes, both *latent* and *manifest* which led to this strike, as a means of first describing the events and then contributing to an understanding of why such strikes occur. The 'indulgency pattern' generating workers' satisfaction that existed in the company is highlighted, in that there existed an expectation of leniency from the management towards the workforce. However, economic developments in 1948, combined with a change of senior management, resulted in this indulgency pattern being violated as the new managers attempted to intensify production and install new machinery.

It is argued that these latent issues would find their manifest expression during a dispute over a wage claim as the wage claim was seen as legitimate, it did not challenge managerial prerogative in the plant, and it was easier for the national union to make the case for a wage claim rather than other changes in the plant. While this wage dispute was eventually settled, albeit with a brief unofficial walk out during the negotiations, the plant then entered a two year period of tension and after further changes to the management, the workforce walked out and stayed on strike for ten days, with no picketing at all. There were a variety of background factors such as technological change, new management that were not viewed as legitimate, a general build-up of grievances, and closer supervision. However, Gouldner

locates the issue that 'sparked' the strike as changes to a production process in which management tried to reduce a task from 20 to 2-4 minutes, and more specifically a personal disagreement between the engineer in charge of the project and one of the workers. This highlights the cumulative issues in the background to a dispute that may appear spontaneous.

Lane and Robert's (1971) approach was to attempt to see the strike at Pilkingtons Glass in 1970 through the eyes of its different groups of participants, including the members, the rank and file strike committee, shop stewards, union officials and company directors. Their account highlights the complexities of a strike situation and the tensions that can exist between members, shop stewards, officials, different levels of authority (branch, regional, national) within the union. They describe how the strike was initially spontaneous and unofficial and clearly began in opposition to union advice with the recommendations of union officials subsequently shouted down at works meetings. The strike then spread to other factories in the company, but this crucially was led by the rank and file, not the shop stewards. While the action was then made official at branch level, after initially urging a return to work, it was still not technically official as it needed national approval.

However, there was a lot of confusion at the outset, and shop stewards were reacting to events largely out of their control. The General Manufacturing Workers Union (GMWU) national officer also held a mass meeting and urged strikers to return to work declaring that the strike was unofficial, resulting in the union losing any 'leadership role' or influence in the strike, and by the end of the second week of the strike local support had drained away from the union completely. This resulted in the 'unofficial' Rank and File Strike Committee (RFSC) being formed to speak for the membership. While the union representatives had not started the strike, once the dispute had begun within two weeks the union had used the situation to

secure an increase of £3 per week for its members. Gradually the workers accepted a pay offer and the RFSC called the strike off.

The emergence of the RFSC is an interesting aspect of this strike, as it nor any part of it existed before the dispute. It was described as coming 'out of nowhere' largely as a reaction to discontent with the GMWU. In interviews with the members of the RFSC, it became clear that while they could be described as 'militant' in the context of the strike, most of them did not ordinarily see themselves in a perpetual struggle with management. Lane and Roberts categorise those involved either 'militants' or 'non-militant', and then sub-divides the militants into 'fatalists' and 'reformers'. However, in a situation such as a strike, where it becomes plainly obvious to everyone that a struggle is involved, the differences become submerged. Nevertheless, the differences between these types were to surface at different times during the strike, especially when tactics were being discussed, but it was not until the last week that they became clearly evident.

The dynamics involved in taking unofficial action are also explored by Gall (2003), albeit in the context of the legislation enacted after 1979 which was designed to prevent such activity. Postal workers in the Royal Mail, it was found, used unofficial action as a means of dealing with 'perishable disputes', allowing for an element of surprise and thus inhibiting management counter-preparations which would be possible if the required legal notification was given. Furthermore, lay officials (elected workplace representatives) preferred unofficial action as they were not forced to cede control to full-time officials quite so quickly. Postal workers thus provide some support for the 'agitator' theory of strikes in that many are organised and led by lay leaderships, however this is qualified by the fact that these workplace representatives have also opposed, limited or stopped strikes. Thus, calculations are made

about when best to strike and over which issues, and many activists testified that as many times they had sought to lead people out unofficially, they had to try to stop or prevent unofficial walkouts.

Unofficial strikes in the Royal Mail were therefore predominantly organised, premeditated and not spontaneous, even so they may have appeared to have been. The organisation of striking is the collective result of activists' action, where issues are explained to members in meetings or by activists moving around the shop floor, and as such very few strikes were 'wildcats', where the formal leaders have actually lost control. To navigate the legal provisions, one rep stated, 'We advise people to take care, we mustn't be seen to support or instigate unofficial action', thus Gall describes the situation as 'quasi-official', or 'pseudo wildcat', rather than 'unofficial-unofficial' (as in against stewards advice). Key to the preponderance of such strikes is the tradition of strong workplace trade unionism within the Royal Mail, and an attitude of 'walk first, negotiate later' among the workforce. In many instances, the balloting legislation has inclined postal workers to avoid its associated pitfalls (i.e. the 4-5 weeks it takes to organise) by taking immediate unofficial action on issues which they believe should be addressed urgently, like sackings, suspensions and imposed changes (Gall, 2003).

Seifert and Sibley's (2005) account of the 2002-4 industrial dispute in the UK Fire and Rescue Service was written in order to provide a timeline of events as a record of the action; to provide some analysis of the dispute, and to assess the causes and conduct of the strike itself within a broader setting of UK public sector industrial relations during New Labour's second term. Crucially, the study draws from interviews with Fire Brigade Union (FBU) officials and activists in 2004, attendance at two seminars for FBU officials and local officials spread over five days and other FBU conferences. Like Karsh (1982), they argue it is inevitable that in any

dispute the bulk of material comes from the union side, and it is therefore through the eyes of the union leadership, local and national that the story is told.

This study is important as it provides a detailed account of the dispute from an academic industrial relations perspective, and crucially is a rare account of a large-scale strike set in the contemporary post-1979 UK industrial relations context. For instance, strike tactics are discussed, and the debate over whether 'discontinuous action' ('a tactic for our times') rather than an all-out indefinite strike would be more effective. There was little support for an indefinite strike among the members, and the benefits of discontinuous action appeared to be that it kept employers alert, allowed for the interchange of action and negotiation, and it meant members' loss of pay was minimised. Furthermore, discontinuous action allowed the FBU to be more flexible as when an all-out strike is suspended that is a different inference. The need to ensure that strike action remains within the law is also a factor compared to the case studies above, for example in the ballots before industrial action, the notifications given to the employer of the dates and times of strikes, and while organising picket lines. As discussed in the previous chapter all these factors have changed the nature of strikes since the various pieces of legislation have been passed, and in this respect, the account is an excellent example of how the law *shapes* a dispute in contemporary industrial relations.

The study also draws attention to the crucial role public support can play in some disputes in light of the conventional wisdom regarding the pressure it can put on political decision makers, because it helps with membership morale and encourages the media to get behind the cause early on, and because in the public sector more specifically the public are the users of services. Yet, as Seifert and Sibley claim (2005) the evidence for such arguments is rather thin and it is difficult to see the mechanism between such support and the actual outcome of

a strike. Additionally, public opinion is a largely false construct, since there are many publics, and some matter more than others and ultimately the opinion that matters most for union members in a dispute is that of community, family, friends, and neighbours, and local community, other trade unionists and workers.

However, Kerr and Sachdev's (1992) analysis of the 1989 Ambulance dispute highlights how public opinion can be crucial in public sector disputes as unlike the private sector it can be political rather than profit related decisions that ultimately determine management practice. Crucially though, these workers faced another obstacle in their dispute – the Thatcher led Conservative Government who established a new norm throughout the 1980s and 1990s that regardless of the economic and social costs it should never be defeated. Believing industrial action alone would be insufficient the union in this dispute developed a major twin-track public relations strategy: in addition to the pressure created by the industrial action, the unions would try to make the government reconsider its offer by making it sufficiently unpopular through a public relations campaign. As a union briefing argued at the time: the media 'will be crucial to winning the dispute. That is why it is important that accident and emergency services should be maintained, and branches should take every available opportunity to go onto local radio, TV and talk to local newspaper reporters about the dispute.' Furthermore, the union commissioned private opinion polls which charted shifts in public opinion.

Nichol's (1992) account of the same Ambulance dispute in 1989 offers a counter-narrative to the preponderance of literature focusing on worker and union perspectives of industrial disputes and strikes. This is interesting in that it does throw light on the often neglected side of management strategies in disputes, in industrial relations strike literature at least, and in

doing so does highlight some of the financial constraints negotiators can have to operate in. For example, in this dispute the Ambulance workers claim was 17 percent, while the management side negotiators were aware the maximum the NHS could pay to staff covered by national negotiations outside pay review bodies was 6.5 percent. An interesting point by Nichols concerns the trade union sides who it is claimed are very critical of the fact NHS management before negotiations are given a maximum remit which they cannot exceed without further authority, and the detail of how they negotiate within that overall limit is for them to determine. Nichols argues it seems remarkable that the trade unions should believe that negotiations elsewhere (including the private sector) are conducted any differently as no private company gives its pay negotiators a blank cheque.

Finally, Taylor and Moore's (2019) account of the 2009-11 BA – BASSA dispute is a more recent example of a detailed case study of a major industrial dispute, written for the BASSA members involved, the wider trade union movement and for the purpose of making a distinctive contribution to the industrial relations literature on strikes and specifically to an understanding of the BA-BASSA dispute itself. The research is also contextualised within the wider context of developments in civil aviation, as well as company specific factors in British Airways, and as such is drawn upon in the pre-strike background context of this thesis in chapter five. Additionally, the study contributes to the industrial relations literature on the strike process, although is largely based on extensive interviews and testimonies with the cabin crew involved in the dispute.

Summary

This chapter began by arguing that the structural and institutional factors outlined in chapter two are not sufficient on their own for explaining the pattern of UK strike activity, and

attention must also be paid to the *social* processes involved in strike causation. Additionally, it was acknowledged that by taking into consideration the literature focusing on these issues it would be possible to gain an insight into the social organisation of conflict in the build up to a strike, as well as the strike 'process' itself when the action had commenced. With this in mind, the first section of the chapter discussed Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory, some of the literature building on Kelly, and Benford and Snow's (2000) discussion of framing during collective action. Although critiqued by Gall (1999; 2000), Fairbrother (2005), and Atzeni (2009; 2010) for inadequately theorising leadership, failing to consider alternative participative forms of union organisation, as well as the central assertion that 'injustice' should form the primary condition for mobilising workers; Kelly's theory does at least provide a theoretical framework which can be used to start exploring these important issues. Regardless of whether injustice or alternative concepts are used as a 'frame' by union activists and/or officials to organise and mobilise workers into taking collective action against their employers, or even if this process is initiated outside of these formal union channels, the insights gained from mobilisation theory supports Hyman's (1989) observation discussed in the previous chapter that for conflict to take a collective character it is *usually* necessary for someone, at least initially, to take a lead in giving an organised form to workers discontents. Consequently, the decline of trade union membership, density and workplace representation in the UK has resulted in a situation where there is no longer this layer of activists who are able to take such lead, and as such this *contributes* to the continuing low levels of strike activity.

To explore these issues in greater detail, the chapter then moved on to look at a number of important in-depth case-studies which illuminate these social processes by incorporating qualitative research methods into their analysis. The work of Nichols and Armstrong (1976), Beynon (1984), Batstone et al (1977, 1978) and Edwards and Scullion (1982) are useful in this

regard as that they include comprehensive accounts of the day-to-day activities of workers, union members and their workplace representatives, and the interaction at this micro-level with other macro- levels in their respective unions. Such literature complements Kelly (1998) and others by showing how different workplace environments influence whether or not workers mobilise to strike, as well as providing concrete examples of how strike situations are 'created' (Batstone et al, 1978). This involved shop-stewards putting forward different arguments in favour of or in opposition to going on strike, further reinforcing the subjective element transforming individual discontent into collective industrial action.

The next section of the chapter examined some of the important literature dealing with the strike process itself, beginning with an outline of Hiller (1928) and Meredeen's (1988) attempts at providing analytical models applicable to all but very short strikes. However, to gain further insight into organisation and dynamics of strikes the chapter then turned to a number of analytical case-studies which like the workplace studies also include qualitative research methods as a means of incorporating the views, strategies and perceptions of those involved. While Gouldner (1954), Lane and Roberts (1971) and Gall (2003) are significant in their contribution to the debate concerning the nature of unofficial, or wildcat strikes, it is the work of Karsh (1958), Foner (1977); Hartley et al (1983), Fantasia (1988) and Seifert and Sibley (2005) with their primary focus on the actual *conduct* of the strike itself which move the debate on from causation to analysing actual strike 'processes' of specific cases in detail. Additionally, as these accounts secured access to the centres of decision making and action in their respective disputes, they are able to incorporate the activities of the actual strike organisers themselves and as such fill in some of the gaps left in Hiller (1928) and Meredeen's (1988) analytical frameworks.

Taking into consideration the literature reviewed in both this and the previous chapter, it is possible to build up a wide-ranging overview of the current state of knowledge regarding strikes in the UK. This includes a broad understanding of the structural, institutional, *and* social determinants explaining both the causes of strikes and fluctuating pattern over time, as well as the decline and historically low levels experienced in recent decades. Additionally, by examining the important literature focusing specifically on the strike process rather than causation and mobilisation, it is possible to gain an insight into the activities and conduct of the union activists themselves, both in the workplace and at different levels in trade unions during a strike.

However, what is notable in this discussion is the fundamental change that has occurred in UK industrial relations over the last four decades, as outlined in chapter two. As such, while still of major significance in any analysis of strikes and industrial conflict, it must be pointed out that apart from some significant exceptions (for example Gall, 2003; Seifert and Sibley, 2005; Taylor and Moore, 2019) the literature discussed above is set in a very different industrial relations context and is therefore unable to take into account the changing 'character' or 'practice' (Edwards, 1995; Kessler and Bayliss, 1998) of industrial action brought about by the post-1979 legislation on strikes, as well as broader and more fundamental developments in UK political economy.

In this context, an examination of the causes of a major dispute, how workers are mobilised to go on strike, what arguments and methods are used in this social organisation, as well as how strike leaders and activists navigate the terrain of the legislation, the strategies and tactics used during a strike, and how morale is maintained during an extended stoppage would be a timely, significant, and relevant contribution to the industrial relations literature. This will

add to the industrial relations literature on strikes more broadly, and more specifically address the gap in the literature concerning the organisation of the strike once it has commenced (the strike process). Therefore to explore these issues the thesis will ask the following overarching research question: *How do trade union workplace representatives and officials organise effective strike action?* The following chapter will go on to outline the research philosophy and approach to theory development, as well as outlining in more detail the rationale for focusing on the Mixed Fleet dispute.

Chapter Four: Research strategy, design, and methods

Introduction

The thesis will now move on from the discussion of the literature in the previous chapters and consider a number of issues relating to the conduct of the research undertaken. The first section will outline the critical realist philosophy underpinning the research, as a means of combining the crucial objective and subjective elements necessary for the investigation into incidences of strike activity. Building on the critical realist research philosophy, section two will discuss theory development and outline the benefits of using the abductive approach. The section will end with a discussion of Langley's (1999) strategies for theorising from process data, which alongside critical realism and abduction will inform the structure of the research findings and subsequent analysis.

Section three will consider the rationale for focusing on one case in detail, and from this the potential for generalising to wider developments in the field of study. The section will then move on to outline specifically why the BA-Mixed Fleet dispute was selected, focusing on the atypical nature of this dispute, the legal context, the relative inexperience of the strike leaders,

union membership growth during the dispute, and crucially access to participants. In section four, the main research methods used in the case study are outlined, focusing on documentary sources and the semi-structured interviews carried out at workplace, regional and national level in the Unite trade union. Section five considers research ethics and the related issues of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity when carrying out qualitative research. Section six will move on to discuss how access was gained to the interview participants, and a number of the problems that were encountered during this process. The eighth section will outline how the interviews were conducted, how they were prepared for, as well as including a reflection on the process. Finally, in section nine, research issues relating to validity and reliability will be briefly discussed.

Research philosophy

The review of the literature in the previous chapter concluded that a fuller understanding of strikes can only be achieved by combining a study of the *objective* social and economic circumstances in which they occur with *subjective* studies of the beliefs and attitudes of the workers involved (see Batstone et al, 1978; Karsh, 1982; Coates and Topham, 1988; Fantasia, 1988; Hyman, 1989; Kelly, 1998; Darlington, 2009). This relates to the important observation that strikes are both a structural/institutional *and* social phenomenon and occur primarily where workers mobilise collectively to resist or influence the actions of their employers. Thus, while the political and economic factors previously discussed can have an influence on the broader trends of strikes over time by generating grievances or a general level of dissatisfaction among workers, whether or not this produces a strike in a particular organisation also depends on the mobilising capacity of the workers involved, as well as their willingness and opportunity to act (Batstone et al, 1978; Kelly, 1998; Williams, 2014).

Building on this discussion, and the important case studies of strikes incorporating worker's perceptions within a fuller investigation of the broader context of the particular industrial disputes studied; (for example, Gouldner, 1954; Lane and Roberts, 1972; Karsh, 1982; Batstone et al, 1978; Hartley et al, 1983; Fantasia, 1988; Siefert and Sibley, 2005; Taylor and Moore, 2019), this thesis will adopt the research philosophy of 'critical realism'. For Edwards (2006) critical realism is an approach to research philosophy that seeks an alternative to the two dominant positions of positivism and relativism/social constructionism. Relating to the philosophical stance of the natural scientist, positivism entails working with an observable objective social reality to produce causal relationships and law-like generalisations (Saunders et al, 2016). At the other end of the spectrum, social constructionism focuses primarily on subjective *social processes* through which people create meaning, and as such tends to ignore the influence of the wider structures existing outside of processes of social construction (Edwards; 2006). In contrast, a critical realist approach would argue that while it is the case that an *objective* world exists independently of people's perceptions, language, or imagination, crucially, part of that world also consists of *subjective* interpretations influencing the ways in which the world is perceived and experienced. An appreciation of this becomes important when observing 'open' events such as strikes, as the entities interacting to cause their occurrence cannot be studied or understood in isolation from the environment in which they take place (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014).

For Bhaskar (1989, cited in Saunders et al, 2016: 140), it is not possible to really understand what is going on in the social world if we do not also appreciate the social structures that have given rise to the phenomena under examination. Therefore, critical realist research focuses on searching for an explanation of organisational events by looking at the underlying causes

and mechanisms through which *deep* social structures shape everyday organisational life (Edwards et al, 2014).

As Hyman (1989) argues, incidences of industrial action are not simply the mechanical outcome of major structural forces, and a more complete analysis can only be achieved by also taking into consideration the perceptions, intentions and strategies of the men and women involved. Yet, it is also the case that human action itself is a product of these broader material and social conditions which can influence and constrain what can be achieved through individual or collective action. 'Structure' and human 'action' in this context are therefore dialectically related with each acting upon and influencing the other, and a focus on both is essential as a means of exploring the complexities of any given incidence of industrial action. The next section of this chapter will consider how the critical realist philosophy informed the approach taken to theory development.

Approach to theory development

Saunders et al (2016) argue there are three main approaches to theory development; deduction, induction, and abduction, and the first two will be considered briefly before outlining the suitability of the abductive approach for this thesis in light of the overarching critical realist approach to research philosophy taken. With deductive reasoning, a clear theoretical position is adopted from the outset, often developed from the reading of the academic literature and a research strategy is designed to test that theory. The purpose of this is to explain *causal relationships* between concepts and variables, and overwhelmingly this is done by collecting quantitative data. Deductive research is normally grounded in the positivist approach to research philosophy discussed above, with its nomological search for regularity and laws (Edwards, 2006).

In contrast, inductive researchers tend to immerse themselves primarily in the facts of specific cases, and from these facts theories or rules are suggested to draw inferences about behaviour generally (Strauss and Whitfield, 1998). Inductive research starts by collecting data to explore a phenomenon with theory then generated from the research findings. Rather than collecting large amounts of quantitative data as would be the case in a deductive approach, researchers from the inductive tradition generally use qualitative research methods in their attempt at understanding how humans interpret their social world, using a variety of methods to collect data in order to establish different views of the phenomena under consideration (Saunders, 2016).

However, rather than deductively moving from theory to data, or inductively from data to theory, the abductive approach moves back and forth between the two, and in doing so, offers more flexibility by potentially combining both within the same piece of research. This becomes important when studying contemporary incidences of strikes as while it is possible to locate a range of theories in the existing literature, the industrial relations context has changed significantly over the last four decades and abduction opens up the possibility of modifying existing theory as the analysis of research findings is carried out (Ackroyd and Karlson, 2014; Saunders, 2016).

Similarly, Langley (1999) argues that rigid adherence to purely deductive (theory driven) or purely inductive (data driven) strategies is unnecessarily restrictive, and instead research should utilise both approaches iteratively and/or simultaneously as it proceeds. By acting abductively there is scope for building on existing constructs to develop new relationships and designing research that selectively takes concepts from different theoretical traditions and

adapts them to the data generated. Additionally, ideas from the research data can be attached to theoretical perspectives drawn from the literature and potentially enrich them.

Langley (1999) goes on to outline seven important 'sensemaking' strategies to help theorise from process data, of which three will be utilised in the following chapters of this thesis. The first strategy is the construction of a detailed account of events to build a 'narrative story' to provide the unique historical context necessary for supporting the subsequent analysis of the research. Additionally, a chronology of the key events is useful for communicating the 'richness of the context' for the readers, with the potential to move from mere description to explanation as the plot or generative mechanisms are identified (Langley et al, 2013).

However, to avoid ending up with a 'thin' theoretical contribution based on an account of marginal interest to those who were not involved, research needs to make readers feel they have learned something of wider value which requires going beyond a straight narrative. With this in mind, the 'temporal bracketing' strategy will be used to make better sense of the narrative, identifying important phases and periods to structure the description of events. The decomposition of data into successive adjacent periods enables the explicit examination of how actions of one period lead to changes in the context that will affect action in subsequent periods (ibid, 703).

As well as this, the 'alternative templates strategy' will be utilised in which alternative templates (or different theories) are drawn from the literature in order to explain the different temporal phases of the dispute, for example, the legal context, theories of mobilisation and framing, economic and institutional factors and so on. In this sensemaking strategy the researcher proposes several alternative interpretations of the same events based on different but internally coherent sets of a priori theoretical premises. He or she then assesses the extent

to which each theoretical template contributes to a satisfactory explanation. Because this strategy draws theory from outside the data it is essentially deductive, though, the different interpretations are less like true "tests" of theory and more like alternate complementary readings that focus on different variables and levels of analysis and reveal different types of dynamics.

Research design: The case study approach

To explore the broader research aims and answer the research questions emanating from the discussion of the strike literature, the decision was made to use the case study approach to research design. While for Kitay and Callus (1998: 105) 'discrete incidents, such as a particular industrial dispute, require a case study almost by definition', Gerring (2004; 2007) goes further and argues that by focusing attention on one case intensively and in detail, the possibility emerges of gaining a better understanding of wider developments in the field of study. Furthermore, when considering the critical realist philosophy and abductive logic underpinning the thesis, a single case study allows the researcher to isolate and examine the generative mechanisms (social processes) involved, while also considering the broader objective organisational context (Ackroyd and Karlson, 2014).

Flyvbjerg (2006) provides a clear rationale for focusing on a single case, and the possibilities for generalising from such research to broader developments in the given field of study. Indeed, it is argued that any social science discipline is ultimately strengthened by the execution of a greater number of case studies, whereas a discipline without such exemplars is an ineffective one. Fundamentally, Flyvbjerg contends that the strategic choice of the case is crucial when considering its generalisability, and this point will be returned to below when the specific reasons for focusing on the BA – Mixed Fleet dispute are outlined in more detail.

Furthermore, it is entirely possible to summarise and develop general propositions and theories on the basis of single case studies as they often contain a substantial element of 'thick', in-depth narrative, which in turn may uncover a particularly rich problem for analysis yielding fresh insights. The chapter will now turn to the reasons why the 2016-17 BA - Mixed Fleet industrial dispute was chosen as the sole focus of the research.

As I conducted a review of the literature in the early stages of the research and had decided on the preliminary ideas for research strategy and design, the issue of which case study or studies of a strike to explore arose. Initially I considered a strike I was involved in as a Unite union workplace representative prior to commencing the thesis, concerning the unfair dismissal of two senior union representatives. However, while the strike was an overwhelming success and the two union representatives were re-instated, this was a very short two-day strike involving relatively few workers and aside from some very brief reports (see Nias, 2015; Noble, 2015; Qureshi, 2015) was not covered in the media in any detail at all. Therefore, in a project of this size if I was going to include an account of this dispute I would have to conduct case studies of some other strikes and apply a comparative approach to the findings. As well as this, I was concerned about the practical and ethical aspects of researching a dispute I had been so closely involved in myself as a union representative, and there were other personal, and union/work related issues concerning the fallout from this episode of conflict that made it difficult to proceed with this idea.

As I was considering these factors, and the all-important issue of gaining access to an industrial dispute that could be of value and interest, I was also following events at British Airways as an industrial dispute over pay among the 'Mixed Fleet' category of cabin crew based at London's Heathrow Airport had escalated into periods of discontinuous strike action from January 2017

onwards. The strikes were related to the 2009-11 industrial dispute between British Airways and their cabin crew organised in the British Airlines Stewards and Stewardesses Association (BASSA); a branch of the Unite union and has been described as one of the most protracted and bitter industrial disputes in recent years (Darlington, 2017). As part of the settlement agreement between Unite and BA in June 2011 the union had reluctantly conceded the introduction of a new 'Mixed Fleet' of cabin crew who would be employed on the basis of inferior terms and conditions to colleagues in the established Eurofleet and Worldwide fleet at BA (Harvey and Turnbull, 2017). Against this background, and in an attempt at initially closing the gap in wages between the Mixed Fleet and the other crews, thousands of union members (organised in the Mixed Fleet Unite branch of Unite the Union) embarked on a series of strikes totalling 85 days between January and August 2017 - a period of industrial action which eventually became the longest running aviation strike in UK history (Allday, 2017a).

I decided to explore the possibility of focusing solely on a case study of this industrial dispute and there were several factors that justified this decision. First, this was an example of a significant 'trial of strength' (Hyman, 1989) and as highlighted in chapter two such strikes have been very infrequent since the early 1990s in the UK, and even more so in the private sector (Lyddon, 2007, 2015). Second, this dispute was in progress when the 2016 Trade Union Act became law on March 1st, 2017 (Labour Research Department, 2018), and this would be important as the effects of the new legislation has not been analysed in the literature yet in any detail. Third, the composition of the cabin crew were overwhelmingly young (the average age of union membership was under 30), and for the majority of workers this was probably their first involvement in a trade union and almost certainly the first time most would have taken industrial action against their employer, thus the dynamics involved in mobilising a group of workers from this demographic warranted attention. Fourth, the relationship

between strikes and union membership growth could be explored due to the fact that as the dispute progressed throughout 2017 Unite recruited thousands of members (Allday, 2017a). Fifth, in practical terms because of the length and size of the strike there was a wealth of documentary evidence generated that I could use to build up a picture of the dispute to place any qualitative research material within the appropriate and objective context. Finally, and crucially, through my own contacts in the Unite union and Keele University I would potentially be able gain access to key Unite officials and representatives (at workplace, regional and national level) who organised and led the strike to undertake qualitative research.

Research methods

Having established at this stage that it could be possible to secure access to a number of people across various levels in the Unite union, attention turned to what methods would be used in the main stage of the research. One of the benefits of conducting in-depth research into a specific case is the ability to utilise a range of research methods, both quantitative and qualitative as a means of gathering the required data to analyse in the pre-dispute background, in constructing a narrative account of the strikes, as well as analysing the perceptions of those involved (Kitay and Callus, 1998). As O'Mahoney and Vincent (2014: 15) argue, critical realist research should incorporate data of different sorts, quantitative and qualitative, historical and current – indeed anything that the researcher has good reason to think 'makes a difference'. Therefore, the critical realist approach to research methods is flexible and adaptive by comparison with other researchers, using different techniques at different times or even at different points in the same research project – where possible combining information from different sources (Ackroyd and Karlsson, 2014).

In light of this discussion, the two primary research methods used to gather ~~the~~ data was a range of documentary sources, and a series of semi-structured interviews with the key organisers of the strikes at workplace, regional and national level in the Unite union. The chapter will now consider each method in turn. To build up a picture of the dispute in the initial stages of the research, and then in order to include a chapter incorporating the pre-dispute background context as well another chapter which provides a narrative account of the dispute, I used a range of 'primary' and 'secondary' documentary sources. Primary sources are those which came into existence *during* the period of research, whereas secondary sources are interpretations of events of that period, often based on primary sources (Duffy, 2010). For example, primary sources used in research could include diaries, meeting minutes, union journals, staff magazines, and newspapers. In contrast, secondary sources can include books, theses and relevant academic journal articles (Patmore, 1998).

While I was applying for ethical clearance at Keele University as a prelude to carrying out interviews, I needed to design an interview schedule. However, for a dispute as protracted as this one, covering almost an entire year with many separate periods of strikes, negotiations, legal challenges, as well as a range of other activities, some knowledge of the case was required before going into the field to gather qualitative evidence. To achieve this, I researched as much of the strike as possible using the available information in order to provide enough material to ground the interviews in the overall context of what had occurred over the 11 months of conflict. Subsequently, I was able to use and build upon the information gathered to structure both a pre-dispute history covering the longer term causes of the strikes in chapter five, as well as an overview of the 11 month dispute in chapter six which both served to contextualise the findings from the qualitative research carried out (see Langley, 1999 above on the usefulness of narrative stories).

Primary documents used include statements made by the Unite union which were available in the archive section of their website detailing every stage of the dispute as it progressed, minutes of Executive Council meetings that were relevant to the strikes, as well as other relevant information on the Unite website. Additionally, the Mixed Fleet Unite branch itself has a good website with links to primary sources such as newsletters from the branch committee and other valuable information. This was supplemented by accounts in a number of broadsheet newspapers such as *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, *The Financial Times*, and other on-line sources, for example *The Conversation*, *Counter-fire*, *The Huffington Post*, as well as industry specific sites who covered the dispute.

Crucially, accounts and articles of most episodes of industrial disputes are always well covered in the various daily and weekly socialist newspapers and publications in the UK, and I was able to access a great deal of primary material from sources such as *Socialist Worker*, *The Morning Star*, *The Socialist*, *Solidarity (The Alliance for Worker's Liberty)* and others. When accessing such documents, it is important to consider the different perceptions, biases and political views of the journalists writing them. As Patmore (1998) argues, regardless of what documents the researcher uses, *people* have written them, and they contain their authors' interpretation of events and biases which must be considered. Furthermore, it is important to not let your own bias guide you in selecting documents only from your own perspective. For instance, while the various 'socialist' sources provided information relating to the dispute, and certainly more than that covered in the broadsheet newspapers or broadcasters such as the BBC, ITV, Channel Four or Sky News, there are a range of political opinions involved relating to different interpretations of Marxism, Trotskyism, and the various factions that exist in the trade union and labour movement in the UK and internationally.

However as I was aware of these sometimes intricate political differences, for instance the tendency to constantly find fault with the so-called union bureaucracy in Trotskyist publications, and the obvious biases displayed towards workers on strike contained in 'establishment' media sources, I was able to 'read between the lines' in the various accounts in order to gather the information required. As the dispute had only just been settled when the research began, there was not at this stage any secondary sources to use to build up a picture of the strikes and I had to rely solely on the primary documents outlined above. By contrast, when researching material to use in chapter five in order to understand the longer-term root causes of the dispute, I was able to utilise a range of journal articles and books relating to the civil aviation industry generally, and British Airways more specifically. Additionally, to gain an appreciation of members views, as well as researching the above media publications I also made use of previously published surveys in the literature and from Unite and where possible have included information from online forums in which many of the issues relating to the causes of the strikes were discussed.

However, while membership opinion is always crucial in any strike analysis, I identified interviews with the key representatives and officials in Unite at workplace, regional and national level involved in the dispute as central to the main stage of gathering qualitative research material. As Seifert and Sibley (2005: 15) argue in their justification for basing their study of the 2002-4 firefighters dispute primarily on the perceptions and testimonies of the union leadership, both local and national, 'It is inevitable that in any dispute the bulk of the material comes from the union side'.

Interviews are the primary means of accessing the experiences and subjective views of participants often resulting in detailed, vivid and inclusive accounts of events (Whipp, 1998).

Structured and semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to tick or circle responses to a previously prepared schedule, generating a set of responses that can be fairly easily recorded, summarised and analysed. However, a rigid and formal structure can lead the researcher to miss out on potentially important information. In contrast, unstructured interviews may produce a wealth of valuable data but require a great deal of expertise to control and a great deal of time to analyse. Conversation around a topic may be interesting and produce valuable insights into a problem, but it has to be remembered that interviews are more than just an interesting conversation. With these considerations in mind, I decided to use 'semi-structured' interviews as opposed to a structured or completely unstructured approach. The aim was to allow interviewees freedom to talk about what was of central significance to them, while imposing an overall structure to ensure all the topics I considered crucial were also covered in the interviews (Bell, 2010). How the interviews were conducted will be returned to in greater detail below, but first it is necessary to discuss the important issues of research ethics and gaining access as a prelude to the interview process.

Research ethics

Historically there are many studies which have caused harm to participants resulting in various guidelines on social research relating to ethics (Punch 1998). This has resulted in academic institutions, including Keele University, ensuring postgraduate research students adhere to specific ethical guidelines and practices. Therefore, before conducting any interviews I had to consider the potential ethical impact of my research and gain clearance from the university's Ethical Review Panel. In order to do this, I designed an 'information sheet' (see Appendix 2) to hand out to participants which contained a brief summary of the research and its broad aims, why they have been chosen as a potential participant, as well information relating to what

happens if they decided to take part. Included in this was an explanation that the interview would be recorded and then transcribed if they agreed, and where this information would be held. It was also stated that only the researcher would have access to the both the recordings and the transcribed material.

Additionally, the information sheet explained that every effort would be made to maintain the anonymity of the participant when it came to using their interviews in the findings chapter, and as such generic terms would be used, for example, Regional Officer, Workplace Rep, or National Officer. To ensure that the participants fully consented to this, I also included a 'consent form' (see Appendix 2) along with the information sheet in which I asked participants to tick a number of boxes and then sign to confirm they had read and understood the information sheet, that they agreed to take part in the study, they understood that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any time, that they agreed for the interview to be recorded, and finally, that any comments used would be anonymised before being included in the completed thesis.

Gaining Access

As I had decided to base my case study on the Mixed Fleet dispute while it was still in progress, I was presented with a unique research opportunity to attend some of the events that were unfolding as the conflict was reaching its critical phase (although I was not to know this at the time), during July and August 2017. Initially, I contacted one of Unite's Regional Officers who was coordinating the action and arranged to meet at a demonstration the Mixed Fleet Unite (MFU) reps had organised outside Parliament on the 12th July 2017. I arrived in Parliament Square to the scene of around 100 cabin crew waving Unite flags and banners and waiting to be addressed by various Members of Parliament (MPs) from the Labour Party, including the

then Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP, and veteran ‘left-winger’ Dennis Skinner MP. I introduced myself to some of the cabin crew, and said I had arranged to meet the contact, and immediately struck up a conversation with one of the activists. After explaining what I was there for and the basic premise of my research, the activist gave me his contact details and we arranged to speak at a later date.

After this conversation, I met with the Regional Officer and discussed the strike and my research objectives, and I was invited to attend one of the ‘picket lines’¹ and the strike headquarters at Bedfont Football Club on the perimeter of Heathrow Airport. As well as getting a ‘feel’ for the dispute and getting the opportunity to observe some of the ways the pickets were organised, the idea was I could also be introduced to other key activists by the union official. As a result of this, I travelled to the Bedfont headquarters on one of the strike days in July and was taken down to a picket line by one of the branch committee officers and observed the strike organisation for myself. Additionally, I was introduced to other key activists and spoke to some of the members on strike and through these initial contacts I was able to start conversations around whether they would like to participate in the research.

Conducting the interviews

As discussed above, to prepare for the interviews I carried out some preliminary research using primary documents to ensure I had a broad understanding of the dispute and was able to conduct interviews effectively. I needed a framework to be able to construct the interview schedules although a semi-structured approach was used which also allowed the participants space to discuss what was important to them (see appendix 2). After carrying out some

¹ Although referred to in most media reports, and by many involved in the strikes as ‘picket lines’, these were actually small protests by striking cabin crew in agreed areas at Heathrow Airport, a discussion that will be returned to in greater detail in Chapter Seven.

preliminary discussions by phone, I then travelled to London and conducted the first interviews in person, and they lasted between 1.5 to 2 hours. These interviews were conducted in Unite's head office in Holborn as well as in a cafe, and in all three cases I was able to record the interview which I then transcribed in full afterwards.

After interviewing these key participants, I was invited to attend a Branch Committee Meeting at Unite's office near Heathrow Airport where a number of key activists from the dispute would be in attendance. At the meeting I made a brief presentation explaining the rationale behind the research to the Branch Committee, and then had an informal chat about the strikes with the committee. Like the events I had earlier observed during the strike, this discussion was useful in gaining further insights into what had occurred in the dispute from their perspective, although for ethical reasons I made it clear that I would not include any of the comments from this conversation and would instead organise interviews with those who wanted to participate. It was important to do this as I needed to gain the trust of any potential participants, and while the Branch Committee were comfortable discussing the strikes with me this was entirely on the understanding that the conversation was 'off the record'.

I gave my details to those present, and in return the Branch Committee members gave me their contact details, and it was decided that if anyone wanted to participate they could contact me by email or phone. Unfortunately, only one interview came from this process, although it was a very important interview with a key workplace representative/branch official who was central in the organisation of the strikes and was involved at every stage throughout the entirety of the dispute. Additionally, in turn this interview resulted in three more contacts, of which one responded, and I interviewed this person as well. After a few months passed I emailed the members of the Branch Committee one more time and asked again if they had

considered taking part in the interviews, although I got either no response or some who said they were too busy.

Finally, some of the initial contacts got back in touch and I carried out some more interviews either in person or using the 'Facebook Messenger' video function that some of the reps were comfortable with. After transcribing the interviews and reading through them I decided to contact the General Secretary of Unite Len McCluskey by email to try and arrange an interview, as some of the important issues that were being discussed related to him specifically and the direction Unite had taken union under three terms as General Secretary. He responded to my request, and I was able to carry out an hour long interview online which covered the issues I was interested in.

There were many problems I encountered trying to conduct research into the Mixed Fleet dispute, and this relates to the conflictual nature of industrial relations in most strike situations. As Fantasia (1988) argues, access to such settings can be enormously difficult with both sides standing to lose by having been overly trusting of an outsider whose data may be used against them in some way. Moreover, workers and others with relatively little resources and power can be highly mistrustful of anyone with a notepad, tape recorder, or clip board. In the case of British Airways this was compounded by a history of trade union representatives being victimised for carrying out their statutory duties during periods of industrial action, a theme that will be returned to in the following chapter when the industrial relations context between BA and BASSA will be discussed in greater detail (Ewing, 2011; Taylor and Moore, 2015, 2019).

Additionally, I began the process of contacting potential participants one year after the Mixed Fleet dispute had been settled and as many of the contacts were still working for the company

perhaps they were unwilling to talk about the dispute for fear of reprisal. Having worked in a similar environment myself and been active as a union rep during an intense period of industrial conflict, I understood what it is like to return to work afterwards and then try to resume some form of a working relationship with the same management you have been opposed to during the dispute.

It became apparent that many were worried about being interviewed even when I promised anonymity, and this was the case when I attended the Branch Committee meeting. In the meeting, committee members were very enthusiastic about being involved and conducting interviews, although when it came to it only one person actually followed through with participating, despite a number of email and text conversations. I was informed that some of the reps were indeed worried about participating in case there were any repercussions.

One of the ways I was able to gain access and arrange the interviews I did carry out, was to rely on my previous experience in Unite as workplace rep, health and safety rep, Branch Secretary, learning rep, and more recently undertaking some case work for the union, standing in for Regional Officers across the East Midlands. As well as being one of the organisers of the strike in my own workplace to reinstate the unfairly dismissed senior Unite reps, I felt this gave me a certain amount of credibility and empathy for what the Mixed Fleet cabin crew were going through which I tried to convey in conversations. Eventually I conducted eight in-depth interviews with the central strike organisers at workplace, regional and national level in Unite. These workplace representatives sometimes held roles in the Mixed Fleet Unite Branch and were involved in all aspects of the dispute and as such provided a wealth of information for the findings chapter. As well as this, two Unite officers at regional level involved in organising the strikes were interviewed, and the General Secretary of Unite

which covered the important issues from the perspective of the national level in the union. The workplace representatives had a range of trade union experience between them lasting from four years to only becoming a representative as the dispute commenced. They were however all new to trade unionism before they started working for BA as Mixed Fleet cabin crew. The Regional Officers had lengthier experiences within the trade union movement as both had previously held roles as shop-stewards/workplace representatives and as full-time officers for many years.

Research Issues: Validity and reliability

Kitay and Callus (1998) argue that one of the advantages of case studies is that the quantity of information collected combined with the ability to probe beneath the surface of a case enhances the validity of the information that is obtained. However, case studies are often viewed as less reliable than other approaches because of the difficulty in replicating the findings. By their very nature, each case study is unique, and as much will depend on the individual researcher the potential for bias is always a possibility. Furthermore, as it is difficult to subject the findings of case studies to thorough scrutiny, they often go unchallenged because of the time and effort that would be required to replicate the study, if indeed this were possible at all. This relates to whether another researcher would be able to gain similar access, as well as the fact that they would encounter a situation that has changed in at least some respects. As Yin (2018) contends, in reality opportunities for repeating a case study rarely occur, however, the research should still be carried out to reflect a concern over reliability.

Summary

This chapter has outlined the critical realist philosophy underpinning the research as well as the benefits of adopting an abductive approach to theory development. Building on this discussion it introduced Langley's (1999) strategies for theorising from process data which inform the structure of the chapters that follow. The chapter proceeded to discuss the research design and why the case study approach has been chosen, as well as the justification for selecting the Mixed Fleet dispute to explore in order to generate the data to answering the research question stated at the end of chapter three. The research methods used in the case study were then outlined, focusing on documentary sources and semi-structured interviews at workplace, regional and national level in the Unite trade union, before considering research ethics and the related issues of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity when carrying out qualitative research. The chapter then moved on to discuss how access to the interview participants was secured and some of the problems encountered during this process. Next, a discussion of how the interviews were conducted was included as well as an explanation of the preparation carried out and a reflection on the process. Finally, the research issues of validity and reliability were briefly discussed.

The following chapters will now focus on the research undertaken based on a range of documentary sources and a number of semi-structured interviews carried out with the key organisers of the Mixed Fleet Dispute. Building on Langley (1999), chapter six will outline a narrative account of the dispute to provide the context for the findings generated from the qualitative research which will be addressed in chapter seven. However, before proceeding to these chapters, it is crucial first to consider some of the longer-term issues underpinning the Mixed Fleet dispute and it is to this discussion that the following chapter will now turn.

Chapter Five: The pre-dispute context

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to provide the appropriate background context to the Mixed Fleet dispute between British Airways (BA) and their cabin crew organised in the Mixed Fleet branch of Unite the Union (Unite), which took place between November 2016 and October 2017. An overview of the dispute itself will follow in chapter six as a means of outlining the key events that took place in the build up to the dispute, the 11 months of conflict, as well the eventual settlement and aftermath. This largely narrative account is necessary to contextualise the findings presented in chapter seven, which have emerged from the in-depth semi-structured interviews with key trade union representatives involved at workplace, regional and national level in Unite. However, before moving on in these chapters to analyse the period of conflict in greater detail, it is necessary to first discuss a number of important longer-term issues preceding and underlying the dispute. The chapter will begin by locating the establishment of Mixed Fleet in June 2010 as a separate category to existing cabin crew at BA, and employed on inferior pay and conditions, within broader developments taking place in global civil aviation since the late 1970s. An understanding of this is essential in explaining first, *why* BA implemented the ‘two-tier’ approach towards their cabin crew workforce, and second, how once this had finally been achieved it *underpinned* the company’s behaviour in the years leading up to and during the Mixed Fleet dispute.

The next section will move on to examine how BA responded to these wider global and sectoral factors impacting civil aviation, and especially the so-called ‘legacy’ airlines (those founded long before the deregulation of the industry after the late 1970s) (Bamber et al, 2009). After briefly outlining the history of BA throughout the 20th century - from inception to

nationalisation, then privatisation - the focus will turn to the industrial relations environment between BA and the main cabin crew trade union, the British Airlines Stewards and Stewardesses Association (BASSA) organised as a branch of the Transport and General Workers Union (TGWU), and then Unite following merger between the TGWU and Amicus in 2007. After discussing a number of the important disputes and events within this relationship, the section will then outline the 2009-11 industrial dispute between BA and BASSA, a period of bitter and prolonged conflict of which one significant outcome was the reluctant acceptance by BASSA of Mixed Fleet's existence (Darlington, 2017).

The chapter will end by discussing the new Mixed Fleet category of cabin crew as it emerged during and in the immediate aftermath of the aforementioned 2009-11 dispute, the two-tier system of pay behind its formation, as well as the inferior working conditions in comparison to the established cabin crew employed in the Worldwide and Eurofleet. This last section will cover the early years of Mixed Fleet up to 2015, as Unite recruited enough members to sign a recognition agreement with BA in 2013 for Mixed Fleet cabin crew. After recognition was won, the newly formed Mixed Fleet Unite (MFU) branch started the process of challenging BA over their member's low pay and inferior working conditions over the following years in comparison to their colleagues in Eurofleet and Worldwide. This ultimately sets the scene for the 2016-17 industrial dispute between MFU and BA which will then be explored in greater detail in chapters six and seven.

The global civil aviation industry

It is important to locate the longer-term causes of both the establishment of the Mixed Fleet cabin crew by BA in 2010, *and* the 2016-17 dispute itself, within broader developments in the political economy of global civil aviation since the late 1970s. Crucial to this is an

understanding of the various factors which led BA, especially after Willie Walsh was appointed as Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the company in 2005 (British Airways, 2017a), to explore the possibility of creating a new separate category of cabin crew employed on inferior pay and working conditions to the established Worldwide and Eurofleet crew (Harvey and Turnbull, 2017). As will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, although lower pay rates for new employees in the established fleets was conceded by BASSA after the 1997 industrial dispute, the idea for a completely *separate* fleet started to gain momentum after the 2006-07 industrial dispute between BASSA and BA, in which Walsh had attempted to radically reconfigure cabin crew contracts and working arrangements. Although the planned industrial action in early 2007 had eventually been suspended, by the following year BA had intensified their approach as evident in the leaked 'Operation Columbus' document which first suggested the idea of a completely new fleet of workers was fast becoming a reality (Ewing, 2011; Taylor and Moore, 2019).

Before moving on to examine developments in the industry over the decades leading up to, and influencing these events, it is necessary to briefly highlight the characteristics of civil aviation as it grew throughout the 20th century. Historically the industry was characterised by a high degree of state regulation which essentially took two forms. First, outside of the United States, widespread state ownership was the common model for the majority of the world's largest carriers, which resulted in these airlines enjoying 'flag carrier' status and preferential access to their country's main, and mostly state owned airports. Indeed, given the levels of investment involved and the scale of operations required, these national airlines might not have been established without this state support (Blyton et al, 2003). For example, many of the legacy airlines in Europe and Asia, including BA, were launched after the First World War by entrepreneurs who had been pilots during the war. However, these new enterprises were

often financially unstable and struggled to survive, and by the post-Second World War period many were eventually fully or partially nationalised by their respective governments (Bamber et al, 2009).

Second, throughout much of the world, the regulation of civil aviation was subject to a high degree of state control with governments restricting entry into their domestic markets resulting in very low levels of competition for national flag carriers, as well as regulating international markets through 'bi-lateral' agreements. Such arrangements restricted access to international markets, as well as specifying flight routes, frequency and prices – effectively removing price competition between the flag carriers of the countries concerned (Blyton et al, 2003). While the civil aviation industry has been described as 'pro-cyclical' with air traffic generally expanding in a period of economic growth, and contracting during a downturn (Harvey and Turnbull, 2014a), state regulation in this period created a 'closed' and 'protected' industry with a stable and predictable product market accompanied by a limited degree of organisational change. Crucially, the monopoly position of airlines meant that any increases in business costs could be passed on to customers in the form of higher prices, while state ownership (and therefore the absence of private shareholders) reduced pressures to cut costs and seek efficiencies to increase profits (Blyton et al, 2003).

This 'golden era of state regulation' (Bamber et al, 2009: 24) resulted in a broad level of job security and good terms and conditions of employment for airline workers, coupled with extensive collective bargaining machinery and secure trade union recognition throughout much of the industry. While industrial conflict was certainly not completely absent from civil aviation, industrial relations took place within a relatively ordered environment, often supported by the state (Blyton et al, 2003). However, since the late 1970s, both domestic and

international competition has intensified markedly as a result of economic liberalisation, deregulation, and the commercialisation or full privatisation of many airlines (Harvey and Turnbull, 2014a). As a consequence, the comparatively high labour, safety and service standards which traditionally characterised the industry have been severely undermined over the last four decades (Blyton et al, 2003; Harvey and Turnbull, 2014b).

The starting point for these developments was the liberalisation of global civil aviation following the 1978 Airline Deregulation Act In the United States. Principally concerned with the US domestic market, the Act sought to increase price and cost competition by opening the market to new entrants, ending price regulations, and by gradually relaxing control over the routes airlines could fly and the cities they could serve (Bamber et al, 2009). In time, transatlantic routes were also opened up followed by deregulation across Europe with the first 'Open-Skies' agreement signed between the UK and the Netherlands in 1992. At the turn of the millennium, forty such bi-lateral agreements had been signed, as well as further deregulation at the Europe Community (EC) (now the European Union) level. This began in 1997 and culminated in the EU-US Open-Skies Agreement (Taylor and Moore, 2019) which was concluded in two phases (2008 and 2010) – and allowed European carriers to fly from any EU city to any city in the USA (Harvey and Turnbull, 2014b).

The European Union's 'open skies' deregulation policy in the 1990s resulted in the appearance and increasing popularity of cut-price airlines such as Ryanair and EasyJet (Boyd, 2001). This compounded common factors affecting European airlines in the early part of the 1990s including economic recession, deregulation of the European Aviation Market at the behest of the European Commission and the growing commercialisation and privatisation of national flag carriers (Blyton and Turnbull, 1996). Additionally, and crucially, from the mid-1980s

onwards, the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) sanctioned a degree of market entry to allow smaller airlines limited access to compete (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

Deregulation meant that airlines no longer needed to demonstrate financial fitness in order to operate or gain permission to reduce fares, and this resulted in a host of 'new entrant' low-cost airlines entering the market during the 1990s providing a competitive challenge to the established legacy airlines. The emergence and success of the low-cost model in turn placed considerable pressure on others to reduce costs, given that these new 'no-frills' airlines operated on average less than half of the 'full service' airlines operating costs (Boyd, 2001; Harvey and Turnbull, 2004; Harvey and Turnbull, 2014b). One response by many European legacy airlines was to create their own low-cost subsidiaries, however in doing so this had the effect of legitimising low cost travel to an even greater extent, and further intensified the pressure to reduce costs across the industry (Harvey and Turnbull, 2010, 2017). Other responses included the increasing trend towards merger and acquisition, code-sharing of flight numbers between airlines, ~~'hub and spoke' networks~~, subcontracting, franchising, and ~~'hub and spoke' networks and the establishment of strategic global alliances~~ (Harvey and Turnbull, 2014b; Taylor and Moore, 2015).

Liberalisation resulted in fewer airlines competing on certain international routes with the objective of lessening control over capacity and frequency and to greater pricing freedom. A number of structural and market developments facilitate the creation of inter-airline alliances during the late 1990s and such alliances evolved into intricate 'webs' that spanned diverse operational aspects as well as a range of geographical locations. They were motivated by operational factors, particularly the marketing benefits of scale and scope in which these hub and spoke operations centred on a major partner's home airport and in doing so these

networks provide transfer connections (Taylor and Moore, 2019: 22-23). Simply put, the hub and spoke model was designed to optimise network coverage and enabled airlines to operate efficiently as a means of making cost efficiencies (Curran, 2020).

The rationale behind the emergence of ~~The objective of~~ 'mega-group' alliances, for example the 'Star Alliance' led by United Airlines and Lufthansa, and the 'oneworld' alliance between American Airlines, BA, Qantas and Cathay Pacific, was to achieve substantial savings by sharing facilities, routes and connections (Boyd, 2001), as well as allowing many aspects of day-to-day operations to be conducted to a common standard (Marriot, 2000). However, the growth of the new-entrant low-cost model continued apace throughout the 2000s, and by 2008 it was estimated that their market share in Europe was 43 percent, up from 17 percent in 2003, while in several European countries (for instance the UK, Spain, Ireland, Poland and Italy) low cost airlines accounted for more than half the market (Harvey and Turnbull, 2014a).

Consequently, while cost efficiencies had once largely been short-term responses to economic downturns impacting the sector, they now emerged as a central priority for airlines (Taylor and Moore, 2015; 2019). In this context, the twin burden (Blyton and Turnbull, 1996) of such initiatives would primarily fall on the industry's workforce, in the form of both cost reduction *and* productivity/service improvement programmes. One important reason for this is the high proportion of labour costs within the overall operating cost structure of airlines; for example, it is estimated that labour costs in European airlines are 33 percent of all operating costs. Another is that unlike landing charges, fuel or aircraft costs, the capital expended on labour is both 'variable', and under the direct control of management (Blyton et al, 2003; Harvey, 2009). Additionally, in an increasingly competitive market, *service* quality represents a principle

means to differentiate between airlines and customers – and prominent in this is the service customers receive from check-in and cabin crew staff (Blyton and Turnbull, 1996).

Airline management have used a number of methods to cut labour costs in order to compete including headcount reduction, the downward renegotiation of workers contracts, 'two-tier' wage structures, as well as introducing more flexible working practices so employees can cover the increased workload created by such measures. Another strategy has been to outsource activities formally performed 'in-house' and then drive down the cost of sub-contractors tendering for business, as well as using the *threat* of outsourcing to negotiate savings among their workforces (Harvey, 2009; Bamber et al, 2009). While these developments occurred in stages throughout the 1980s and 1990s in response to deregulation and increasing competition, the sudden and unexpected decline in air travel following the terrorist attack in the USA on 11 September 2001 ('9/11') was a major turning point for legacy airlines. In the aftermath, employers again implemented dramatic cost savings, imposed redundancies, and revised employment contracts for many employees (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

Although the industry eventually recovered from the after-effects of 9/11, competitiveness was still intensifying for legacy airlines due to the increasing success of the low-cost carriers throughout the 2000s. However, the impact of the global financial crisis of 2008 on civil aviation would eclipse even 9/11, with revenues declining by 15 percent in 2009 (compared to 7 percent after the terrorist attacks), passenger demand reducing by 8 percent, and operating losses totalling \$15 billion for the world's top 150 airlines. This resulted in further employment cutbacks and job losses as numerous airlines went bankrupt or ceased trading, pay freezes and cuts, furlough and redundancies (both voluntary and compulsory), part-time

working, shorter working weeks, reduced training, work-sharing, unpaid holiday/leave, and cuts to bonuses (Harvey and Turnbull, 2014a).

The above discussion has highlighted some of the important factors impacting civil aviation more broadly over recent decades as it transitioned from a highly regulated, largely state owned industry to one characterised by deregulation, privatisation, competition and crisis (Harvey and Turnbull, 2014b). The chapter will now consider the impact of these developments on industrial relations at BA and specifically how cost-cutting affected cabin crew in the established fleets, as well as how the workforce organised in the main cabin crew union BASSA attempted to resist such initiatives. However, before doing so a brief outline of the history of BA will be included to provide some historical context.

British Airways

BA is the UK's largest and oldest airline (Bamber et al, 2009) with one of its forerunner companies, Aircraft Transport and Travel, launching the world's first ever commercial scheduled passenger air service between London and Paris in 1919. After a period of mergers and takeovers in the nascent UK aviation industry (Marriot, 2000: 7; Jarvis, 2014), as well as government subsidies to some fledgling airlines, the two most prominent companies – Imperial Airlines and British Airways Limited - were then merged by the UK government to form the state owned British Overseas Airways Corporation (BOAC) in 1939, just prior to the outbreak of World War Two. With BOAC operating long-haul routes to the 'British Empire', the Far East and North America, two other state owned airlines were formed by the post-war Labour Government, British European Airways (BEA) operating UK domestic and European flights, and British South American Airways (BSAA) which provided services to South American and Caribbean destinations, although BSAA merged with BOAC in 1949 (British Airways,

2017a). Following the publication of a formal government enquiry into the UK's airline industry in 1969 (the Edwards Report), it was announced that BOAC and BEA would merge, and British Airways was finally formed on the 1st April 1974 (Marriot, 2000).

During this period British Airways dominated UK domestic and international civil aviation, and while sometimes challenged, the regulatory nature of the industry (and at times the use of questionable business practices) ensured new entrants would struggle to survive (see Bamber et al, 2009: 24, for an outline of the Freddie Laker episode in the late 1970s/early 1980s). However, with the election in 1979 of a Conservative Government committed to a neoliberal economic agenda (Howell, 2005, Smith, 2009), it was announced that BA would no longer receive any state support or commercial interference as preparations were made to privatise the airline. Although this process was delayed in the early 1980s due to a combination of recession and rising fuel prices, resulting in massive losses in revenue for the company (British Airways, 2017a; Grugulis et al, 2013), by the mid-1980s BA had returned to profitability. This was achieved by cutting labour costs, making mass redundancies (Bamber et al, 2009), as well as discontinuing unprofitable routes, selling off aircraft, closing engineering bases and cutting back on administration (Taylor and Moore, 2019). Demonstrating its willingness to use state resources in their pursuit of dismantling the post-war settlement, the Conservative Government provided £53 million to finance BA's redundancy programme, and the workforce was reduced from 53,600 to 39,700 between 1981 and 1983, while profits increased to £77 million (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

With privatisation taking place in 1987, British Airways immediately began a programme of expansion and acquisition, merging with the Gatwick based British Caledonian Airways by the end of the year (Marriot, 2000; British Airways, 2017a). With this move, and subsequent

purchases, BA epitomised the strategic objective of all major European flag-carriers during this period – domestic market domination (Taylor and Moore, 2019). However, the broader developments within civil aviation discussed above would ensure that BA as a privately owned company, was born into an increasingly competitive and volatile domestic and international business environment which almost immediately would present both challenges and challengers (Blyton et al, 2003; Harvey and Turnbull, 2017).

An early threat after privatisation came from Richard Branson's Virgin Atlantic, whose comparatively lower operating costs were achieved by adopting a 'union avoidance' strategy and thus eliminating any collective pressure for wage improvements, as well as other measures (Bamber et al, 2009). In a demonstration of the type of underhand tactics BA would later use against their own employees, the company launched a campaign to discredit Virgin Atlantic and Richard Branson personally, a decision which would eventually result in an out of court settlement in January 1993 awarding Virgin Atlantic the largest libel sum ever awarded in British history (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

While the decline of air traffic after the first Gulf War in 1991 would result in some job losses, (British Airways, 2017a), it was the growth of low cost airlines such as Ryanair and EasyJet throughout the decade that would provide BA with the impetus to re-structure in order to cut costs and compete in the increasingly deregulated environment. This was achieved by decentralising many areas of its business, enabling workers at different airports to be employed on different terms and conditions; detaching various services from the core business to lower costs; as well as out-sourcing 'non-core' activities such as catering and vehicle maintenance (Blyton et al; 2003); or using the *threat* of outsourcing to reinforce the idea that all operations must be costed at market price (Blyton, 2001). Additionally, in 1998

BA also launched its own low-cost 'no-frills' airline 'Go', based at Stanstead Airport and operating as a separate business with its own management and employees (Marriot, 2000; British Airways, 2017a).

However, while these initiatives were designed to produce cost savings across different aspects of the operation, it was the Business Efficiency Programme (BEP) which BA planned to implement for three years from 1997 that would represent a critical juncture in the relationship between the company and BASSA. This ushered in a new period of antagonist industrial relations between cabin crew and their union, other sections of workforce and BA, which ultimately resulted in the 2009-11 conflict and the emergence of Mixed Fleet in the aftermath (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

Industrial relations: British Airways and BASSA

BA announced the BEP in 1996 and planned to generate £1 billion of cost savings primarily from within the organisation's workforce, in order to double profits by the end of the 1990s. This included 5000 voluntary redundancies with crew to be replaced by new employees on lower pay, signalling the beginning of moves to create separate terms and conditions for crew doing the same job (Grugulis et al, 2013). This can broadly be related to BA's business model as a response to the developments in civil aviation discussed above. Indeed, Blyton et al (2003) argue that as an illustration of how major airlines have restructured their business in order to cut costs and compete in a deregulated environment BA was regarded as a trend setter. First, BA decentralised many areas of its business (operations were divided into smaller business units and retained under company ownership). One consequence of this was the attempt to marginalise trade unions in the new subsidiaries, for example 'Go' the no-thrills' service only recognised the British Airline Pilots' Association (BALPA) and the Amalgamated Engineering

and Electrical Union (AEEU). Second, BA detached various services from their core business, pioneering franchise agreements with several airlines. All but three of the forty new routes opened by BA between June 1992 and June 1995 were franchise or partnership operations. Finally, BA outsourced their 'non-core' activities such as catering, vehicle management and maintenance, and even outsourced some ticket services to India. At the same time, if other services such as aircraft maintenance and ground handling were to be retained 'in-house' they had to be cost competitive against low-cost providers.

While BA had previously tried to marginalise BASSA when Cabin Crew '89 (CC89), a breakaway union with a no-strike clause in its recognition agreement, was formed in the immediate aftermath of the British Caledonian takeover in 1988, this strategy ultimately proved unsuccessful and BASSA membership grew from 4,079 in 1990 to 9,076 in 1997. The CC89 episode aside, generally the relationship between BA and BASSA had been characterised by joint regulation with its roots in BA's former status as a nationalised airline and the voluntarist framework of UK industrial relations that existed for much of the 20th century. While this certainly did not mean the absence of industrial disputes, with strikes in the mid to late 1970s, and into the 1980s, such conflict was institutionalised within clearly defined parameters in which both parties recognised the legitimacy of each other (Taylor and Moore, 2019). Notably, BASSA reps were intricately involved in day-to-day joint regulation of cabin crew working conditions, in which comprehensive collective bargaining agreements covered Worldwide and Eurofleet operations (Taylor and Moore, 2015).

However, if BA's early privatisation signified the company's emergence as an innovator in the global airline industry providing the market leadership and business strategies in cost reduction discussed above, it also implied 'first mover' status in bringing industrial relations

change. Crucially, this would lead to confrontation with the well developed collective organisation in BASSA. BASSA had come into existence in the 1950s during the state ownership of civil aviation and joint regulation was encouraged with its roots in the post First World War Whitley Councils (Taylor and Moore, 2019: 30-31).

As well as lower pay levels for new employees the BEP attempted to change the structure of payments to cabin crew, a process by which existing employees would be 'bought out' of their allowances (petrol, overnight stay, etc.) by receiving a higher basic wage combined with a three-year guarantee that no crew would earn less under the new system. When negotiations failed, the TGWU balloted BASSA members for industrial action and with an 80 percent turnout, 73 percent of members voted in favour of strike action. With the first 72 hour strike scheduled for July 1997 (Grugulis et al, 2013), BA adopted a tough stance and threatened to sack any employees going on strike and sue them for breach of contract. This approach proved counter-productive and turned cabin crew opinion against BA management, and while only 300 BASSA members went on strike, more than 2,000 went on sick leave resulting in longer term disruption through August (Bamber et al, 2009) in the celebrated 'mass sickie' (Taylor and Moore, 2015).

The 1997 dispute is estimated to have cost BA £125 million, and following a 'pause for peace', insisted on by the TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris BASSA agreed to the demand for savings with some limited concessions (Taylor and Moore, 2019). By the end of 1997, 4,000 staff had left, but 4,500 more were recruited, including 2,000 in 1998. By the terms of the settlement agreement the new staff were employed on the new contracts and as a result, cabin crew working on the same aircraft were increasingly on different pays scales (Grugulis et al, 2013). However, while this episode was financially damaging for BA, more importantly it

crushed morale and reinforced mistrust of management among *all* employees (Harvey and Turnbull, 2004: 297-300). Over the following three years during a period of relative industrial peace, BASSA recruited over 2,000 new members to their branch, while in contrast CC89 entered a period of serious decline due to its complicity in the 1997 dispute (even though BA still afforded them preferential treatment). By the turn of the century, BASSA had over 10,000 members, and by 2001 had increased its density from 43 to 73 percent over a ten year period (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

Prior to 9/11 the industry was already feeling the effect of a global economic downturn, and in the week before the terrorist attacks BA had announced lay-offs (Bamber et al, 2009). However, like other airlines, BA suffered heavily following the terrorist attacks and their initial response was to announce 1,800 job losses followed by a further cut of 5,200 positions. In fact, between 2000 and 2005, the company would shed 14,000 jobs, 7,000 of which were reportedly due to falling demand (Grugulis et al, 2013). As well as these job losses, other measures enacted to try and return the airline to profitability included a review of spending on new projects, aircraft modifications and investment on products, as well as a moratorium on IT expenditure (British Airways, 2017a).

During this period BASSA also agreed to temporarily remove one crew member per flight, although as this was not restored when conditions improved some felt that BA was using 9/11 as an excuse to drive forward 'rationalisation' (Taylor and Moore, 2015). However, following shareholder pressure with the pace of these measures, Willie Walsh took over as CEO in 2005, after which point a confrontation with the unions was seen as inevitable. From BASSA's perspective the arrival of Walsh saw industrial relations go into an 'almost instantaneous

nosedive' and almost overnight senior managers became more hard-line in their dealings with BASSA and cabin crew employees (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

There had been a number of disputes at BA over this period involving other sections of the workforce, for instance the stoppage by ground staff in 2003, the pay dispute by check-in staff in 2004 who had balloted for industrial action and then negotiated a settlement (BBC, 2005; Bamber et al, 2009), and more notably, the Gate Gourmet dispute in 2005 which had cost BA £40 million in lost revenue, with 700 flights cancelled affecting the travel plans of 100, 000 passengers (Grugulis et al, 2013). BA had sold its catering facilities to Gate Gourmet (a subsidiary of Swiss Air) as part of its cost savings initiative in 1997, although it had been taken over in 2002 by the private equity firm Texas Pacific after it faced serious financial difficulties in the wake of low cost competition and 9/11. The strike in 2005 was in relation to a proposed management 'rescue package' to these problems including a reduction of overtime pay supplements, flexible working, and productivity increases (Gallas, 2018).

While Gate Gourmet had been in discussions with the TGWU over proposed changes, the company recruited 130 temporary workers without consulting the union or their representatives. When the permanent employees assembled in the canteen to discuss this, management told them if they did not return to work within three minutes they would be sacked, and when they did not return 677 workers were dismissed for taking unofficial strike action. Crucially, because there had been no official ballot or notification period the stoppage of work was indeed counted as unofficial, and the employees were not protected by unfair dismissal law (Labour Research Department, 2018). The dispute escalated when ground personnel and the baggage handlers at Heathrow reacted to the dismissal by starting another 'illegal' (*i.e., unofficial*) solidarity strike which was organised through family and community

networks; action which shut down the entire airport for 24 hours. Eventually the TGWU and Gate Gourmet came to an agreement, which amounted to a victory for the company, and out of the 813 workers eventually sacked, only 272 were reinstated. In 13 cases the dismissal was confirmed, and 411 took 'voluntary' redundancy with compensation, while the remaining workers accepted the poorer working conditions (Gallas, 2018).

Bamber et al (2009: 36-37) argue that BA during these years followed a paradoxical course between on the one hand being willing to endure strikes implement cost cutting, and on the other trying to foster cost-cutting. When it was privatised in 1987 BA retained its existing collective bargaining arrangements with most of its workforce as well as mechanisms for consulting with unions. BA had a formal partnership agreement with the pilots union, the British Airline Pilots Association (BALPA). However, the union argued that BA generally does not recognise the spirit of the partnership. Moreover, only 54 percent of BA pilots had a favourable view of such a partnership approach. In 2005, BA launched another initiative, the Industrial Relations Change Programme, and more than 1,800 managers and 220 union representatives attended workshops. In 2006, BA claimed 'our people want fulfilling and secure jobs, a good working environment, fair reward, and personal development'. However, it is very difficult to maintain and develop a genuine sense of partnership in a context of which continuously emphasises cutting jobs and benefits.

This was illustrated in the same year when Willie Walsh was attempting to radically reform working arrangements and contracts for cabin crew, and after a series of unproductive and hostile negotiations BASSA registered 12 areas of a failure to agree. In the subsequent ballot for strike action 97 percent voted in favour on an 80 percent turnout, reflecting the depth of anger among crew members and their union representatives. Three days of action were then

planned to take place on the 29-31 January 2007, and as during the 1997 dispute, BA responded by closing the BASSA offices at Heathrow and preventing the de-rostering of the union reps. However, the BASSA Branch Committee voted 6 to 3 in favour of suspending the proposed action this time, a decision attributed by some to the disinclination of the TGWU leadership to support the strike (it is thought this was due to the aftermath of the Gate Gourmet dispute). However, conflict was merely postponed, and BA management returned the following year with a tougher set of proposals (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

The 2009-11 BA – BASSA dispute

By June 2008 it was reported that BA had been looking into ‘Project Columbus’ (subsequently referred to as ‘Operation Columbus’) with an external consultant with the aim of gradually introducing a ‘New Fleet’ of cabin crew on inferior terms and conditions. These workers would be employed on significantly reduced pay, *and* they would be subjected to greater command and control by the company’s managers. As well as introducing this new fleet, the cost cutting exercise would also affect existing staff by changing crewing levels. BA justified these changes by arguing the wages of their cabin crew at Heathrow were uncompetitive as they were paid above the industry average, therefore by introducing the new fleet this would reduce wages over the long term without impact existing crews salaries (Ewing, 2011).

As discussed above, while civil aviation generally recovered from the impact of 9/11, the 2007-8 global financial crisis had resulted in another economic downturn. Hence, while BA made a total operational profit of £878 million in 2007-08, by 2008-09 they made an operating loss of £720 million due to a massive rise in fuel prices and falling passenger demand (Ewing, 2011). In February 2009 BA formally announced its intention to make £89 million of savings to combat the worsening global economic situation described by Walsh as unprecedented

(British Airways, 2017a), and negotiations with BASSA started the following month. Throughout the 2000s BASSA had continued to grow with membership now standing at 11,500, while in contrast CC89's membership had declined to 1,500 although with some of the older generation gone the newer reps were willing to collaborate with BASSA. Thus, as industrial conflict neared the combined membership of BASSA and CC89 was 13,000 out of 14,000 total crew – or 92 percent density (Taylor and Moore, 2019).

However, as Taylor and Moore (2015) argue, while the dispute may have been *precipitated* by Operation Columbus, and the longer term factors impacting civil aviation over the preceding three decades, it was *triggered* by the imposition of reduced crew across the Worldwide and Eurofleet in October 2009, after months of negotiations between Unite and BA had failed to come to an agreement on this issue. By writing to all employees and informing them of the company's decision to take unilateral action and reduce on-board 'compliments' (the removal of one position from all BA Worldwide flights from London Heathrow) from November 2009, BA had completely discarded the decades long tradition of joint regulation incorporated in the two collective bargaining agreements, the Worldwide Scheduling Agreement and the Eurofleet Cabin Crew Manual. Both of these dealt with all operational arrangements for cabin crew and crucially no change had ever been made to either unless agreed by both BA and BASSA (Ewing, 2011; Harvey and Turnbull, 2014b). With this action, Operation Columbus had simultaneously threatened the existence of the union, and the nature of the job. As one activist said: "When they removed the crew member, we said, well, they've just thrown out the format of negotiation. The old way of doing business has just been by-passed. You do understand what that means? Most of the crew got it. It was the imposition" (Taylor and Moore, 2015).

Unite responded to this unilateral action by BA via two distinct avenues: the threat of industrial action in the form of a number of discontinuous periods of strikes, and a claim for a breach of individual employment contracts (Prassl, 2011). The legal claim was challenged in the High Court by Unite on behalf of over 5,500 cabin crew 11 days before the changes were due to be implemented on the 16 November 2009. However, the application for an injunction was dismissed, and a trial ordered for February the following year during which BA's unilateral implementation was withheld and they were free to unilaterally change the contracts. Regarding the industrial route, the first strike ballot had taken place in November 2009 alongside the legal proceedings with 9,514 out of 10,286 voting in the ballot, and 92 percent voting in favour of industrial action (Ewing, 2011). With the 12 day strike planned to go ahead on the 22nd December 2009, BA went to the High Court complaining about balloting irregularities and BA was granted an injunction to stop the strike. The strike was ruled unlawful as around 900 cabin crew were balloted despite having taken voluntary redundancy, a verdict Unite criticised as a 'bad day for democracy' (Williams, 2014).

Following the court ruling, BA management sought to locate and reprimand all employees who even alluded to supporting further strike action, and in the following months the company suspended and disciplined over 45 cabin crew who indicated support for industrial action (Grugulis et al, 2013). As well as this, BA withdrew facility time for BASSA reps apart from the minimum provisions set out by law and sacked or disciplined with final written warnings a number of key BASSA activists and leaders, including the Branch Secretary, treasurer and two workplace representatives. Alongside these actions, BA sought to exploit the many 'traps and hurdles' set by the legislation enacted by the Thatcher/Major governments and left intact or in some ways made worse by New Labour.

Two provisions of the legislation (the Trade Unions and Labour Relations Consolidation Act 1992) would feature prominently over the course of the dispute. First, the requirement for the union to give notice of the intention to hold a ballot, and depending on the result, notice of the intention to take industrial action. Second, the duty on the part of the union to not only inform the employer, but also the members of a detailed breakdown of the ballot result (Ewing, 2011).

In February 2010, the result of the re-ballot was announced by Unite with an 80 percent turnout and 80 percent voting in favour of industrial action and in March there was a three-day strike, followed by another four-day strike which cost BA an estimated £43 million (Williams, 2014; Harvey and Turnbull, 2014a). On the 10th May 2010 Unite announced a further 20 days of strikes (4 periods of 5 days), however, on the 17th May, a day before the first set of strikes were due to start, BA were granted another injunction. The reason given was that Unite had failed to inform members of the ballot result correctly as it had only been announced on the union's website. There were also questions concerning 11 spoilt ballot papers in a ballot in which 7, 482 members voted in favour of going on strike and only 1, 789 against. However, although this prevented five days of strike action going ahead, the injunction was quashed in the Court of Appeal and the dispute continued with 15 more days of strike action throughout May and June 2010. During these strikes BA used a range of counter-mobilisation tactics to stop disruption to their flights, including recruiting pilots and ground-staff to perform the work of crew, and leasing 23 aircraft complete with crew from other airlines. There was also a culture of surveillance, bullying and intimidation by BA with 93 cabin crew sacked or disciplined for conduct relating to the dispute, as well crew being followed to their homes by BA's Asset Protection Unit, and harassment by the right wing media. In this context, the changing nature of the dispute was

such that any further action would need to be authorised by a fresh ballot if the union was to retain its immunity from common law prosecutions (Ewing, 2011).

After the strikes ended, BA continued apace with their plans and the new fleet of cabin crew, now called 'Mixed Fleet', was officially established in June 2010. At the end of the month the company had also signed a merger plan document with Iberia and early in 2011 this was completed, and International Airlines Group (IAG) was formed with Willie Walsh appointed Chief Executive (British Airways, 2017a). Meanwhile, Unite planned to issue a new ballot for industrial action, focusing on some of the unresolved issues from the dispute, namely the withdrawal of concessionary travel arrangements from staff participating in the previous strikes, the bullying of union activists, and the introduction of new contractual arrangements for cabin crew (Williams, 2014).

However, the ballot was postponed following a new offer from BA which was then overwhelmingly rejected by the membership with only 15 percent voting in favour. This was followed in October 2010 by another offer, although this was so far short of what was required Unite did not even put it to the members. A new ballot for industrial action was then opened on the 21st December 2010 with five strike demands, including the rejection of Mixed Fleet. Unite announced in January 2011 that 10, 220 members had been balloted, and 7, 335 had voted with 5, 571 in favour of industrial action and 1, 579 against (78. 5 percent in favour on a 75 percent turnout). Again, this was challenged by BA, although on this occasion by contacting the Electoral Reform Society, and the proposed strikes were again stopped. Unite balloted their members once more and announced the result in March 2011 with a turnout of 72 percent and 83 percent in favour of industrial action. As it turned out, this result was made redundant by a negotiated settlement to the long

running dispute, and instead of the strikes going ahead BA granted an extension of 28 days on the ballot result and issued a joint statement with Unite on the 14th April 2011 (Ewing, 2011).

The dispute finally ended in June 2011 after a ballot of cabin crew resulted in them overwhelmingly voting in favour of the agreement negotiated by Unite and BA containing a pay deal of 7 percent over two years and the restoration of travel concessions for striking crew (Williams, 2014). With 92 percent voting to back the agreement on a turnout of 72 percent, in what was to be the sixth and final ballot, existing staff's pay, and terms and conditions were protected, and although Mixed Fleet had been officially established a year earlier while the dispute was ongoing - with this vote BASSA members had now (reluctantly) accepted the reality of its existence (Ewing, 2011).

Mixed Fleet Unite (2011-16)

From here on in, anyone commencing employment as cabin crew at BA would join the new Mixed Fleet category, and while there were already slight differences in pay between BASSA members as a result of the outcome of the 1997 industrial dispute (Taylor and Moore, 2019), with Mixed Fleet's arrival BA's dream of a 'two-tier' workforce among their cabin crew as a means of driving down labour costs became a reality (Allday, 2017a). Crucially, new employees were employed on substantially lower wages than existing crew and by 2015 Mixed Fleet's basic salary was £12,000 (with an additional £3 an hour when flying), whereas the average expenditure per head of all cabin crew was £37,000 (Harvey and Turnbull, 2017). As well as this, Mixed Fleet employees would also operate a *mix* of both long haul and short haul routes; a crucial difference in working conditions to the Worldwide and Eurofleet crews who only operated either long haul *or* short haul flights (British Airways, 2017a).

At the time some BASSA members commented that the settlement was not a 'peace-agreement', but rather a 'temporary ceasefire', as employing two groups of workers to do the same job on vastly different rates of pay would inevitably lead to feelings of injustice and discrimination (Allday, 2017a). Indeed, it did not take long before Mixed Fleet cabin crew started to join Unite (BBC, 2014), and by 2012 enough members had been recruited to enable the crew to form their own branch – 'Mixed Fleet Unite' (Topham, 2014; Unite, 2018). It then took a further year before BA eventually signed a voluntary recognition deal with Unite for the Mixed Fleet cabin crew in 2013 (Morning Star, 2016; Rodionova, 2016) and after only three years BA's plans for a union-free workforce was over.

By the following year, with union recognition won, the branch established, and membership growing, evidence emerged that the workforce were starting to question the disparity in wages between Mixed Fleet and the legacy crews, as well as the effect low pay and the conditions of work were having on them. In June 2014, MFU members voted in a 'consultative ballot' that they would be prepared to go on strike over pay. Although only a third of the crew voted in this ballot to gauge feeling of members, 95 percent voted in favour of the possibility of taking industrial action (Topham, 2014).

Harvey and Turnbull (2014b) had also surveyed and interviewed Mixed Fleet workers during this period as part of a larger survey of aviation workers for the European Transport Workers' Federation. They found that although Mixed Fleet cabin crew are employed on 'direct' contracts in contrast to the 'non-standard' employment contracts, agency work or self-employed contracts that have emerged in some airlines, 60 percent found their contracts unsatisfactory. As well as this, 81 percent reported extreme difficulty in changing rosters for personal needs, while 86 percent reported that they were only given 24 hours advance notice

of any change to their roster by management. Additionally, the intensive nature of the Mixed Fleet roster was highlighted which could involve seven days on and one day off followed by seven days on and two days off. Less than 10 percent of Mixed Fleet cabin crew thought their pay and benefits were sufficient to support their current lifestyle, with one crew member commenting that Mixed Fleet are commonly referred to as “Cheap Fleet” throughout the company. Crucially, when asked to identify the three most important priorities from a list of eight (pay, benefits, flexibility, time-off, security, work satisfaction, relationship with management, and work-life balance), pay (over 50 percent), and work-life balance (over 20 percent) were cited as the most important.

By the time the annual pay negotiations came around in autumn 2016, there were now roughly 4,000 Mixed Fleet employees working for BA, totalling 15 percent of the entire cabin crew workforce, and of this number, 2,000 were now members of Unite (Rodionova, 2016). As Harvey and Turnbull (2017) argued, little had changed in the two years since they last highlighted major concerns among Mixed Fleet crew relating to both their pay and working conditions. However, whereas in the 2009-11 industrial dispute between BA and BASSA the company had claimed that the competitive business environment and tough economic conditions in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis were justification for their cost-cutting proposals (Kavanagh, 2017), by 2016 the same arguments could not be made when it came to giving Mixed Fleet cabin crew a decent pay increase. Indeed, BA’s parent company had reported a 64 percent rise in yearly pre-tax profits to £1.4 billion in 2016, and as a consequence (partly) of lower fuel prices, the group had also announced it was on course to make an operating profit of €3.2 billion throughout 2017 (BBC, 2016).

Summary

This chapter has outlined the background context and underlying long-term causes of the Mixed Fleet dispute. The first section focused on the broader developments in global civil aviation that have taken place since the deregulation of industry commenced in the late 1970s, as a means of understanding the rationale behind BA's decision to create a new fleet on inferior pay and conditions to their existing cabin crew. Following on from this, a brief history of BA was included before discussing how the company responded to the increasingly competitive business environment in the period after privatisation in 1987 and as deregulation and liberalisation started to take effect, especially on legacy airlines. The history of industrial relations between BA and the main trade union BASSA (a branch of the TGWU and then Unite) was then outlined, culminating in a discussion of the 2009-11 industrial dispute. While Mixed Fleet as a separate category of cabin crew had already been established in June 2010 while the dispute was ongoing, as part of the settlement agreement in June 2011 BASSA had voted to accept the situation. The final section discussed the emergence of Mixed Fleet in the aftermath of the 2009-11 dispute, as separate category of cabin crew on substantially less pay and inferior working conditions, as well as how enough of the new workforce joined Unite by 2013 to enable the union to sign a voluntary recognition agreement with BA and then begin to challenge the company over the unjust situation over the following years leading up to the 2016-17 dispute.

Chapter Six: The Mixed Fleet Unite – British Airways dispute 2016-17

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to outline the significant events of the Mixed Fleet dispute as it unfolded during late 2016 and throughout 2017, as a means of providing the context for the more substantial findings and analysis that follows in chapter seven, based on the semi-

structured interviews carried out. The previous chapter has already located the longer-term causes of the dispute, rooted in developments at BA which culminated in the 2009-11 dispute with BASSA; a period of conflict which itself was underpinned by the wider changes taking place in the global civil aviation sector since the late 1970s. With Mixed Fleet established *during* the 2009-11 dispute, and then accepted as part of the settlement agreement in June 2011 (British Airways, 2017a), chapter five concluded with a discussion of the early years of the new fleet as the workforce started to join the Unite trade union in increasing numbers. With enough members recruited to sign a recognition agreement with BA in 2013, the newly established Mixed Fleet Unite branch then started the process of building union organisation among the cabin crew and questioning their low pay and working conditions. By 2016, with around 2000 members recruited, an organised branch committee with lay officers and workplace representatives in place, as well as union officials at regional level committed to fighting for improvements in pay and other areas, the scene was set for the conflict that would follow.

With these factors in mind, the first section of this chapter will start by discussing the outcome of the pay negotiations in autumn 2016 which resulted in the first industrial action ballot over November-December, after the Mixed Fleet Unite branch rejected BA's two percent pay offer to all employees. The following section will outline the period after the ballot result was announced, with a turnout of 60 percent and 79 percent voting in favour of taking industrial action. With strikes announced for Christmas Day and Boxing Day, and then suspended, further negotiations yielded an improved pay offer which members would vote on over the holiday period. With this offer subsequently rejected by the membership, the chapter will then move on to discuss the period of discontinuous strike action that took place

between January and March 2017. This consisted of a series of seven separate incidences of strike action ranging from two to seven days in length and totalling 26 days.

After this, the next section will briefly cover the 'pause for peace' that lasted from April to June 2017. During this period, with the Trade Union Act 2016 (TUA 16) being implemented on the 1st March 2017, Unite had to hold another ballot as the mandate from the previous one by law had now expired after six months. As well as the successful vote again in favour of industrial action, with turnout well above the now legal requirement of 50 percent (Labour Research Department, 2018), the union would also start legal action on behalf of 1,400 members who had bonuses and travel concessions removed for going on strike between January and March.

With negotiations failing to resolve the dispute over these three months, the next section will outline the almost continuous period of strikes that followed throughout July and August 2017. With BA 'wet-leasing' fully crewed aircraft from Qatar Airways; an agreement in which a carrier provides aircraft, crew, maintenance and insurance to another airline (Caswell, 2017), and MFU members and their union determined to escalate the conflict this series of strikes would ultimately see BA forced to return to the negotiating table in September 2017. The chapter will conclude by detailing the settlement of the dispute in late October 2017 after talks between BA and Unite, with a pay deal of 11 per cent on basic pay by March 2018, the introduction of a new £10 daily overseas allowance and all docked bonuses and travel concession returned to those 1,400 MFU members sanctioned (Unite, 2017y).

The ballot for industrial action: November – December 2016

By the time the annual pay negotiations came around in autumn 2016, there were now around 4,000 Mixed Fleet employees working for BA totalling 15 percent of the entire cabin crew workforce, of which 2,000 were members of Unite (Rodionova, 2016). BA's pay offer during the negotiations was a two percent increase on the annual salary for *all* employees, and while this was accepted by BASSA members and other sections of the workforce, it was firmly rejected by MFU members and Unite began the process of organising a ballot for industrial action, which opened on the 16th November 2016. As well as rejecting the 2 percent pay increase, another initial strike demand included in the ballot concerned the 'on-board' Customer Services Managers (CSMs) who unlike the main cabin crew had no collective bargaining rights, even though many were members of Unite (Unite, 2016a).

BA described the two percent pay proposal as 'fair, reasonable and consistent' with that already agreed by other BA colleagues, making comparisons with both the wider UK labour market and the annual salaries of cabin crew at competitor airlines (Morning Star, 2016). In contrast, Unite claimed that starter rates for Mixed Fleet cabin crew were actually £12, 192 – £13, 564, with an additional £3 per hour 'flying pay', an annual salary they estimated to be at least £2,000 less than other UK airlines paid to new cabin crew employees. For instance, Thompson paid £13, 393 - £19, 442 plus £3.77 per hour flying pay and £5.71 cabin tidy per sector, and Virgin paid £14, 093 plus £49 cabin tidy per sector. Unite also stated they had seen no evidence that Mixed Fleet employees were earning anything near the advertised potential rate of £21,000- £25,000, and this was the case even after years of employment with the airline (Unite, 2016b).

During the pay negotiations Unite had carried out a survey of MFU members and the results highlighted the impact 'poverty' pay levels were having on them. For instance, wages were so

low some of the crew were doing second and even third jobs on their days off or sleeping in their cars between shifts as they could not afford the petrol to drive home. Two thirds of members admitted to coming to work unfit to fly because they could not afford to take time off sick, while 84 percent said they had experienced stress and depression due to their financial circumstances (Unite, 2016a). It was also argued that whereas BA had justified the establishment of Mixed Fleet in the build up to the 2009-11 dispute as a consequence of the competitive business environment they were operating in (Kavanagh, 2017), the same argument could not be used to deny low paid cabin crew a decent pay rise. Indeed, in 2016 BA's parent company IAG had reported a 64 percent rise in yearly pre-tax profits to £1.4 billion, and as a consequence (partly) of lower fuel prices, the group had also announced it was on course to make an operating profit of €3.2 billion during 2017 (BBC, 2016).

The ballot result, strikes for Christmas, and a new offer

After four weeks of voting the ballot result was announced on the 14th December 2016, with a turnout of 60 percent, and 79 percent voting for industrial action. With the mandate to take industrial action confirmed, Unite urged BA to return to the negotiating table to avoid strikes after the 21st December 2016 (Unite 2016b; Unite, 2016c). However, with no response forthcoming from BA, and adhering to the legislative requirement to notify the company seven days in advance of any strike action (Kessler and Bayliss, 1998), the union announced two 24-hour strikes on Christmas Day and Boxing Day – action that would impact an estimated 57,000 customers (Calder, 2016). Over the balloting period, the MFU branch had also recruited another 500 new members taking total membership to 2,500 out of 4,000 total employees, a density of 60 percent (Unite 2016b; Unite, 2016c).

BA's Chief Executive and Chairman Alex Cruz responded to Unite's notification of strike action by announcing detailed contingency plans had been arranged so the company could operate their normal flight programmes during the planned strikes. Rejecting the union's statement regarding the low earnings of Mixed Fleet cabin crew, BA offered an independent audit of their pay data over the previous 12 months. Their data, it was argued, proved that Mixed Fleet cabin crew working full-time earned between £21,151 and £27,356 during the period September 1st, 2015, and August 31st, 2016 (Smith, 2016).

However, regardless of these claims and counter-claims, for those MFU members voting in the ballot it was the two percent increase as applied to their extremely low annual salary *compared* to cabin crew in Worldwide and Eurofleet, and other BA employees on higher wages that was the crucial factor in rejecting the offer at this stage (Unite, 2016e). Another important issue which BA's public pronouncements on wage rates failed to mention was the disparity between Mixed Fleet crew's actual annual salary, and the money made up in flying pay and bonuses. Regarding this, one of the main issues was that the additional payments were inconsistent and thus impacted their monthly earnings, and as these bonuses were not counted as salary so that affected crews ability to apply for mortgages or bank loans (reference).

It was in this climate that talks between BA and Unite to resolve the dispute commenced at Acas on the 19th December 2016, just days before the planned strikes were due to start. In a sign of escalating tension between the two sides to the dispute, Unite's General Secretary Len McCluskey warned BA against releasing misleading statements on pay as they broke the embargo on comments that had been agreed by the company and the union (Unite, 2016d). When the negotiations were concluded on the 22nd December 2016, Unite announced that

the planned 2-day strike on Christmas Day and Boxing Day had been suspended, following a revised offer from BA which they would put before members over the Christmas and New Year period (Unite, 2016e).

In January 2017, the result of the ballot on the improved offer showed members had rejected it by a margin of 7-1 (Jones, 2017), and the dispute now had reached a critical juncture with the position of both sides becoming entrenched. In rejecting the improved offer, the MFU membership were signalling their willingness to continuing with their objective of securing a substantial pay rise, whereas BA were ideologically committed to resisting this, and any collective action that might result. After all, the whole point of Mixed Fleet was to create a two-tier workforce to drive down wages in the long term (Ewing, 2011; Taylor and Moore, 2015), and this would not be achieved if concessions to displays of collectivism were made. Events were then shaped by the legislation on industrial action as MFU members were required by law to take industrial action within 28 days of voting for it, although BA had the option of extending the mandate if they wanted to resume negotiations (Labour Research Department, 2018). However, BA chose not to take up this option and Unite, accusing the company of needlessly provoking conflict when the union were willing to try and resolve the dispute, gave seven days' notice that a 48-hour strike would take place on the 10th and 11th January 2017 (Unite, 2017a).

Although BA made public statements that the planned strikes were unnecessary and unjustified, and that they were continuing their dialogue with Mixed Fleet cabin crew and their union to resolve the issues (Topham, 2017b), it was also clear that as in the 2009-11 dispute they had already started implementing counter-mobilisation measures to mitigate any disruption caused by industrial action as well trying to encourage their workforce not to strike.

For instance, in an attempt at dividing cabin crew they informed employees that they would receive the pay offer in January if they declared they were not a member of a trade union (Unite, 2017a). Additionally, after trying to bolster public confidence in the airline by ensuring all customers would travel to their destinations and reiterating that Mixed Fleet represented only 15 per cent of the cabin crew workforce (Jones, 2017), a range of options were then announced to minimise disruption to scheduled flights. These included 'wet-leasing' aircraft from other airlines, bringing in crew from Gatwick to cover striking Mixed Fleet workers, drafting in back-office staff who were also trained as cabin crew (Calder, 2017a), as well as 'merging' some flights (Chaplain, 2017). At the same time, support for the strike was growing among the Mixed Fleet cabin crew and on the eve of the 48-hour strike over 800 employees had joined the union since the ballot opened, taking membership to 2, 900 and over 70 percent density (Short, 2017a; Unite, 2017b).

Strikes: January – March 2017

One month after the ballot result was announced, MFU members began their first period of strike action, a 48-hour stoppage over the 10th and 11th January 2017, and with solid support reported at the 'picket' lines at Heathrow Airport (Stone, 2017a; Sewell, 2017a), it was estimated that the industrial action resulted in the cancellation of at least 100 flights over the two days (Morning Star, 2017) while some flights went without food service due to low staffing or were expensively chartered from other airlines (Raymie and Sewell, 2017). On the second day of the strike Unite wrote to Marks and Spencer (M&S) calling on them to demand BA stops paying poverty wages to sell M&S food, as the retailer were now providing food on short haul flights following the withdrawal of inclusive 'in-flight' meals. (Unite, 2017c). Then, as soon as

this two-day strike action ended, the union gave seven-days' notice to BA of a further three days of action starting on the 19th January 2017 (Unite, 2017e).

Like the first set of strikes, the picket lines were well supported at Heathrow Airport during the 19th - 21st January strike days and crew were joined by Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey, Labour MP Clive Lewis and the then Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell MP (Unite, 2017f; Calder, 2017b). This shows the changing nature of the wider labour movement after the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party in 2015, and contrasts markedly with comments made by New Labour representatives during the 2009-11 dispute (Milmo and Curtis, 2010). At a rally at the strike headquarters, Bedfont FC Football ground, a MFU workplace representative explained how BA's business model had contributed to the conflict:

It all feeds back into the business plan. They want people to join what seems like a prestigious airline, a big British brand, do the job and after a year or two they realise physically they cannot do it, financially they cannot do it and they are out of the door, and they have a new wave coming in (Mitchell, 2017).

As well as this, MFU members were now arguing the strikes were about more than just the money, and increasingly the working conditions crew were forced to endure were being cited as just as important (Sewell, 2017b).

With the strikes ongoing BA implemented their planned strategy to minimise the disruption, chartering three aircraft belonging to Titan Airways to cover for some flights and merging a small number of their short-haul services at Heathrow, which they argued resulted in the cancellation of only one per cent of their total scheduled flights across the three days. (Calder, 2017b). After the second set of strikes ended Unite wrote an open letter to BA urging the

company to resume negotiations and argued that BA's willingness to spend millions of pounds trying to break the strike instead of using that money to offer a reasonable pay deal showed the ideological nature of their behaviour so far (Unite, 2017g). Although BA were still insisting that the previous five days of strikes had no effect on the business, the hiring of fully crewed planes from Titan reportedly cost £650, 000 a flight, with one Unite official witnessing three aircraft flying over the Mixed Fleet picket lines in ten minutes (Sewell, 2017b).

With no response forthcoming from the airline, a further six days of strike action (divided into two sets of three days strikes with two days working in between) were announced for the 5th to 7th February, and then from 9th to 11th February (Unite, 2017g). As well as impacting BA's flight schedules, the longer period of strikes between the 5th and the 11th February enabled the union to test the figures more accurately in relation to turnout. BA claimed at this stage in the dispute that 70 percent of Mixed Fleet cabin crew were not striking, but this included those workers whose irregular rosters meant they were not working on strike days, although many had turned out to picket. It was argued that by going out for a longer period more people would then go on strike revealing the real depth of feeling among the membership (Sewell, 2017c).

As these strikes took place, and with BA still refusing to reconvene talks with Unite at Acas, the union notified the company of a further four days of strikes from the 17th to 20th February (Unite, 2017j), and then days later with still no response, a further four days of action running from the 22nd to 25th February. A Unite Regional Officer estimated the money British Airways had spent on defending the dispute was at least £1 million, "money the airline had made a conscious decision to give to other airlines rather than addressing pay levels which are forcing hardworking Mixed Fleet cabin crew into financial hardship" (Unite 2017k).

Rather than take up the offer of resuming negotiations, BA responded to the notification of eight more days of strikes by intensifying their counter-mobilisation strategy to mitigate any potential disruption. In a previous email to staff, BA claimed that anyone continuing to strike in February would lose any bonus for 2016 and see their 2017 bonuses affected, as well as losing three months' worth of the 'My Incentives' payment scheme which included staff travel and discounted travel for family members for a year. After the notification of eight more strike days, BA then claimed anyone striking would see a loss of the My Incentives bonus for the whole of 2017, complete loss of bonus for 2016 and 2017 and loss of discounted travel benefits and Hotline (discounted booking for family and friends) for 24 months (Ross, 2017).

On the penultimate day of the eight day strike period in February, with the dispute showing no sign of being resolved and IAG reporting a rise in pre-tax profits of nearly a third to £2 billion, Unite gave notification of another seven days of strikes to take place from the 3rd to 9th March (Unite, 2017l). Striking crew protested outside the BBC and ITV as the broadcasters had failed to cover the dispute, while their union said it would call off the March strike days in exchange for further talks (Socialist Worker, 2017a), although again this request was ignored, and striking continued from the 3rd March. During this period of strikes, cabin crew continued to try and publicise their dispute, protesting outside the British Airways sponsored i360 attraction in Brighton (Unite, 2017m), as well as travelling to Manchester and Glasgow Airports for protests as some of the Mixed Fleet crew worked out of these locations (Sewell and Harper, 2017).

With the Trade Union Act 2016 being implemented on the 1st March 2017, Unite were now required by law to give BA seven days notification that they were re-balloting their members as the 6-month mandate for the first ballot in November was going to expire on the 3rd April

(Tuckman, 2018). As well as having to hold another ballot, the law now stipulated that industrial action is not lawful unless 50 percent of those entitled to vote in the ballot did so, and a majority of those voting voted in favour of actions (Labour Research Department, 2018). Crucially, the requirement to re-ballot enabled the strike demands to be broadened at this stage beyond pay, to include the reinstatement of the bonuses and travel concessions that had been taken off those crew who had gone on strike since the dispute began (Sewell and Harper, 2017). However, days after the seven day period of strikes ended, and under growing pressure due to another ballot being organised, BA finally agreed to attend talks with Unite at Acas (Reuters, 2017a).

April – June 2017: The ‘Pause for Peace’, the second ballot, and another cancelled strike

As the reconvened negotiations continued, the result of the second ballot was announced by Unite on 4th April with 91 percent of cabin crew voting resoundingly in favour of industrial action on a turnout of 69 percent (Socialist Worker, 2017b) well above the ‘thresholds’ introduced by the TUA 2016 (Labour Research Department, 2018). This extended the mandate to take industrial action for a further six months and as discussed above, broadened the demands to include reinstating the sanctions as well as the initial demand for an improvement on the pay offer.

After more talks throughout April and May, and a new offer that included increases in pay but no movement on the loss of travel concessions and bonuses there were fears that the dispute was starting to lose momentum, especially as no strikes had taken place during the crucial Easter period (Socialist Worker, 2017b). However, in a turn of fate for the striking crew, BA

was placed under mounting pressure at the end of May due to an IT ‘meltdown’ which caused major disruptions for the airline (Fleming, 2017), with 75, 000 customers stranded, and the cancellation of 800 flights (Topham, 2017b).

At the beginning of June with the dispute now entering its eighth month (Calder, 2017d), Unite gave BA the 14-days’ notice now required by the TUA 2016 (Labour Research Department, 2018: 173) that four more days of strikes would take place from the 16th to 19th June. For Unite’s Assistant General Secretary Howard Becket, BA stood out among the employers the union has dealt with “in that they can accept the case for a pay deal but want to punish the very people who made the case” (Unite, 2017n). This four-day strike in June was then cancelled as talks resumed again at Acas, and while originally beginning as a dispute *primarily* over pay, the central unresolved issue had now become the removal of the sanctions imposed on members who took part in the earlier strikes (BBC, 2017; Calder, 2017d).

However, with BA refusing to send their key decision makers to these negotiations, Unite’s representatives wrote to BA with a final compromise position on the outstanding issue of the sanctioning of striking cabin crew, giving the company until noon on the 16th June to accept, or prolonged industrial action would continue throughout the summer months. As well as industrial action, the union started the process of pursuing 1,400 legal cases against the airline on behalf of the sanctioned cabin crew (Unite, 2017o). With BA refusing to accept Unite’s final compromise position by 16th June deadline, as promised the union then proceeded to give 14-days’ notice that a two-week strike would take place from the 1st to 16th July (Unite, 2017p), action which a BA spokeswoman described as ‘extreme’. The company’s position was that Unite should let its members vote on the pay deal that had now been agreed by both parties, and then pursue the other ‘non-pay’ issues through the courts (Topham, 2017c). Perhaps

previous experience of the bias nature of the judiciary in the UK towards workers and trade unions generally (Hyman, 2003; Howell, 2005), and more specifically the events that marked the 2009-11 BA-BASSA dispute discussed in the previous chapter (Ewing, 2011) played some part in Unite's decision to try and reinstate these sanctions using collective action as well as the legal route.

In preparation for the resumption of strike activity, BA applied to the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) to wet lease nine A320 aircraft from Qatar Airways to cover operations for a maximum of two months (Caswell, 2017). In response to this, Unite called on the CAA to turn down the application, warning that it could be in breach of aviation law if BA was unable to demonstrate that an equivalent level of safety standards would be applied to the aircraft. This is because under European Law, BA had to demonstrate to the CAA that all safety standards equivalent to those imposed by national laws are met.

A Unite official claimed that MFU members were "hungry" for the upcoming action, arguing that BA's vindictiveness had provided the momentum to keep on striking: "We paused for peace, but BA just couldn't help themselves. Now anything other than two-weeks would have seemed weak" (Sewell, 2017d). Yet, in a characteristically defiant statement, the CEO of IAG Willie Walsh stated that the planned Qatar Airways aeroplanes would go ahead; "I'll be pleased to say that those airplanes will fly and all the British Airways passengers who are booked to fly with us over the next couple of weeks will be flying" (Reuters, 2017b).

Strikes: July – August 2017: 'BA ... a ship you can't sink with one hit'

On 1st of July, Mixed Fleet crew began 16 days of strike action after a three month gap and a series of talks had failed to resolve the long-running dispute (Sewell, 2017e). While it appeared both sides had broadly come to an agreement on pay (although this would need to be agreed by the membership), the central and unresolved issue was the treatment of 1,400 crew who had taken industrial action between January and March and then been sanctioned for doing so. So far, 26 days of strike action had taken place with around 25-30 per cent of Mixed Fleet cabin crew stopping work. With only Heathrow flights affected, the number of flights cancelled had been a low-single figure percentage of the overall schedule due to BA's counter-mobilisation tactics. As discussed, some aircraft and crews were wet leased from other airlines while other flights were 'merged', crew were drafted in from Gatwick, and a number of back office staff trained as cabin crew were drafted in to cover. Crucially, as Mixed Fleet were only 15 percent of the crew workforce, Worldwide and Eurofleet were also flying the routes impacted by the strikes (Calder, 2017d).

However, despite BA and Unite supposedly reaching an agreement over the wage increase as the strikes resumed in July, for those MFU members taking industrial action the impact of 'poverty pay' still remained as a justification for escalating the conflict. As one MFU member claimed:

I've had to work second jobs to make ends meet. It's really tiring to come back from a trip and instead of recuperating do an eight- or ten-hour shift at a bar waiting tables. Because our basic pay is so low we have to live off our flight allowances. That means your pay is inconsistent – it depends what you fly in a given month (Sewell, 2017e).

Another explained that in a bad month they were paid less than half of what they got in a good month, while others were trapped in a cycle of getting advances on their wages one

month to make up for the advance on their wages they needed the previous month (Sewell, 2017e). However, Unite officials and BA were publicly stating that the pay aspect of the dispute was largely resolved in principle (7 percent over three years) and the continuing strike action was a response to the sanctions (Reuters 2017c; Topham, 2017d). With the wet-leasing arrangement with Qatar Airways given the go ahead, BA were estimating that 99.5 percent of their flights would operate, although this would come at a major financial cost, and significantly have the potential of affecting forward bookings (Calder, 2017d).

On the fifth day of striking, Mixed Fleet members protested outside the headquarters of Qatar Airways in London, while their union proceeded with legal action over the wet leasing arrangement with BA. Again, Unite argued the deal with Qatar breached European regulations, as well as BA's own corporate responsibility policy as the Qatar airline had been found guilty in the past of systematic workplace sexual discrimination which included female cabin crew being automatically sacked when becoming pregnant, as well as prohibiting women from being dropped off or picked up from work by a man other than their husband, father or brother (Unite, 2017r).

On the same day, Unite notified BA of a further 14-days of strikes running from 19th July to 1st August (Unite, 2017s) while the company announced that the 'My Incentive' bonuses they had taken off workers for striking earlier in the year would be paid to crew who worked during both periods of strikes in July, in a one off payment of £250. In addition to this, staff who worked on flights where there were fewer cabin crew than normal could claim up to £30 for the extra effort involved (Calder, 2017g). This was presented by BA as using savings from docking the bonuses of those who went on strike to make extra payments to non-striking crew, but as one Mixed Fleet rep argued, to present this as a result of 'making savings' was

absurd as BA had by this point spent millions of pounds trying to break the strikes, money that could have been used to offer their workers a substantial pay rise and settle the dispute. This is a key point, as although the strikes caused dozens of cancellations the disruption caused to BA's flight schedule was limited because of the wet leasing of fully-crewed Qatar airplanes, albeit at an extremely high financial cost to BA (Sewell, 2017f). It appears that BA were willing to spend millions of pounds in order to resist attempts by their new Mixed Fleet to fight for better pay and conditions, a category of workers set up with the explicit intention of not being collectively organised. As one MFU member said, "We know the money is there. Their profits show it. So, the only reason they won't settle is not because they can't, it's because they choose not to. They would rather lose money than show respect to the people that make their profit" (Allday, 2017c).

On 12th July hundreds of Mixed Fleet crew demonstrated outside Parliament, which coincided with an 'Early Day Motion' in the House of Commons by MPs expressing concern over low pay and British Airways penalising striking members of cabin crew, as well as raising concerns over the 'wet leasing' of aircraft from Qatar (Unite, 2017t). By now, the MFU branch of Unite had 3,100 members, an increase of over 1,000 since the first ballot opened in November 2016, and at the protest veteran Labour MP Dennis Skinner and Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell addressed the crowds in support of the strikes (Topham, 2017d). However, as the strikes progressed throughout July it appeared that the two sides had arrived at an impasse. BA would keep using their wet-leased Quatar aircraft and thus minimise the impact of the strikes, while at the same time those on strike were not prepared to return to work until the docked bonuses and travel concessions were restored to those who had gone on strike earlier in the year (Calder, 2017e, The Guardian, 2017b).

On 19th July, Unite announced another 14 days of strike action running from the 2nd to the 15th August, pointing to a deepening resolve among striking cabin crew. Additionally, the union warned that those cabin crew covering striking workers would be getting perilously close to their legal number of flying hours and would not be able to legally fly in the coming weeks as under aviation regulations cabin crew could not clock up more than 100 flying hours during a rolling 28-day period (Unite, 2017u). At the same time, IAG announced massive profits of €975 million for the first half of the year up to Jul 2017, a rise of nearly 40 percent, while BA's profits of €742 million were up 20 percent; thus, reinforcing the perceived injustice of the striking crew's demands over low pay (Unite, 2017v). In response to this, Unite's Regional Secretary for London and Eastern claimed that BA's heavy handedness was backfiring as the strikers became more determined and solidarity was increasing. Comparing the dispute to the 2009-11 BA-BASSA conflict, it was argued that the strikes were exposing the race to the bottom on terms and conditions in the aviation industry (Kavanagh, 2017).

With crew out on strike for almost the whole of July, this had already become the longest running strike in UK aviation history, and in a sign of growing solidarity, some members of BA's Worldwide and Eurofleet were supporting their Mixed Fleet colleagues by buying shopping online for those suffering financial hardship as a result of striking, while the MFU branch had set up its own food bank in their strike headquarters, the Bedfont Football Club. In contrast, BA were bizarrely trying to undermine the growing solidarity by disciplining crew who used yellow pens at work. As the colour had become a symbol of the dispute, BA claimed if anyone had yellow on display it amounted to bullying or harassment (Sewell, 2017g).

The first day of August saw the end of the 14-day strike and the second day saw the start of a new 14 -day strike. Although the dispute had now escalated to a period of almost continuous

strike action, the financial pressure on striking crew was lessened by Unite paying enhanced strike pay of £60 per day, at a reported cost of £2 million by this stage. As discussed above, Mixed Fleet wages were so low that many workers had been forced to take on second (and sometimes third) jobs to make ends meet and this was now enabling them to stay out for a longer periods as combined with Unite's strike pay the loss of wages was not impacting them as severely (Allday, 2017b). Under pressure, BA started to make concessions and emailed workers directly offering to restore their staff travel discounts if they returned to work. However, in response, MFU representatives emailed their members and pointed out that strikers were still being denied their bonuses and there was still a mandate to push for real improvements in pay in any settlement (Sewell, 2017h).

In a clear sign of escalating conflict, Unite announced on 3rd August further strikes from the 16th to 30th August which meant that striking Mixed Fleet members would now be out on strike for almost two whole months (Unite, 2017w) with one striker stating, "There's no point going back after seven months if there's no difference" (Tengely-Evans, 2017). As the dispute entered into what would be the last period of strike action in mid-August there were no signs that the Mixed Fleet striking crew were becoming demoralised. Protesting outside Heathrow Airport Ltd on 16th August, it was reported that there was a carnival like atmosphere as demonstrators made as much noise as possible with whistles, vuvuzelas, air horns and the help of several musicians (Sewell, 2017i). Yet BA continued their strategy of wet-leasing aircraft to minimise disruption to customers, pointing out that Unite had agreed a pay deal that was acceptable while refusing to ballot their members on it (Monagahn, 2017).

As the August strikes were coming to an end, Unite General Secretary Len McCluskey wrote to Alex Cruz, CEO of British Airways claiming the union was now embarking upon another 'pause for peace', urging BA to enter talks and find a resolution to the long running dispute:

You will be aware that we have not issued any further notice for strike action which will currently end on 30 August. This is in order to create a 'pause for peace' so that our respective teams can get round the table with a view to securing a mutually accepted resolution to the current dispute. Given the nature and length of the dispute I am more than willing to involve myself in any future talks with you and would ask that the company looks at a number of dates from 31 August onwards' (Unite, 2017x).

With the strikes finally ending on the 30th August, an estimated 1,400 cabin crew had been on strike almost continuously for two months, following on from the 26-days of action between January and March. The strikes so far had resulted in flights being cancelled, as well as BA being forced to spend millions wet leasing aircraft to cover the operational disruption. Yet the impact of the strike on customers had been limited mainly due to the availability of Qatar Airways aircraft, and BA claimed that detailed contingency planning had resulted in fewer than one in a hundred of its overall July – August schedule being cancelled (Calder, 2017h). However, after going on strike for 85 days over 8 months, this was now the longest-running strike in UK Aviation history and despite BA's attempts to downplay its impact, the action had cost the company millions of pounds in its attempts at limiting disruption to flight schedules (Socialist Worker, 2017c).

Settlement: September – November 2017

After further negotiations took place during this second 'pause for peace' throughout September and October, Unite finally announced on the 31st of October that cabin crew had

voted overwhelmingly to accept a pay deal which brought the long running dispute to an end. Eventually, 84 per cent of MFU members backed the deal on a turnout of 80 percent with crew set to get pay increases of at least £1,404 to £2,908 by March 2018, depending on experience and subject to inflation. This worked out as an 11 per cent increase on basic pay with an additional 4 per cent on the hourly rate, as well as the introduction of a new £10 daily overseas allowance. The deal also saw travel concessions and entitlements to fully participate in the airlines bonus scheme returned to cabin crew who took industrial action, in addition to guarantees that deductions will not be made to any applicable bonuses. In accepting the deal Unite also dropped the legal action that it was pursuing on behalf of Mixed Fleet crew who had been sanctioned by BA for taking industrial action (Unite, 2017y; Taylor and Moore, 2019: 153; Short, 2017b). However, while the majority of MFU members voted in favour of the settlement agreement there were some concerns that the pay increase did not do enough to ease stress over monthly fluctuations in wages, as well as the fact that the deal had only taken money from incentive payments in order to increase basic pay. Another MFU member who had gone on strike pointed to the reason why the vote to accept was so high, “I honestly believe we are all exhausted from this battle, I am. Most will vote yes to this deal as they want it over with, we are all tired of fighting with a monster’ (Sewell, 2017j).

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the main events that occurred during the 2016-17 Mixed Fleet Unite dispute, a period of conflict that lasted 11 months and eventually included 85 days of strike action. The objective of this was to provide a narrative account of the dispute based on primary documentary material to provide the context for the following chapter based on the qualitative research. This relates to the previous discussion in chapter three in

which it was argued that the most effective accounts of strikes are those that combine an appreciation of the objective factors underpinning industrial action and conflict, along with the subjective element that can be found by examining the perceptions of those involved (Darlington, 2002; Coates and Topham, 1988; Hyman, 1989).

The chapter included a discussion of how the dispute progressed following the first industrial action ballot in November-December 2016, with the announcement of strikes on Christmas Day and Boxing Day, which were then suspended so the MFU membership could vote on an improved offer. With this offer rejected by the members, and BA unwilling to carry on negotiations, a series of 26 days discontinuous strike action between January and March 2017 then took place, before a 'pause for peace' was initiated by Unite to try and resolve the dispute. Although during this period further negotiations had brought about an improved offer, and legal action had been started by Unite over the sanctions imposed on striking crew by BA, the dispute could not be settled as BA would not back down over these sanctions arguing Unite should pursue by the legal route. With both sides at loggerheads over this issue, the dispute escalated to the two months of almost continuous strike action throughout July and August 2017, a period of industrial conflict that ultimately would see BA back down and restore the bonuses and travel concessions to striking MFU members and with the membership voting to accept the pay deal the long running dispute ended.

Chapter Seven: Strike organisation: perceptions, insights and reflections.

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings from the eight semi-structured interviews carried out with representatives from Unite at workplace, regional and national level. Those interviewed were directly involved in building union organisation and membership in the early years of Mixed Fleet, the recruitment of members in the run-up to the 2016 pay negotiations, as well as mobilising MFU members to vote for industrial action. However, as well as the crucial role played in the build up to the industrial dispute resulting in the positive industrial action ballot and announcement of strikes, these union representatives and officials were also involved in the day-to-day organisation of the strikes once they had commenced in January 2017 and throughout the entirety of the dispute over the following 10 months.

As outlined in chapter four, those interviewed include five workplace representatives who were centrally involved in all aspects of the dispute and the strikes, and these participants had a range of experience between them from 4 years in the role to being elected as a workplace union representative just before the dispute started, and as well as being workplace representatives some held additional positions within the MFU branch. However, what emerged from the interviews is that they were all new to trade unionism before they started working for BA in Mixed Fleet. As well as these cabin crew workplace representatives, the two Unite Regional Officers who organised and led the strikes were also interviewed. These officers had lengthier experiences within the trade union movement to draw upon, both in their previous roles as shop stewards/workplace representatives and as full-time officers in Unite for many years. Finally, the General Secretary of Unite Len McCluskey was interviewed and did not object to being named in person, although for consistency he will be referred to throughout as the General Secretary.

Building on the critical realist research philosophy and the necessity to consider the objective structures and historical factors giving rise to an event (Edwards et al, 2014; O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014; Bhaskar, 1989, cited in Saunders et al, 2016: 140), chapter five has already outlined the underlying long term causes of the Mixed Fleet dispute by examining important developments in the political economy of civil aviation, and how BA responded to these competitive pressures. This resulted in a range of cost saving initiatives being implemented, including attempts at reducing the cost of labour, and as discussed this ultimately resulted in BA successfully introducing a two tier workforce in 2010 during the BA-BASSA dispute which created the conditions for the Mixed Fleet dispute six years later. In chapter six, following Langley's (1999) discussion of 'sense-making strategies', a narrative account of the dispute was then outlined using predominately primary sources. The purpose of this was to provide the appropriate context for the qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews in this chapter.

To return to discussion of critical realism above, while an *objective* world exists independently of people's perceptions, language, or imagination, crucially, part of that world also consists of *subjective* interpretations influencing the ways in which the world is perceived and experienced (O'Mahoney and Vincent, 2014). More specifically, as Hyman (1989) argues, incidences of industrial action are not simply the mechanical outcome of major structural forces, and a more complete analysis can only be achieved by also taking into consideration the perceptions, intentions and strategies of the men and women involved.

With these observations in mind the rest of the chapter is structured into eight sections based on a number of important themes emerging from the interviews with the participants. The first section, 'Growing the union: 2011-16', will discuss the early years of Mixed Fleet in the

period following the BA - BASSA dispute in June 2011, up to the pay negotiations in late 2016. As part of the settlement agreement to the dispute, as well as being employed on significantly lower pay and inferior working conditions to the established Worldwide and Eurofleet, cabin crew in the new Mixed Fleet were not allowed to join the BASSA branch of Unite. This section will explore how the Regional Officer assigned to the new workforce slowly built up membership over the following years, with Unite and BA signing a voluntary recognition agreement in 2013. After this, the Mixed Fleet Unite (MFU) Branch organised and grew the membership further and by the time of the pay negotiations in late 2016 there were around 2,000 members (50 percent density).

Section two will cover 'Strike causes, mobilisation and the first industrial action ballot' and outlines why the pay offer of two percent made to all employees was overwhelmingly rejected by the MFU members, as well as some of the other underlying causes of the dispute. It will then discuss how the majority of members were mobilised to vote yes in the industrial action ballot during November – December 2016. In the third section, 'The strikes', the various methods of mobilisation in the early period of strikes will be discussed with a focus on how the strike leaders utilised communication methods such as social media as well as email, text and WhatsApp to communicate to members who as a consequence of the nature of their job were dispersed around the UK and internationally. The section will then move on to consider strike tactics, and how these tactics changed in response to events as the strike progressed, before discussing how the strike leaders dealt with strike breakers and the difficulties in establishing effective picket lines in the airport. The final part of this section will discuss the important issue of strike pay from Unite and the impact this had on the ability of these low paid workers to stay out on strike for so long.

In section four, the relationship between 'Membership growth and industrial action' will be considered as during the period of the dispute over 1000 cabin crew joined the Unite union taking membership density to 77.5 percent. This section will explore the reasons for this from the perspective of the strike leaders, and the various methods employed to recruit members as the dispute progressed from the first ballot for industrial action to the strikes throughout 2017. Section five will cover 'Morale building, protests, and solidarity'. This will include a discussion of the range of events planned by the strike leaders which had the objective of building and maintaining morale among the cabin crew, protesting against BA as a means of placing additional pressure on the company, and attempting to raise the media profile of the dispute.

The sixth section, 'BA counter-mobilisation' will examine the various strategies BA adopted to try and divide the cabin crew by punishing those who had gone on strike and rewarding those who worked. Additionally, the various measures that were used to lessen the effects of the strikes will be discussed with a particular focus on the wet-leasing of fully crewed aircraft during the dispute, as well as re-directing Mixed Fleet routes to the legacy fleets. In section seven, 'The legal context' of the dispute will be discussed with a particular focus on the restrictive nature of the law on industrial action, the impact of the Trade Union Act 2016 which came into law during the dispute, and a discussion concerning the issue of labour injunctions and the reasons why BA did not choose this route as a means of stopping the strikes. In section eight, 'Settlement and aftermath', the interview participants reflect on the settlement agreement that ended the long dispute, as well as the aftermath in the immediate period following the end of the strikes. The final section will then include a broader discussion and

analysis of the qualitative research carried out as prelude to last chapter of the thesis which provides an overall conclusion.

Growing the union (2011-16):

As outlined in chapter five, Mixed Fleet as a separate category of cabin crew was officially established in June 2010 *during* the 2009-11 dispute between BA and BASSA, with the new structure reluctantly accepted by the BASSA membership one year later with the vote on the settlement agreement in June 2011 (Ewing, 2011; British Airways, 2017a). Among this new group of workers there were very few trade union members, and as previously agreed by BA and Unite, employees in the Mixed Fleet crew could not become members of BASSA even if they joined Unite (Regional Officer 1). Yet, by the time the annual wage negotiations began in autumn 2016 there were around 2,000 members in the newly created Mixed Fleet Unite (MFU) branch out of 4,000 potential recruits as Mixed Fleet grew to 15 percent of the entire cabin crew workforce (Rodionova, 2016).

Over this period a committed group of union activists at workplace level in Mixed Fleet had also emerged, and alongside their Unite Regional Officer these activists played a key role in this recruitment campaign which resulted in a recognition agreement for Mixed Fleet between BA and Unite being signed in 2013 (Morning Star, 2016). Before moving on to examine the industrial dispute and strikes in more detail from the perspective of those involved, it is necessary first to briefly discuss this period in which the MFU branch was built up to a position in which it could challenge BA over the low wage rates and inferior working conditions in comparison to the other fleets.

The General Secretary argued that while “[Willie] Walsh was hoping that he would break the union, he didn’t, he failed to break the old legacy crew and when we cut the deal it was regarded as an honourable draw, an honourable settlement”. Regional Officer 1, in contrast, viewed the settlement agreement in 2011 as a victory for the union as “it stopped a billion pound profit making company smashing the union, when they picked the battlefield, the time of it, and have all the resources to do that”. However, while the cabin crew in Eurofleet and the Worldwide fleet had their terms and conditions “ring fenced”, anyone joining the company after this period would now join Mixed Fleet and be employed on substantially lower pay and inferior working conditions.

Crucially, as Mixed Fleet employees were not allowed to join the BASSA branch of Unite they were initially at least denied the ability to collectively challenge BA over their pay and working conditions. Instead, a staff council called ‘My Voice’ was available for new employees who were informed by BA management in their initial training that they could not join BASSA. Indeed, it was reported that new employees were actually told in these training sessions that they could not join a trade union at all, although when legally challenged by Unite, the company corrected this and would then say to their new recruits that they could join a union, just not the BASSA branch of Unite (Regional Officer 1).

During this early period as the new Mixed Fleet workforce started to grow, there were only a few hundred Unite members among the newly established cabin crew, mainly made up from temporary workers who had worked in either the Worldwide or Eurofleet and had joined BASSA. When their temporary contracts had ended, they then joined Mixed Fleet on permanent contracts, and therefore carried over their membership of Unite into their new jobs. Additionally, there were some members of Mixed Fleet who had joined the union in this

early period as they had disciplinary, grievance or other issues relating to their employment with BA and required union representation, some others who had carried union membership over from their previous employment, as well as a few members who were perhaps “politically motivated to join a trade union” (Regional Officer 1).

For Regional Officer 1 who was assigned to Mixed Fleet after the 2009-11 dispute was settled, the objective was clear, “My aim was to look at this workforce and think right, this is an opportunity, it’s a clean sheet, I can just go in and see what I can do with it and try and organise them”. In the months that followed the membership started to slowly build from the initial hundred or so as Regional Officer 1 met potential recruits after work in pubs and in their houses, to try and recruit them and hopefully get them to convince others to join. During this early period, the officer also represented BASSA members in Worldwide and Eurofleet, and therefore was assisted in the recruitment process by having access to the Mixed Fleet cabin crew’s headquarters at Heathrow Airport. Conveniently, it was very easy to identify who was working in Mixed Fleet at this time as unlike crew in the other fleets they were made to wear hats as part of their uniform. As Workplace Rep 1 explained, “they made us wear hats when our fleet was created, and hats weren’t involved before, we had to wear hats to differentiate us from the other fleets”.

Discontent was also apparent in these early years on cabin crew online forums with comments concerning the vast difference between BA’s vision and the reality of working in Mixed Fleet. New workers were complaining of using BA’s system ‘Host’ to purchase food while at work and then having vast amounts of money deducted from their wages at the end of the month as well as how sickness impacted their quarterly bonus. Others were claiming that while they knew the wages were low, they thought they could make this up with the ‘flying pay’ per hour

bonus system although this was not happening because of lack of flights and short layovers. Because of these issues it was claimed that many were leaving after only a few months because of the issue of low pay. Even with the travel ‘perks’ and bonuses the cost of living was impacting the ability of these workers to survive on the basic salary (Professional Pilots Rumour Network, 2022). Harvey and Turnbull (2014b) also surveyed Mixed Fleet cabin crew and the responses highlighted discontent and grievances in these early years. For example even though Mixed Fleet are employed on ‘direct’ contracts, 60 percent of cabin crew found their contracts unsatisfactory while 81 percent reported extreme difficulty in changing rosters for personal needs. Additionally, less than 10 percent of Mixed Fleet cabin crew thought their pay and benefits were sufficient to support their current lifestyle with one participant stating: ‘We are commonly known as ‘cheap fleet’ throughout the company’.

During these early years, Regional Officer 1’s strategy was to attend every disciplinary and grievance case for existing members, and then encourage the connections made in these meetings to try and recruit more members at work, talking to crew “under the radar” (Regional Officer 1). As Unite had not yet gained recognition for Mixed Fleet there were no elected and accredited workplace representatives who could carry out this role, and so for Regional Officer 1 this became an effective way of trying to utilise the presence of an experienced trade union officer as an example to these mainly young workers of what membership of a trade union could do for them.

This strategy was possible because of legislation included in the Employment Relations Act 1999 (ERA 1999) introduced during the 1997-2001 Labour government. First, this Act provides employees with an *individual* statutory right to bring a companion to a disciplinary or grievance hearing. The companion is chosen by the employee and can be either a colleague

sharing the same employer, a certified lay official (workplace representative/shop steward), or a full-time union official. Crucially in this case, this statutory right applies even if the union is not recognised by the company and regardless of the length of service of the employee (Labour Research Department, 2018). Second, the ERA 1999 also introduced the *collective* statutory right to union recognition if a union can demonstrate a majority of employees are members, albeit in firms with over twenty employees and when certain balloting thresholds have been met (Howell, 2005).

As the General Secretary argued, “[Willie] Walsh was desperate not to recognise the union in his new fleet, the company’s whole attitude was ... we’ll just get a gang of youngsters in, they can live in bedsits in Hounslow, and they’ll be burnt out after three or four years and we’ll replace them”. Regional Officer 1 also claimed that BA “thought they could do whatever they wanted” with their new fleet, in contrast to the tradition of joint regulation of the employment relationship that had characterised its relationship with BASSA in the legacy fleets (Taylor and Moore, 2019). However, this situation also presented the union with a potentially effective organising opportunity as BA were treating their new employees so unfairly people could see the injustice very easily and were now starting to join Unite in increasing numbers. By going in and winning cases for members who were going to be heavily disciplined or sacked, or grievances for members being treated unfairly, these actions promoted a feeling that someone was fighting for the membership “against this injustice, and if we all join and we can get 50 percent, or near it, then we can get recognition” (Regional Officer 1).

The plan therefore was to “grow the union” slowly and organically towards a recognition agreement with the company, and while the members could not yet elect workplace representatives, Regional Officer 1 embarked upon a strategy of identifying potential leaders

among the cabin crew who could take up these positions if and when recognition was achieved, as well as involving these new activists in the recruitment of colleagues in the intervening period. In doing so the process of turning individual dissatisfaction among Mixed Fleet cabin crew into a collective response was set in motion (Karsh, 1982; Kelly, 1998), as was BA's intention to target any activists involved using long-standing anti-union tactics (see Hiller, 1928; Foner, 1978: 40).

One emerging activist was Workplace Rep 3 who was working as cabin crew in Mixed Fleet during this period, had joined Unite, and then became involved in the recruitment of colleagues to the union:

It was tough when we first joined, if you speak to any crew who were around at the beginning of the creation of Mixed Fleet and I'm sure some of the other guys will say the same thing that it was really tough ... and so there was rumblings of unionising and union talk and I kind of [got involved] and so much so the company didn't like that, and tried to get rid of me so I was suspended, I can't remember what the year that was, maybe 2012 something like that, no later than that, so they tried to suspend me and that was when I first met [Regional Officer 1] ... [I was suspended] for trying to recruit members to the branch, this was pre-recognition, and we didn't have any kind of branch or workplace reps ... I took a slap on the wrist for whatever, and then I went back to work.

After a few years had passed this recruitment strategy was starting to work, with around 35 percent membership density achieved despite BA's attempts at resisting unionisation and crucially a recognition deal *specifically* with Unite. In fact, the company was so opposed to Unite establishing a presence among their new workforce that they even offered a recognition deal to the General Municipal and Boilermaker's Union (GMB), even though there were no

GMB members among the cabin crew (Regional Officer 1). This resulted in the intervention of Unite's General Secretary who contacted his counterpart in the GMB to explain the situation, with the result that all of the GMB's officers were pulled away from any recognition talks with BA (General Secretary). As well as this, BA tried to prevent recognition by constantly holding meetings though never actually agreeing to anything, involving a private consultant to try and promote a culture of partnership between the company and workforce, as well as arranging a visit to South West Airlines in America with representatives from BA management, Unite, and the Mixed Fleet cabin crew workforce to try and learn from South West's "strike-free model" (Regional Officer 1). However, Regional Officer 1 was clear in his message to BA, "we can do this the hard way or the easy way, but your little dream is gone, you're going to get unionised".

Eventually, this is what happened and despite these attempts by BA at resisting a union recognition deal with Unite, by the end of 2012 enough members had been recruited to make this a formality. It was only at this stage that the company were forced to work with the union to agree a voluntary recognition deal, which was finally formalised the following year for the main cabin crew only. This was a significant achievement by a relatively small number of officials and activists in such a short period of time, and in an environment which had explicitly been set up to prevent this from happening.

However, by only including the main cabin crew in the agreement, the recognition deal had left the 'on-board' Customer Service Managers (CSMs), many of whom were Unite members, with no access to collective bargaining. This would cause problems almost immediately and reversing this decision would become one of the key strike demands at the start of the dispute three years later. However, the justification behind the decision at this stage was to accept recognition for the main crew as a starting point, and then fight for CSM recognition later on:

“For us it was a point of looking and going, we get access to the training school, [the CSMs] will have come from main crew, so eventually we’ll use our influence to get more and more union people into that management and then try and change it” (Regional Officer 1).

Workplace Rep 1 explained how the elected reps in the newly established ‘Mixed Fleet Unite’ (MFU) branch organised in the period after recognition, immediately forming a Branch Committee with a Chairperson, Secretary, Treasurer and Office Administrator, as well as about seven or eight workplace reps in the emerging union structure at workplace level:

[We] needed to make some sort of committee so that we could make decisions and stuff quickly, and get communications out which is vital to anything that we were doing at BA, because being crew logistically it’s a nightmare to organise, you have never got anybody in the same place at once, you only have to get to your work to check in an hour and a half before you leave so at a push people might be there three hours early if they live far away, but most of the time they’re there before they start work and then they fly off, so to organise that is very difficult so our communication and everything had to go out really quickly, and we had to have all these platforms available, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, email, all available for people to be able to contact us, so creating a community from the beginning was really, really, important.

After the recognition agreement was signed, Unite were allowed access to the initial training sessions for new employees where they could give a presentation, but not sign people up on the day. This was another attempt at resisting further unionisation among the new crew, as BA argued that previously BASSA reps would have come in and “put everyone’s arms up against their back and forced them to sign union membership” (Regional Officer 1). However, with the new branch structure and union representatives in place, by 2014 the membership had grown to around 1000, although as Mixed Fleet as a workforce was also increasing,

membership density was still roughly 40 percent. A feeling started to grow in these circumstances that the branch was “running to stand still”, and a “win” was needed to show the workforce that the union could make a real difference; and that is when the “skirt issue” occurred.

As well as making the crew wear hats to identify them, and therefore separate them from the other fleets, they were also originally made to have both names on their badges although that was eventually resisted by the union when some members of crew had been contacted and harassed by members of the public on social media sites. As well as this, unlike their colleagues in BASSA, female crew in Mixed Fleet were not allowed to wear trousers and were only issued skirts with their uniform. Regional Officer 1 started to campaign over this issue and contacted the press stating that Unite members may be willing to take industrial action to overturn the policy, and although in response BA stopped the union making presentations during the training courses for new employees, the negative stories emerging in various newspapers forced the company to back down and provide female crew with trousers. For Regional Officer 1, “[losing the training presentation] was a price worth paying because guess what, everyone saw we had a win and that was really the one issue that then enabled us to build from there to go, right, we’ve got pay coming up ... lets hit them on pay”.

By early 2016, despite significant recruitment of crew and membership now at around 1,500, overall density within the MFU branch was still only 40 percent as the Mixed Fleet workforce kept on increasing. However, the MFU branch had already surveyed its members in a ‘consultative ballot’ in 2014 and found that they would be willing to take industrial action over pay (Topham, 2014) and with this in mind it was decided by the Branch Committee that a significant recruitment drive would be needed to build the membership before the upcoming

pay negotiations in order to strengthen the union's bargaining position. During this period Unite were already engaged in their "100 percent campaign" across the regions, which was attempting to maximise membership in all workplaces where the union already had recognition. Influenced by this initiative, the MFU reps and branch officers decided to organise a local "spin off" which they called "80 percent in 80 days" (Workplace Rep 1).

As Workplace Rep 1 explained, "ultimately we wanted to get across to people that collectively we're stronger", and the branch, through Unite, ran a "member-get-member" drive with a £25 payment for recruiting a colleague to the union, as well as the chance for all new members to win an iPad in a prize draw at the end of campaign. Over a few months of active organising the MFU branch, their workplace representatives and other members managed to recruit around 500 new members in time for the 2016 pay negotiations, taking membership to 2000 (or around 50 percent density). As Regional Officer 1 claimed, "It took four years to get there, it wasn't like I just walked in and went right, we're having a strike, I built this to a position where I thought we are strike ready".

These developments highlight important issues for workers and trade unions, as well as relating to a number of theoretical points raised in the literature on strikes and mobilisation more generally. Although various long-term and immediate causes of the dispute have been discussed in previous chapters and the crucial insights of those leading the strikes will be covered in more detail below, it is also the case that without this period of recruitment and organising by one union officer and a small number of activists it is very unlikely the strikes would have taken place at all.

As already documented, strikes in the UK by non-union members have always been extremely rare (Hyman, 1989; Gall, 2006) and industrial action is very difficult to organise and maintain

without the involvement of a union and their representatives at workplace, regional, and national level. While a union presence is usually required to mobilise the membership, offer financial support to strikes and co-ordinate a response to any counter-mobilisation, strikes in the UK now take place in the context of complex and restrictive legislation which necessitates intricate levels of union involvement (Atzeni, 2010; Williams, 2014).

This case therefore reinforces the theoretical association between union membership/density and strikes in the UK context. As Kelly (2015) argues, theoretically this makes sense as union membership and organisation represent the critical power resources necessary for collective action. As discussed in chapter two, while a range of structural and institutional variables have been used to explain the decline of strikes, the correlation between union density and strikes is very strong and the trend of membership decline is remarkably similar to the downward trajectory of strikes. Additionally, by demonstrating the important role that small numbers of leaders and activists can play in the process of building union organisation, these events can be related to a crucial stage in Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory.

In a related point, French and Hodder (2016) detail that while trade unions generally did not recover significantly in terms of membership levels after 13 years of Labour Government between 1997 and 2010, the framework provided by these administrations did at least provide the necessary scope for unions to at least pursue revitalisation initiatives. The period of recruitment leading to recognition in 2013 and the building of union organisation in the years that followed demonstrates that this is the case, if combined with the necessary leadership at various levels in the union. The following section will now move on to outline the causes of the strikes, and how the members were mobilised to vote in the industrial action ballot.

Strike causes, mobilisation and the first industrial action ballot

As the pay negotiations proceeded throughout October and into November 2016, BA made their final offer of two percent which would apply to all employees, however while Mixed Fleet were offered the same percentage as everyone else, the company made the decision to exclude them from the “corporate pay offer” bargaining unit that covered the rest of their employees. Regional Officer 1 argued this was a mistake as if BA had included Mixed Fleet within this structure Unite would have likely just ran a ballot of the entire workforce and Mixed Fleet would have simply been outvoted as they only represented 15 percent of the overall cabin crew workforce (Regional Officer 1).

Regional Officer 1 argued that while the rest of BA’s workforce voted to accept the two percent as part of the corporate structure, by excluding Mixed Fleet from this vote the MFU branch were subsequently presented with the flexibility to *separately* put in a “failure to agree” over pay. As discussed, MFU members had already indicated in a consultative ballot in 2014 that they would be prepared to strike over pay and with strong support from representatives at workplace and branch level Regional Officer 1 proceeded to get the required clearance from Unite at national level to ~~run~~ carry out an industrial action ballot.

An increase in pay above the corporate offer of two percent was the central demand in this ballot and Workplace Rep 5 discussed concerns over the effects of such low wages, arguing that it was very difficult to live on an annual salary of just over £15,000. and crucially Mixed Fleet crew were worth much more when you look at what they actually do and in comparison with the wages of the other fleets. While in their public statements BA quoted higher salaries of over £21,000 (Smith, 2016), these figures included bonuses paid while flying, and payments

for working away from home. As Workplace Rep 5 pointed out, these additional sums should not be included in projections of annual earnings as they are meant to be spent while at work on food or drink. Additionally, such bonuses are not included when applying for bank loans or mortgages and as such were seriously impacting crew's ability to properly manage their finances.

However, it became apparent that while low pay was the central reason for balloting for industrial action at this stage, other factors had also contributed to the decision. Workplace Rep 1 explained that as well as wages being so low, Mixed Fleet crew were working more hours on extremely tiring routes, they did not get any of the benefits that crew in the other fleets ~~got~~ received such as food in certain destinations, and they were only getting one night of rest between flights compared to two nights which added to the exhausting schedule. As such:

It wasn't just about pay it was about fairness, we never wanted equality with Worldwide or Eurofleet, it would be nice don't get me wrong, but it was something that we never thought would happen, we just wanted some fairness ... and I think that putting that background to it lets you know and understand how pissed off some 'Mixed Fleeter's' were, they were being exploited left right and centre ... it was health and safety, it was uniform, it was just the way you were generally treated and spoken to, it was everything - and the underlying factor of all of this was most evident in the money because you get paid 11 grand a year doing exactly the same thing as [crew in the other fleets].

One of the other main differences between Mixed Fleet and the legacy fleets was the requirement to work a 'mix' of routes, whereas Eurofleet covered only short-haul and Worldwide covered only long-haul. As Workplace Rep 1 argued, you had these two fleets

traditionally for a reason because flying short-haul and long-haul at the same time is really tiring and is a potential health and safety issue:

They would give us eight day blocks [of work] ... so we'd have like Frankfurt, Manchester, Glasgow, back to Heathrow and then a four day to LA, you'd be up and down all week then have to do a 12-hour flight to LA overnight, it was crazy, it was so exhausting, and you don't have time to eat because if you think you're doing a Frankfurt, Glasgow and Manchester, that's 45 minutes max each flight, and then you've got to get up and down in the cabin and give people food, you don't eat yourself and then you've got to do it all again, you have 4 days of not eating properly and not sleeping properly, so really early and really late and then you've got to go and do a long flight and be 'compos mentis' and alert enough to operate a huge aircraft – there was a huge amount of injustice.

Workplace Rep 3 claimed that the cause of the dispute was initially and predominantly related to the pay claim, as when the two percent was applied to such a low starting salary you wouldn't see much of a difference, and on such low wages the ability to work and sustain yourself was being raised as an issue by the majority of crew. However, as events started to gather momentum, the whole business model of Mixed Fleet itself was starting to be called into question incorporating working conditions as well as pay, "so you know the shiny new fleet that they have created, the wheels have kind of come off under the heading of pay, but a lot of things were highlighted".

Another issue that Unite included in the industrial action ballot alongside pay was collective bargaining rights for the CSMs, which had remained unresolved since the recognition agreement was signed ~~back~~ in 2013, and although this was certainly not the primary cause of the dispute, it would become the other key strike demand in the early stages. BA management

were determined that the CSMs would not be included in the same bargaining unit as the main crew and ~~again~~, this approach was largely informed by their experiences with BASSA and the Cabin Service Directors (CSDs) in the established crews. In these fleets, most CSDs were also members of BASSA and once the door had closed on the airplane, management lost all control over their workforce other than the pilot who was preoccupied with flying the plane (Regional Officer 1).

Because of this, BA had sought to maintain control over the CSMs in Mixed Fleet and insisted that they would not be included in the recognition agreement with the main cabin crew (Workplace Rep 2). Although Unite initially accepted this with the intention of changing it later as membership grew, discontent had emerged within months with a section of unionised CSMs arguing whether it was worth being a member when Unite could not bargain for them (Regional Officer 1).

It is clear that low pay in comparison to the other fleets became the central issue for balloting for industrial action at this stage in the dispute, and those leading the strikes were presented with the opportunity to ballot over this when BA excluded Mixed Fleet from the corporate pay offer made to all other employees. However, the range of other factors outlined reinforce the discussion in the literature relating to the potential for strikes to be 'multi-causal' even though strike statistics use single categories in their recording and measurement (Knowles, 1952; Smith et al, 1978).

For instance, inferior working conditions compared to Worldwide and Eurofleet cabin crew were also given as reasons for the strike including longer hours and working both short and long haul routes on the same shift rotas. Additionally, concerns over health and safety, different uniforms, and the way that cabin crew were generally spoken to by management all

fed into the reasons for the strike. Finally, the issue of union recognition for the on-board supervisors (CSMs) came to the fore after years of no progress and including these supervisors in the same bargaining unit as Mixed Fleet cabin crew was included in the ballot.

All of these factors were discussed in terms of 'unfairness', 'exploitation', and crucially 'injustice', which as Kelly (1998) argues is the primary condition for collective action, the conviction that an event, action, or situation is wrong or illegitimate. However, it is not enough that workers feel aggrieved, they must also feel there is some chance that their situation can be changed by collective agency, and this will be returned to below when the mobilisation of the MFU members is discussed in more detail.

These observations can also be related to Meredeen's (1988) comment that the *occasion* of an industrial dispute must be distinguished carefully from its underlying causes, and first impressions of causes cannot be accepted at face value. As Foner (1978) details in the case of the Great Strike of 1877 in the USA, while the one issue universally cited by rail workers was pay the conflict also sprung from 'a reservoir of accumulated grievances' (see also Hiller, 1928; Lane and Roberts, 1972).

Gouldner's (1954) illustrates this in detail in which a strike over pay (the 'manifest' issue) was also a reflection of other underlying (or 'latent') issues in the workplace and hostilities to management that had built up over a period of time. However, the wage issue displaced the other grievances as it was seen as more legitimate, it did not challenge managerial prerogative in the plant, it was easier for the national union to make the case for a wage claim, and crucially it is also the case that as long as worker's live in a market economy many of the things they need to live can only be secured through cash transactions. The reasons for striking would change as the dispute progressed throughout 2017, and this will be discussed in more detail

below. However, before moving on it is necessary to first discuss how the Unite officers and MFU workplace representatives mobilised the membership to vote in favour of industrial action in the first industrial ballot in November 2016.

With the two percent offer rejected by the MFU membership and a range of other issues underlying the dispute, Unite proceeded to ballot Mixed Fleet cabin crew for industrial action over pay and a collective bargaining agreement for the CSMs. At the time of the ballot under UK law only a majority of those voting either for or against industrial action counted, regardless of the amount of union members voting, although this would change when the Trade Union Act 2016 became law on March 1st, 2017, after which point the ballot 'thresholds' were introduced. (Tuckman, 2018; Labour Research Department, 2018).

Yet, even though a simple majority vote was all that was required for a successful ballot at this stage, a good turnout by members is always preferable as the threat of a strike can strengthen the bargaining position of union negotiators. Additionally, such support persuades employers that those leading negotiations for the union have a good chance of calling for industrial action if necessary and therefore further increases the pressure on employers in any talks (Seifert and Sibley, 2005). In many cases the issue will be settled at this stage, and this is evidenced by the number of industrial action ballots in the UK since the legislation was introduced in 1984, which do not then result in a strike (Gall, 2006).

With these considerations in mind the emphasis at this early stage in the dispute became gaining a mandate from the membership to strengthen the bargaining position of the union during any further pay talks with BA. Indeed, the MFU branch officers, workplace reps and Regional Officer 1 had already actively recruited around 500 new members to the union in the immediate period before the pay negotiation for this very purpose, as well as gradually

building union organisation and membership over a five year period. Workplace Rep 3 discussed the preparation that had gone into organising members to vote in the ballot explaining how “there were phone banks that went on before to try and make sure [members] got their ballot, and they voted and the rest of it, so there was a lot of groundwork that went into just kind of getting it to that point”.

Workplace Rep 1 explained how social media sites such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, as well as email, were all used during this process to mobilise the membership to vote yes in the ballot. This was necessary due to the nature of the cabin crew’s working arrangements as they are more often than not in the same place, “we couldn’t go and speak to people because they weren’t ever there, so it was really unnerving when we were doing the voting and stuff”. However, by communicating the branch committee’s message effectively the MFU reps were able to overcome this hurdle:

We’ve got so many pages of written emails to members saying we don't condone this we don't think this is acceptable we think you are worth more than this ... we were quite aggressive in a way, but we had to be I think because if we weren't then I think people would just have rolled over, I think what really shocked us, actually no I think shocked is the wrong word, I think what pleasantly surprised us was how much the membership listened to us as reps and obviously that's an indication of how strong you are as a branch regardless of your numbers, you could have 100 percent of people in your union but if they don't listen to you as reps you're not very strong ... when it came to our emails, Facebook and everything, all these platforms that people communicated with us on it really surprised us ... because we were honest, we were brutally honest, they definitely saw us as leaders for sure which was nice, and then as the strike progressed, or more as the ballot progressed, you saw activists come forward as well and push people in certain directions and stuff like that.

During this period, Regional Officer 1 also made use of the local Unite Community Branch to help mobilise crew to vote in favour of industrial action in the ballot, with the Community Organiser and members handing out “vote yes” leaflets to cabin crew at Heathrow Airport’s Terminal Five. Additionally, while BASSA members in the other fleets had initially been wary of Mixed Fleet, perhaps understandably in the context of the 2009-11 dispute, with time they had significantly softened in their attitude and were a lot more supportive. As the ballot period progressed BASSA members helped mobilise the vote as they were on the same buses going into work as Mixed Fleet crew, and conversations took place reflecting on their previous experiences in the 2009-11 dispute and the need to stand up to BA (Workplace Rep 1; Regional Officer 1).

One of the main methods the strike organisers used to mobilise MFU members to vote yes in the ballot was the Facebook page (“BA Cabin Crew Solidarity”) that Regional Officer 1 and Regional Officer 2 set up when the ballot for industrial action opened. Workplace Rep 1 explained the significance of the page which grew from 1,500 people to 20,000 over a short period of time, “we had everything on there and it made people think like they were part of something”. They used this forum to try and mobilise members to vote yes for industrial action by encouraging them to take a photograph of the ballot and then post it on the Facebook page with comments such as:

I done my vote, or a picture of people putting the ballot in a letterbox ... then it trended on Twitter, on Facebook and stuff, people would just start copying basically which is great ... now I think about it, it’s phenomenal how we got that amount of people because we were so isolated, the only way we were communicating with anyone was through a computer screen or through a phone screen.

Additionally, Regional Officer 2 used the Facebook page to post a lot of information aimed at the members explaining why they should vote for industrial action, and then watched as it “took off” and the members got more involved:

We had the secret Facebook group, the solidarity group, if you scroll back and see that time you will see I did loads of posts on this is why you vote to strike, hundreds of people would be, oh I've never looked at it like that ... those things were very meaningful to them, it explained it in a way they hadn't previously thought of ... it started off with someone just saying I'm voting yes and because they are young they get how to do social media in a way that we don't necessarily, and they would do a photograph and then the next thing would be a photograph of them posting it. Then suddenly all it is pictures of people posting ballot papers, you know sometimes in an outlandish costume, and it became what I had always wanted it to be which was a club that you want to be with. You wouldn't want to be on the other side, we made it cool and dynamic ... I was obsessed with it. We were just constantly on it and constantly monitoring it and making sure the message was just there ... [Regional Officer 1] and I set it up one day ... and I don't think we realised what we had created.

There are important lessons to be drawn from the period of mobilisation to vote in favour of industrial action in the ballot. First of all, when the ballot process began in November 2016 the strike leaders were adept in their use of communication methods to their members including the use of social media sites such as Twitter, Instagram, and Facebook. As well as this, other methods were used including phone banks, email, text and WhatsApp and all of these were necessary as cabin crew are dispersed around the world. At this early stage of mobilisation the need to progress to a ballot for industrial action was framed by the strike leaders in terms of the pay offer being unacceptable and the requirement to achieve a strong mandate in the ballot (Kelly, 1998; Benford and Snow, 2000). However, this would develop as

the ballot result was confirmed and definite concrete strike dates confirmed, and the following section will chart important developments that emerged throughout the strikes.

The strikes: Mobilisation, tactics, pickets and strike pay

The result of the first ballot was announced on the 14th December 2016 with 79 percent voting for industrial action on a turnout of 60 percent and strikes were announced for Christmas Day and Boxing Day 2016 (Unite, 2016b, Unite 2016c), although these strike days were eventually suspended as negotiations between BA and Unite resumed at Acas. A slightly improved offer was then put to members over the Christmas and New Year period and subsequently rejected (Calder, 2016). When BA refused to extend the 28 day period that requires unions take industrial action after the ballot result has been declared, a two day strike was then announced to take place on the 11th and 12th of January 2017 (Unite, 2017a). This section will focus on four important themes relating to the strikes emerging from the interviews; mobilisation, strike tactics, the protests which took the place of organised picket lines, and strike pay.

Mobilisation

When the strikes eventually started it had been nearly two months since the ballot for industrial action had opened, and for those organising the strikes there had been little opportunity to address the membership in person due to cabin crew's working arrangements which by their very nature means people are working all over the world. However, the BA Cabin Crew Solidarity Facebook page had by now been set up and thousands of cabin crew were actively participating on it including the strike organisers who used it alongside emails to communicate to the membership. Nevertheless, it was difficult to predict from the online

activity how many members would actually go on strike once the action began, and Workplace Rep 1 explained how events unfolded on the first day arriving at the Unite office near Heathrow Airport to start setting everything up:

I remember thinking what if I'm the only one there, what if nobody does anything, like, you can vote as much as you want, you can put a pen to paper ... keyboard warrior kind of thing, attacking people through your screen, but when it comes down to it, who has the balls to do that ... so the worry was out of 3000, 4000 crew, how many were going to come out. How much of an impact are we going to make on the operation, and I remember the day at six in the morning we were just swarming [outside] the Unite Office at Heathrow ... we didn't have Bedfont because we didn't know how many people were going to turn up, we thought there was only going to be five or six people.

Workplace Rep 3 was also one of the first to turn up on the first day and described the emotional impact of actually "stepping off the job". Like Workplace Rep 1, the fear was that although there was a lot of support building for the strikes on the social media site throughout the balloting period and then over Christmas and New Year would members actually strike on the day. However as Regional Officer 2 argued, despite such concerns it was useful to use social media to communicate with this group of workers as they lived all over the UK and sometimes abroad, flying in just to do the job. "It's not like they're in a village, all in a town you know in Yorkshire or whatever, and who you work with is different all the time, so you don't have that industrial base you don't have that shop floor you don't have those methods of communication".

For Workplace Rep 2, mobilisation at this stage included positively arguing the case for taking industrial action as well as trying to counter the negative arguments made by BA to try and

undermine the strikes. This was primarily achieved by communicating with members through email and the BA Cabin Crew Solidarity Facebook page, and it was argued that this was required as the majority of the members were young and for many it was their first job after school or college and they would have had no experience of trade union membership, let alone taking industrial action. With so many experienced people from the other established fleets in BA and other areas in Unite participating in the Facebook group, this was used to “encourage people and make them realise they weren’t alone, and they were doing the right thing”.

Workplace Rep 3 also argued that social media was essential both in mobilising the members to go on strike, and in organising the strikes as well:

I very quickly started dealing with the social media side of things, then all the digital and production of stuff, producing any of the information flyers ... generating you know the kind of social pressure within the crew itself through lots of different avenues ... I don't think it's any surprise to anyone now when they say social media is key and you know it's something that everyone needs to be doing ... there's lots of rhetoric that goes round it but the difference that's applied to our dispute essentially is the demographic of who we were dealing with, and you know predominantly 18-25 year olds you know, social media isn't something that they have to be shown to use or told to use it's just inherently, it's something that they are accustomed to.

Workplace Rep 4 also focused on social media and other methods of communication such as texts and emails when explaining how the strike leaders mobilised this group of predominantly young members. When the MFU branch was formed after recognition it became apparent that there was already a small social media presence and the workplace reps and branch officials decided to engage on it because that was where their members were engaging.

Because of this, by the time of the strike, the branch was already using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, as well as establishing their own website, “We’ve got all the tools because with our jobs people aren’t at home all the time, they need access and it’s all about knowing your members ... it’s definitely key because you can push things very quickly ... and do you know what, its free”.

However, the point was made that social media had to work in combination with other communication methods and the strike leaders had to accept that not everyone is on Facebook. Because of this the MFU branch made sure they always had up to date membership information and always used email to communicate information to members initially, and then “spread the message across all platforms ... it felt like we had to be on the ball, the organising and getting the message out takes up a lot of time and it wasn’t always easy, but we had to constantly keep on top of it” (Workplace Rep 2). Workplace Rep 1 discussed how before the strikes the strike organisers communicated with the members by email:

We sent out three question and answer emails to the membership, and said that all the legislation behind striking, all the protections behind striking, why it’s legal, what isn’t legal, all of this stuff, so basically, we just outlined it to everyone this is your legal right, you have a legal right to be part of a union you have a legal right to withdraw your labour, you’ve got all of this stuff in black and white that we’ve sent out ... so it was just making sure that people were aware of what was going on, communication again, that is so key to all of this.

For Workplace Rep 2, the branch committee had built up momentum among the membership all the way through the pay negotiations, the balloting period, and then the result in favour of industrial action, and as well as this, members were also encouraging each other to ~~both~~ go on strike and to join the union, which increased membership further when the strikes started:

So for a lot of people it was a natural progression, they were comfortable you know, we are here we've been voting for this we can't pull out now, this is what we are actually faced with, the reality of the situation, there were a lot of waverers ... however there's always the conversations that were being had between the members on private networks on WhatsApp groups on flights, so our members also did all they possibly could to encourage people to come out and that's against a backdrop of being scared to talk at work they're being very careful about the conversations you are having.

When the strikes started in January it had been almost two months since the ballot had opened and during this period the strike leaders continued to communicate with their members mainly through emails and the Facebook page, and by building support in this way they ensured members turned out on strike days. Mobilisation during this period was a case of positively arguing the case for industrial action, while at the same time countering the negative arguments made by BA. While the strikes were officially related to pay and collective bargaining rights for CSMs they were also 'framed' in terms of injustice, exploitation and unfairness as well as other issues related to working conditions, health and safety, and the way Mixed Fleet crew were generally treated by management.

These events fit well with Benford and Snow's (2000) concept of collective action frames which the strike leaders constructed in an attempt at defining an understanding of a situation in need of change (low wages), identified who is to blame (BA management), articulated an alternative course (industrial action), and then urged others to act collectively to affect this change. This incorporates the three core framing tasks discussed in chapter three: First, diagnostic framing which relates to the situation of low pay as being framed as an injustice and this was blamed on the company. Second, prognostic framing which involves the articulation of a proposed solution to the problem which was achieved by balloting for

industrial action. This also brings 'counter-framing' into the argument as BA management set out their arguments to justify the annual salary and the two percent offer in the pay negotiations. Finally, motivational framing provides a rationale for engaging in collective action, including the construction of appropriate 'vocabularies of motive', a concept also utilised by Batstone et al (1978) who observed that a crucial part of the movement towards a strike were these arguments in favour of striking put forward by certain people.

This can also be related to the central assertion of Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory that collective organisation and activity ultimately stem from employer's actions generating among workers a feeling of injustice or illegitimacy, a process leading to the industrial action ballot and through to the strikes. The establishment of Mixed Fleet and the lower pay and inferior working conditions compared to the other fleets had generated these feelings among the cabin crew and their representatives.

Yet, while such grievances are necessary, they are not sufficient for workers to move towards a collective response. For this to happen workers must feel entitled to their demands and expect there is some chance their situation can be changed by 'collective agency'. As Kelly argues, within this process, workers must acquire a sense of common identity which differentiates them from their employer; they must attribute the perceived injustice to their employer, and they must be willing to engage in some form of collective organisation and activity to try and remedy the situation. This was achieved by the strike leaders in this dispute highlighting how discontent is translated into collective action through organisation and mobilisation, and central to this process is the role of small groups of activists and leaders.

This 'micro-mobilisation' process is crucial in this case and involved the strike leadership group promoting a sense of grievance among workers by persuading them the low pay in comparison

to the other fleets is unjust. Additionally, strike leaders created and sustained a degree of social identity and cohesion and then urged the appropriateness going on strike to rectify the unjust situation as well as providing arguments to legitimise industrial action in the face of hostile criticism and employer counter-mobilisation.

Additionally, mobilisation theory also highlights the importance of ideologies in ‘framing’ issues around which workers can be mobilised to take collective action. Since workers’ ‘willingness to act’ is a key power resource for trade unions, the way they think about workplace and employment issues is a vital part of the mobilisation process. Consequently, injustice or illegitimacy ‘frames’ are critical in mobilising workers to take collective action as they initiate the process of detaching subordinate group members from loyalty to their employers (Kelly, 1998; Brown-Johnson and Jarley, 2004). Crucially, as Buttigieg et al (2008) argue, mobilisation requires organised leadership, and both union officials and workplace union representatives can encourage solidarity by building and promoting a collective response to perceived injustices. Workplace union representatives in particular play a critical role in facilitating industrial action due to their role as both a worker and a leader.

Strike Tactics

As the dispute progressed throughout 2017 there was a total of 85 days of strike action and these strikes occurred in two distinct phases. First, between January and March 2017 there was a period of discontinuous strike action with Unite organising a series of strikes ranging from two-days to seven-days, totalling 26 days over the three months. Then, during a ‘pause for peace’ between April and June 2017 talks resumed and a second industrial action ballot took place which broadened the strike demands to include re-instating docked bonus

payments and travel concessions - the 'sanctions' - for those members who took part in the first strikes and Unite started legal proceedings against BA over this issue.

After a four-day strike was announced and then suspended in June 2017, the strikes started again with four periods of action running from the 1st to the 16th July, the 19th July to the 1st August, the 2nd to the 15th August, and then finally from the 16th to the 30th August. With the Mixed Fleet crew on strike for almost two months throughout these months the dispute was then settled, and the strikes ended.

Regional Officer 1 explained why the strike leaders decided on short periods of discontinuous strike action in the early period of the dispute between January and March 2017:

We could have called whatever we wanted, we could have called an indefinite strike, if the strike pay would have been sufficient, maybe in a way that might have been cheaper than doing individual days, maybe if we had just done indefinite from the start it wouldn't have been 85 days, maybe it would have got sorted out before then, our sort of viewpoint was it would lessen the burden on the members to do two or three days the first week, and then three or four.

However, when this period of short periods of discontinuous strike action had not achieved anything in relation to BA making a serious improvement in the pay offer, the members were keen to go out for a longer period in April, pushing for "forty days for lent", and this was getting unanimous support from the MFU reps and branch officials. Regional Officer 1 argued that this idea was not pursued at Regional level as they thought they would not get support nationally as strike pay for the dispute had already cost an estimated £1 million: -"I would have got hung, drawn and quartered from Unite ... I wouldn't [at that stage] have got Unite's support to do forty days".

In contrast, by mid-June 2017 after months had passed since the first period of strikes and with BA showing no sign of backing down over the sanctions issue, it was felt that a statement needed to be made. Workplace Rep 2 outlined why the strike leaders decided escalate the strikes throughout almost the whole of July and August:

We really, really, considered all the options you know we didn't just disregard one, we really went to town it was really, really, difficult to decide on dates and times and blocks and I think it took its toll on people ... I think it was effective that we didn't have a pattern as such, we had to play around a little bit with the timings, but there was also a consensus among the members that we just go out, you know, it is continuous we don't stop. There would have to be a time when we would just you know, we're out now until it's resolved, and this stopping and starting was ineffective so there was a strong sense that that would be a good strategy.

Workplace Rep 4 also discussed the reasoning behind intensifying the strikes throughout July and August and how after the short periods of discontinuous action between January and March, followed by the negotiations and second ballot between April and June, "it ramped up". For the workplace-reps when the June strike days had been suspended and BA did not respond to Unite's final deadline it was time to escalate the conflict:

Do you know what, that's it now, two weeks - you've had your chance, we're going to make a big statement, because anyone announcing 14 days continuous strike action, people were like, 'whoa' ... and having the consistent days as well meant that actually we got a bit more consistent attendance at events because when you were doing two days, one day, two days, you would have a load of people that would end up back in work.

For Workplace Rep 2, the strategy and tactics were evolving all the time and were principally in response to the events unfolding throughout the dispute as well as feedback

from the membership. However, with the earlier period of strikes failing to have the desired impact, alongside crew being sanctioned for participating in these strikes it was felt they had “got to a point of no return”. With BA wet leasing aircraft and crew from Qatar and momentum building towards more strikes, the longer periods of action were planned to disrupt BA’s attempts at counter-mobilisation:

We had people you know relaying how chaotic it was in Terminal 5, in the report centre, how the flights and the people you know rallying together to get flights off the ground it really was you know a hotchpotch of individuals trying to get basic services off, so I think we succeeded in disrupting the operation ... crew’s hours are really limited so pushing people to the limit of working time, flight time limitations, that was part of the disruption ... so the company were up against it, I know they struggled and we have to believe that they needed to reach a settlement because it couldn't have gone on forever, it couldn't have been open ended, it had to come to an end and I think we really were able to force them to reach a settlement.

The discussion regarding the timing and length of strike days reveals a number of important issues regarding tactics and strategy which can change as the dispute develops. For Lyddon (1998), when a strike is called the choice of tactics (indefinite or discontinuous) depends on a number of factors including whether or not an ‘all-out’ indefinite strike is possible, what is the membership density, will all members support the strike, how quickly will the employer be affected so that they settle, can members stay out long enough to force this, and will strike pay be paid and if so how much and for how long. What is crucial in all these discussions is the views of the members and workplace leaders and balancing these opinions with the trade union position at regional and national level.

Seifert and Sibley (2005:105-108) illustrate these points well in their discussion of the range of strike tactics considered by the strike leadership in the 2002-04 UK firefighters dispute. They outline the benefits of discontinuous action ('a tactic for our times') as keeping employers 'on the hop' as well as ensuring members loss of pay was less hard to bear as a strike grows in duration. Additionally, there is a deeper significance of suspending an all-out strike compared to discontinuous action which in contrast can allow for a flexible interchange of action and negotiations as a dispute proceeds. In the Mixed Fleet case, the strike leaders were able to intensify the strike periods in the final stages of the dispute announcing long periods of strikes one after the other, creating the impact of an indefinite strike while maintaining this flexibility.

Protest points - not picket lines

The majority of media reports during the dispute described the presence of striking cabin crew at various locations around Heathrow Airport as 'pickets lines'. However, it became apparent throughout the interviews that there were no picket lines at all in the dispute, and while this was limiting in some respects it also presented the strike organisers with opportunities. Regional Officer 1 explained the difficulties in securing access from Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) security to areas where the strike organisers could establish an official picket line, and therefore speak to crew directly as they went into work. Essentially, as soon as notification was given to BA that the strike was going to take place, as the designated official organising the strikes Regional Officer 1 was contacted by HAL security, through the police, and informed exactly where they could and could not assemble in the airport.

After being informed they could only gather at specific and designated areas at Heathrow Airport's perimeter and Hatton Cross Tube Station, a number of "token picket lines", or

“protests” were set up. However, against the wishes of HAL security Regional Officer 1 did manage to secure access to the roundabout at the entrance to a Terminal Five (the “T5 roundabout”), something that BASSA had not achieved during the 2009-11 dispute. This was vital as everyone driving in to Heathrow Airport had to come past this area, including all the buses transporting cabin crew into work:

As you drive into T5 there is a roundabout right outside Heathrow so everyone who's driving comes in that way the crew bus goes in that way, and I drove in a couple of days before and I noticed that there was plane spotters, and I thought well if they can stand there why can't a trade unionist stand there. I'll just get a pair of binoculars ... on the first day of the strike I got a minibus and took about 20 people up there with me with a pair of binoculars ... within 5 minutes the police sirens you know security all descended on us and the police were like what are you doing, and I said I'm bird watching ... I've got a pair of binoculars you let people bird watch I just happen to have a red flag with me and a few people, but I'm bird watching that's alright isn't it and then security came along from HAL and threatened to ban me from Heathrow Airport, they've got some kind of public order offence where they can ban me from entering the airport for like 18 months or something. But the police were very supportive and very helpful, and their pensions were being screwed over and they had only just been given a 0.1 percent pay rise. They helped us to a certain extent get to a compromise with the airport, for me to say look you don't want to be seen to kick us off here because if you kick us off here I've got hundreds of people that need to go somewhere and I have got no control over them, and they want to protest and the sites you have given me they're not good enough so let us have some form of people on here and we'll agree to it ... the police were looking going it's clearly public order common sense to have a place where people are protesting.

This compromise position was reached between the police, HAL security, and Regional Officer 1 and consequently secured a highly visible presence for MFU crew on strike days. However, it was also clear that:

This was a not a picket line it was a protest, and we were particularly clear on all the social [media] stuff we do and all the messages, a protest is not a picket line, [but] the buses are going past this, and they've got to stop. And they are seeing all their comrades outside waving banners, so BA had a fit and were threatening HAL because their buses had to drive past us, and they blacked all the windows out so the crew wouldn't be seen going in ... but if they had let us go on the terminal [inside the airport] we would have had 6 people, that would have been fine if we could have had a picket where their bus got off and tried to be able to talk to them and say don't go in or to be able to leaflet passengers we would have kept it to that because that was a picket line. But what they done was they stopped it being a picket line and made it a protest, and we reacted accordingly (Regional Officer 1).

Workplace Rep 1 also called them “token” picket lines or “protests” and explained how they were organised in a way that ensured there was always a visible presence at Heathrow Airport on strike days. This was done by renting mini-buses through the MFU Branch, and then on strike days constantly picking members up from the strike headquarters at Bedfont Football Club and dropping them off at the protest points. Then after a period of time had passed the mini-buses would bring the members back to Bedfont after replacement crew had been dropped off at the protests:

We set up the fund where other unions and people could donate and that funded the buses ... so people could get to and from all of the protest points, because it's really sad when there is only one person there, and then we bought a microphone and speaker, so we could play music at all of the pickets ... we would always have at least two reps at all of the pickets, we would

always have at least two reps at any of the bases, and a couple of reps would drive the cars, sometimes we would ask for volunteers ... so we would always have someone running it from base, so there would be someone like, [she] has been on the roundabout for two hours now, get her back, get her to warm up, send someone else out there so there would always be someone running it as well which was always good because otherwise you would be out for hours.

Furthermore, by calling it a protest the strike leaders were able to have more than 6 people at each “protest point”, and through the police they negotiated with HAL security that a maximum of 20 crew could assemble at these points. However, at certain times in the day these gatherings would grow to at least 40 people as the rented mini-buses were doing their handovers and transporting MFU members to and from the Bedfont strike headquarters: “So we’d have a bus dropping people off and a bus picking people up, so HAL would come along and go, you’ve got 40, and we’re like, well yeah because 20 of them are just leaving” (Regional Officer 1). While crew were not able to picket and try and prevent colleagues going into work, as Workplace Rep 2 argued, the protests were important as a “focal point and centre for our visibility”, and crucially, by managing to gain access to the entrance to Terminal 5 at the start of the dispute they were able to always keep that important site occupied throughout the strikes.

The fact that crew were not able to establish effective picket lines inside the airport relates to another important aspect of the dispute revealed during the interviews, regarding how those on strike dealt with their colleagues who either were not in the union and carried on working, or some of the union members who decided to break the strike - including many of the unionised CSMs. The strike leaders took the decision to adopt an inclusive approach and try and win these workers over by creating a feeling that people could come and go as they want,

“if people choose to join the strike we will welcome them with open arms, even if they broke the strike previously, because it takes a lot to do something like this” (Workplace Rep 1). As Workplace Rep 3 explained, the atmosphere they created at the protests was a crucial element in this strategy:

Even making the picket lines more relaxed and you know feel inviting and welcoming, even up until the last few months we had new people walking out because they had just had enough ... so to make the environment a place that feels welcoming and to show them that they're doing the right thing was of huge importance.

Regional Officer 1 discussed this in relationship to his disappointment in the number of CSM union members (about three quarters of them) who carried on working during the strike, even though one of the key strike demands was to try and win collective bargaining rights for this group. However, when it came to it “they saw themselves as managers” and BA had told them because of this to not go on strike:

But equally, as a union we didn't go hardball on them, it's not the way to play cabin crew, it's not the way to revert, to put out a scabby rat, and being seen to be beating them up you know politically and verbally for doing that, the crew don't like that they don't like people being put in a position, they don't win them round they like to take the higher moral ground and hope that they can turn these people around in the future rather than attacking them so we probably pulled our punches a bit with the way we treated Unite members who went in.

Strike pay

In this last section on the strikes that took place during the dispute, the important factor of the ‘strike pay’ members received from Unite will be discussed. The union had been building a separate strike fund since Len McCluskey took over as General Secretary in 2010, and these

funds had been gradually increasing over the years preceding the dispute. At the time, strike pay from Unite was usually paid at a minimum of £30 per day tax free, although the General Secretary had the authority subject to Executive Council approval to increase this if necessary. There was a strong feeling expressed in the interviews that without support from Unite at national level in terms of strike pay, the dispute would have been very difficult to win, and the General Secretary explained his decision to personally authorise the enhanced strike pay of £60 per day to each member during the dispute:

Obviously 80 percent of the planes were still flying and it became more difficult to make a breakthrough, British Airways decided they were going to take a hard line and teach these young people a lesson and the strike went on ... now of course remember, what we did and we are the only union that does this, we were able to provide strike pay that was £60 a day so that meant there was no way our members were going to be starved back to work and British Airways soon came to realise that they were not going to be able to do that because I made it clear to the company that we had tens of millions of pounds in our strike funds and we wouldn't be backing down in any shape or form, and it was at that time that the CEO said we need to see if we can sort this dispute and we did. There was no way we could allow it to drift on and on, so that was also hugely key, massive strike fund, we pay more than any other union, no other union comes close to paying what we pay ... the reality is that our strike fund is the largest in Europe ... so there is a confidence in workers to say we're not accepting this, we're fighting back on that, and certainly the strike pay was the crucial factor within the Mixed Fleet dispute.

As Mixed Fleet's wages were so low it was estimated that sometimes they were getting more money in strike pay than they would in wages. For example if someone was on strike for five days they would be receiving £300 and as many had already had to take on second (and sometimes third) jobs they could stay out on strike and do their other part-time jobs (Regional

Officer 1). Workplace Rep 1 did not believe the majority of crew went on strike because of this factor and there would have been a “hardcore group of people even if there wasn’t strike pay”. However, Regional Officer 2 believed it was one of the crucial factors arguing:

It would have been very different if they didn’t get strike pay ... I had my own thoughts about strike pay but there is no doubt that Len [McCluskey], had he not paid strike pay they could not have afforded to be out, and they wouldn’t have been ... when it came to it, it was like sixty quid for two months ... so they were mobilised by the strike pay that is true.

Workplace Rep 2 had similar thoughts regarding this and explained that the commitment from the General Secretary that enhanced strike payments would be made was vital and made a big difference in mobilising crew early on in the dispute. Workplace Rep 3 also argued the strike pay played a huge part in its ability to “enable people to actually take action ... and essentially, if we wasn’t able to offer the rate that we got or the speed in which it was paid ... then the wheels would have fallen off quite easily”.

One of the interesting aspects relating to strike pay was the work carried out at branch level to make the system of payments to members more efficient. As the length of the strikes began to have a financial impact on crew, the turn-around of strike pay needed to be minimised and Workplace Rep 3 came up with a method of digitising the system by which members were able to claim. This had the practical effect of making it a lot easier to process and make payments to members who otherwise would have been struggling financially. Additionally, the branch was able to collect the data of the payments made, and then use it to try and understand what motivated people to strike:

What we was able to do was to see where the strongest part of the strike was because obviously it went on for so long we was able to build up a picture. So I used to look at the reports generated

of the strike pay claims, and we was able to see you know peaks and troughs and when I actually looked at for instance one of the high points what the most amount of people were taking industrial action and tried to understand why, I went back through and realised that actually at that time that most people are out just before it was when the company try to operate a bribe ... and essentially it makes sense the company offer a bribe for people to go to work and for the workers that was a huge red rag to a lot of people who necessarily hasn't taken industrial action until that point some people actually walked out because of that bribe ... I just heard in the region that they're trying to run strike pay in the same way purely because it's easier and it allows people to obviously get it out and then build the data, but the ability for unions to actually harness what we actually already have is a huge kind of point that we need to learn.

The General Secretary claimed that one reason Unite has many more industrial action ballots running than other unions is because of the “fighting back” culture that has developed over the years, but also, because the massive strike fund that has been built up gives Unite members confidence. He argued that he personally has a lot of anecdotal evidence from conversations with Unite reps and officers over the years that employers had conceded in disputes on the basis that if members are receiving that level of strike pay, they are never going to defeat the union so they “decide to call it a day and reach an agreement”.

It's why that is so crucial for the future of our movement going forward ... I've preached for a long time that all unions should build up a huge strike fund, so it gives workers confidence if they do have to go out on strike ... I've yet to meet a worker who was happy to go out on strike, workers only vote to go out on strike when they've got an injustice that they have to confront and so when they know that they are backed up by this massive strike fund it gives them this massive confidence.

Membership growth and industrial action

The first section of this chapter has already outlined how Regional Officer 1 and a small number of activists built up union membership among the Mixed Fleet crew between 2011 and 2016 from a few hundred members to around 2000 (roughly 50 percent density), and this provided the foundation for the first industrial action ballot and strikes that followed (Regional Officer 1). However, another important feature of the dispute was the number of cabin crew that joined Unite after the first ballot for industrial action had opened in November 2016, and then during the early period of strikes that followed in January 2017. In fact, membership increased from 2000 to 2500 during the first ballot, and then to 2,900 as the first series of strikes took place in January. By the time the strikes resumed in July 2017, membership was 3,100 out of 4,000 total crew, with density increasing from 50 to around 77.5 percent during over the entire period of the dispute.

This section will focus on how the strike leaders recruited members during the dispute, as well as their reflections on why cabin crew joined the union in increasing numbers. In the discussion above Regional Officer 1 described how during the first industrial action ballot Unite Community members leafleted crew as they were going into work to vote yes for industrial action. Crucially, in relationship to membership growth, these leaflets had a “QR code” which enabled potential members to scan the code with their mobile phones taking them to a “landing page” with all the relevant information about joining Unite:

[One of our union reps] he’s just like an IT maestro ... we wouldn’t have come up with a QR reader, getting people to sign up there and then, he couldn’t believe how slow Unite’s process was for signing people up in membership, “what - you have a form, what’s that about” no you just scan it, and they join.

Regional Officer 2 also discussed how making the process of joining easier was certainly a factor in recruiting so many members during this period:

Young people don't want to - they want to join the union - they don't want to scan through 10 pages of forms or whatever, they want to go like – 'that' [points with phone] - because that's what they're used to doing. So, he developed a way of doing that so that was really key because people knew they could just join.

The General Secretary compared the situation at Mixed Fleet to a dispute at Honda in Swindon in which the company sacked a Unite convenor. Unite immediately acted, although because the workforce were not very strong, well organised, or willing to go on strike, the union used leverage against the employer instead and got the convenor re-instated. Crucially, 1,200 people joined Unite at Honda over this period and in his opinion this was because they had grown in confidence and thought they did not have to be scared anymore, "so that's exactly what happened in Mixed Fleet, people said oh we don't need to keep our heads down here and of course the membership in Mixed Fleet has been steadily on the increase ever since". The General Secretary then contrasted this to the partnership approach which has been promoted by some in the trade union and labour movement:

It's self-defeating, the partnership, we're all in this together, we don't need to take strikes ... and while Unite doesn't go looking for trouble, far from it, we have agreements with tens of thousands of companies and 90 percent of the time we cut deals all over the place and there is good working relationships. But where there is bad employers behaving badly we don't walk away ... everything you are doing always comes back to this confidence, on the one hand the Tory government and the bosses try to undermine workers confidence and the unions task is to try and raise people's confidence. That is what brings about a proper balance of fairness and justice ... that confidence is key in everything.

Workplace Rep 1 acknowledged that the strike pay was a factor for some colleagues joining Unite and then going on strike; “as strike pay was only going to get paid to members, then certain people would join on the back of that to protect themselves”. However, a lot of crew were joining as soon as the strikes began as they wanted to join in the action:

So, on the first day we had our office phone with us, we forwarded the office phone to a mobile and we signed people up, we had 10 or so forms in the first hour, and people saying I need to sign because I need to strike. The strike really motivated the membership, if you really want to grow membership, organise a strike ... I think that there was an element of you’re fighting for us, I need to be part of the fight, so I need to join you.

Workplace Rep 2 explained that after years of steady membership growth, when Unite issued the ballot for industrial action the membership rapidly increased because people “suddenly felt that actually, I can join this movement, there’s something happening here and it’s better to be in it”. However, for Workplace Rep 3 there were three reasons why so many of the cabin crew joined the union resulting in this surge in membership. First, due to the low pay and inferior working conditions they were just pushed to the limit and were “waiting for that something to be given to them or somewhere to go and vent their anger”. Second, was the “ability to join” which he related to the leaflets containing the QR code handed out in the “vote yes for industrial action” campaign which he produced. As well as this, he set up an online “landing page” containing more information and instructions which was then added onto the “BA Cabin Crew Solidarity” Facebook page with a link to the application site. Third, social pressure meant that cabin crew felt compelled to stand by their friends and fight against the low pay and poor working conditions, or just the general treatment and bullying that had occurred:

Crew are a unique bunch if you like because they are remote workers, so they don't necessarily work in the same place every day, they don't have an office and all that. Their place of work changes all the time, but what they do have is this camaraderie this ability to actually connect with each other and that played a huge part in this dispute because people were able to relate to each other and relate to what's going on. So, kind of the social pressure really played a part, the recruitment of each other ... they're probably the kind of three main reasons.

Workplace Rep 4 added that another reason so many cabin crew joined Unite during the strikes was BA's aggressive approach, and as a consequence of the company appearing to be unwilling to try and resolve the dispute which in the end people turned against the company. As well as this the MFU reps were also pro-actively sending out communications to members and crew, stating that if you join and take strike action you are legally covered to encourage people to join and support the action. For Workplace Rep 5, it was difficult to actively recruit while at work as they did not want to be accused by BA of harassing people. Again, social media was a key "driver" of recruitment during this period: "It was pushed by social media more than anything else ... but it was a fine line of asking people to join without being seen to force their hand or anything like that".

This case demonstrates that there can be a relationship between industrial conflict and strikes and union membership growth, a point illustrated by Darlington (2009) in reference to the RMT trade union in the period 2001-2007. By taking a more 'adversarial' approach to industrial relations, for example going on strike and winning pay increases, the RMT increased membership from 55,037 to 75,939 making it one of the fastest growing unions in the UK during a period of stable or declining membership generally. Taylor and Moore (2019) also outline how BASSA membership grew significantly during the 1990s after BA was privatised. When BA attempted to marginalise BASSA by courting the breakaway union Cabin Crew 89,

membership grew from 4,079 to 9,076 between 1990 and 1997, with most of the growth concentrated in the build up to the 1997 dispute over the 'Business Efficiency Programme's cost cutting initiatives.

Hodder et al (2017) demonstrated an association between strike activity and union membership growth in their analysis of trade union joiners and leavers from the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS). They found that in the months where there was strike action, either national or local, there was a significantly higher rate of membership growth measured by the number of joiners and the ratio of joiners to leavers. Furthermore, data from new union members suggest that perceived injustice and perceived union effectiveness both motivate the decision to join.

There are practical examples outlined in the above discussion which demonstrate how joining the union was made easier for people, for example including QR codes on leaflets, an online link on the Facebook page taking people to the Unite membership form, as well as communications sent out by the strike leaders to crew explaining the legal aspects of striking. However, as the industrial dispute began with the first ballot and strikes it was claimed an element of social pressure also accounted for people joining, and this was pushed by crew on social media. As the workforce started to grow in confidence the momentum grew to fight back against the perceived injustice regarding pay and working conditions.

Morale building, protests, and solidarity

With 85 days of strike action taking place during a dispute that lasted almost one year, there were long periods of time when the cabin crew were not on strike as well as varying durations of strike days ranging from 2 days to 2 months. This section will consider the different methods

used by the strike leaders-to maintain morale, build solidarity, and place additional pressure on BA by publicising the dispute as much as possible once the strikes commenced until the dispute was eventually settled.

Activities of this type are particularly important during a prolonged period of industrial action, and as Hiller (1928) argues, as strikes can extend beyond the act of quitting work, new forms of collective action will appear. A lengthy dispute such as this therefore requires a degree of unity which is not necessarily implied when the strike initially begins, and in these circumstances the first 'burst of enthusiasm' is not sufficient to enable the strikers to endure what follows. In this context, a range of techniques are usually used to develop morale such as maintaining rapport, generating incentives to carry on, and lessening incentives to return to work. However, in a dispute like this in which the tactics of varying periods of discontinuous action are used, there is the additional problem of maintaining morale when strikers return to work in between periods of strike days.

Workplace Rep 1 explained how the strike organisers would "keep morale up" by a combination of communicating with members every day and planning different events and activities over the course of the dispute. They organised these almost on a daily basis, such as a "green dress day", a "red dress day", travelling up to Glasgow and Manchester which they called "Glasfont" and "Manfont". This was in reference to the Bedfont strike headquarters, and the idea was to support crew that lived in these locations and therefore were potentially feeling isolated from the events taking place at Heathrow. In this way a core of strikers tried to "cover every base", organising marches and rallies on strike days, and because of this "essentially morale was really easy to keep up if we kept it different and you communicated

what you were doing, as long as you communicate with everybody and make them feel like they're involved in every decision making process then I don't think you can go wrong".

Almost immediately the strike leaders looked at ways of using these different forms of collective protests as a means of placing pressure on BA. The first of this type of organised protest was outside the headquarters of Marks and Spencer (M&S) in London as the retailer had just started supplying food for BA's short-haul flights to "buy-on-board" where customers would not get food within the price of a flight anymore. The idea of doing this was to try and embarrass M&S by protesting outside their premises and hope they would then contact BA which would pressure them into resolving the dispute (Workplace Rep 1). As Regional Officer 1 explained:

The whole idea of that originally was Marks and Spencer were going to be embarrassed that their whole brand image was getting sucked into British Airways and that kind of leverage may make the company, both companies, be more realistic where they say look you better settle this because we are looking bad they are coming for us. So that was leverage if you like, it wasn't industrial action against Marks and Spencer, but it was this is what you are promoting ... so we just took 100 people and stood outside Marks and Spencer.

Workplace Rep 4 described this as "kind of like leverage" and by dressing up as "Percy Pig" and standing outside M&S headquarters with signs saying "M&S supports British Airways" hopefully the retailer's PR people would then contact BA urging them to sort it out. As well as protesting outside M&S, as the dispute progressed protests took place outside the BBC, at a protest against the US President Donald Trump in which one of the striking crew members spoke to the crowd, at the BA sponsored i360 in Brighton, outside the headquarters of Qatar Airways and the Civil Aviation Authority in relation to the 'wet-leasing' issue, as well as

Parliament, and Heathrow Airport Limited. As some of the cabin crew were LGBT, they attended various Pride rallies throughout the UK, as well as trade union events such as Tolpuddle and the Durham Miners Gala. Workplace Rep 4 explained the significance of attending the Pride marches:

London Pride was all about getting the message out, there was a lot of people and it was fun for our members it was kind of like a bit of a release, Unite had the bus already in the parade and we just kind of tagged on with that but instead of it being a Unite branded bus it ended up being a striking bus, so that was really positive, Brighton was another big one because that's a big pride, a lot our members are LGBT, so it goes well with the demographic that we're working with, and also you've got the i360 down there ... It's sponsored [by BA] so they all wear the same uniforms.

Workplace Rep 2 explained that because the strike leaders were convinced that the dispute was "facing a media blackout", many of these events were organised to generate media coverage: "we had to mobilise people and try and create the stories to get us in the media ... we were really trying to raise the profile of the demonstrations and our strike and that was a struggle". Workplace Rep 3 also discussed how one of the purposes of these events was to raise the profile of the dispute among the public and in the media:

If you ever stood in front of a group of workers that are out [on strike], then to encourage them to get off the picket line and do something 'non-normal' if you like is absolutely key ... because you've got to go to the people, the people won't come to you, you've got to take your dispute and make it known ... especially if you've got wider forces at play and things against you, no one can stop you taking your picket line somewhere else in the form of a protest.

Workplace Rep 3 ~~also~~ argued that during this process a core of strikers quickly became politicised and actively more engaged, not only in the strikes but also what was happening in the wider political context:

You are looking at taking people from you know just going to work and then suddenly ... we marched a group of cabin crew into Parliament and had a hearing with MPs, you know it was huge to have people be actually interested and want to go into Parliament and have their say, I mean the Parliament building, the room that we had was packed and we couldn't fit any more people in ... and they were interested in not only their own dispute but what the country had to say what Chris Grayling was going to do about it to stop exploitation of young workers happening to other people.

Workplace Rep 4 organised many of these events and claimed the intention was to “aggravate and agitate” explaining how the branch got thousands of stickers made with “I support striking BA crew” and BASSA members from Worldwide and Eurofleet were sticking them in the terminals and on aircraft, while MFU members stuck them all over the Qatar Airways building. Workplace Rep 5 and Regional Officer 1 commented on the fact that there were usually only usually around 100 members at these events as the majority of those striking stayed away or took the opportunity to do their second jobs or were probably afraid to be seen to be overly active in the dispute. However, this core of active support was probably enough to maintain a visible presence throughout the strikes and keep up the morale of those actively involved.

For Regional Officer 2 the idea was to make it fun and the strike organisers “would be very creative and very audacious about things and that was all important for this group of workers – they loved it”. This was crucial as the dispute progressed throughout 2017 and the members

started to get worn down, “I think the members got fed up at one point ... they were like I can’t, I’m broke, I’m tired, I’m anxious, I’m stressed, I don’t know how long I can carry on” (Workplace Rep 1).

When the 14 days of strikes in July was announced some of the more active members were struggling with “strike fatigue”, but the reps continued to come up with new activities to keep them engaged:

So we had like meet us at this location at 6am and everyone is like what are you doing and we're like it's a secret or there's a surprise arriving at Bedfont at 11, members that want to participate should be there at 10:30 so then an open top bus pulled in, they all loved an open top bus, and we just drove around the airport for over 3 hours straight just to wind the company up because obviously it was a public road we wasn't doing anything illegal. Everything was attached to the bus we were just on the top deck waving flags with music on just really visible, but then you had people that were like - photos went up on Facebook - and if I had known there was a double decker bus I would have made sure I was there, but it's not pick and choose the event it's you come down and support your union (Workplace Rep 4).

Taking inspiration from the 2009-11 BA-BASSA dispute, the Mixed Fleet crew also used the XXXX symbol that BA management included in the roster of any BASSA member who was on strike on a particular day. BASSA had made this the symbol of their strike with posters inspired by the popular television programme at the time - “We’ve got the XXXX Factor” (Regional Officer 2). As well as adopting the XXXX symbol, for MFU members yellow became the colour of the strike and consequently BA banned the colour yellow on any of their aircraft, with crew not even allowed to carry yellow pens or Marie Curie daffodils. Members were also being disciplined for using the word scab on the social media sites resulting in some using “sausage

chips and beans because it spelt scab” instead, only for BA to ban the use of the phrase as well (Workplace Rep 1). For Regional Officer 2, these symbols of the strike were important for mobilising workers as well as building and maintaining morale during the dispute:

So mobilising people is unbelievable right but when they are mobilised and they go on strike what they realise is, and we had this at BASSA, and Mixed Fleet definitely had it, it becomes you are part of a community. There will be people going my cousin is on so and so, my friend is on your flight say hello to them he's a good 4 X'r or he is a good 'Bedfont buddy' or something like that you know because it's like look after each other, it is really interesting that isolation that crew feel and then that being part of something.

One of the main ways of building morale during the dispute was having Bedfont Football Club on the outskirts of Heathrow Airport as the strike headquarters. I attended Bedfont on one of the strike days in July 2017 and witnessed the organisation of the strike from this base as MFU reps ran buses to and from the 'picket lines'/protest points, food was prepared, and the members socialised. Workplace Rep 3 described Bedfont as the “headquarters of the whole dispute and it is now referred to as Bedfont Days ... or there are all these nicknames for it because people are so fond of what took place there”. This was crucial in explaining why members were able to stay out on strike for such a long period of time.

Workplace Rep 5 argued that without Bedfont they would not have been successful, and it was “100 percent essential” as a counter-balance to the “on-line” activities, “I probably wouldn't have been as active if it wasn't for Bedfont ... it was a great place to be to re-energise you ... it was honestly fantastic and without that I wouldn't have been so actively involved”.

Regional Officer 2 also emphasised the importance of Bedfont as “having a bar, making it fun, making it like a party ... like a club you want to be a member of ... all of those things are

mobilising techniques and the crew particularly, it gives them a community that they don't have ordinarily". This was planned out and making it fun was a tactic used by the strike organisers who organised DJs, films and parties to keep spirits up: "[It's powerful] to have Bedford and to have the parties and have the barbecues and all of those things, because crew, people forget this, crew don't have a shop floor".

Workplace Rep 4 had only become a union rep just before the pay negotiations in 2016, and then became central to the organisation of the strikes attending all but one of the strike days either at Bedford, on the picket lines, or at the various protests that had been arranged. He explained that while none of the reps involved had any previous experience of organising an industrial dispute, there was strong support from Unite at regional and national level: "I just became known as the one who organised all the venues, the buses ... it was very much like – elected, we are taking industrial action and then I was in the thick of it and every day we took action I was there and just became one of the key organisers". This rep was involved in the negotiations, organising the strikes, as well as setting up a food bank using money that had been donated from other branches and other supporters of the strike:

I think as well one of the main reasons for the success of our branch is we are very vibrant if you've been down to Bedford you've obviously seen probably a very different strike and it was criticised in some ways because people said you shouldn't be dancing around to music on a picket line and that's a very stereotypical view ... a strike is to have a presence and to make your message heard and we certainly had a presence. But for the people who were kind of there every day it did become hard, and you've then got - without the picket lines and the events at Bedford and stuff I don't think I could have coped because it was a support network ... you could come four days a week and actually be around like minded people, we provided food every day ... It felt like some people wanted us to get an old oil barrel light a fire and stand around it looking

miserable, so you know how I was saying before how we arranged catering for the first couple of strikes, well this guy turned up with funding from Worldwide for a barbecue, when the funding ran out we had donations from the engineers, and they kept bringing food for the barbecue (Workplace 4).

There was also solidarity shown from BASSA members who donated Asda and Sainsbury's gift cards which were intended to buy food for the picket lines, although the strike leaders used them to provide individual support for members who were struggling. Additionally, when crew were 'sanctioned' by BA for going on strike and had their staff travel taken off them, BASSA members donated their own staff travel. One of the Mixed Fleet reps set up a "Google document" that everyone had access to and instead of donating to the strike fund, supporters could offer a spare room, or to care share. Even some EasyJet cabin crew were donating their staff travel bonuses, "it was so moving to watch what people are prepared to physically do. That was a really important thing and the BASSA members were doing that" (Regional Officer 2).

Finally, although certainly not a major feature of the dispute (Regional Officer 2), the political support towards the MFU cabin crew that was shown from the leadership of the Labour Party does warrant a brief mention. Workplace Rep 1 discussed how early on in the dispute Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell came to Bedfont (which was located in his constituency) to support the striking cabin crew and said, "what we were doing was phenomenal, that he hadn't seen young people unite together like that in decades ... that was amazing, that was awesome". Workplace Rep 3 thought it was helpful in that it generated some attention for the strikes, however for Workplace Rep 2 as well as raising the profile of the dispute, it also provided a real "boost" to the members:

Of course, that also coincided with the time when the Labour Party were going through some significant changes, you know Momentum, the actual organisation was riding high at that time they were really heavily influencing the profile of Jeremy Corbyn and the leadership ... With this new young - relatively young - there are also a lot of people who are not in that lower age bracket, they attract people from all ages but the vast majority fall into that definition for them it was also, they were becoming politicised for the first time as well so that was important the time was right for that.

All of the activities described above were therefore used to achieve a number of objectives over the course of the dispute, including building morale and solidarity, creating a sense of identity and community, preventing strike fatigue setting in, raising the profile of the dispute by generating media coverage, and trying to place additional pressure on BA by targeting their commercial partners. For Karsh (1958), if a movement is to succeed in the face of adversity it must command a persistent and fixed loyalty and this is what was achieved by those leading the Mixed Fleet strikes. In this context, the essence of a strike is found in the behaviour of human beings acting together which requires sustained planning and organisation, and in this process new forms of social structure and institutions were formed (Fantasia, 1988).

BA counter-mobilisation

In the discussion above concerning strike tactics, the decision to escalate the dispute by increasing the length of the strikes throughout July and August was highlighted, after the initial short discontinuous periods of strikes in the earlier months of the dispute failed to make a significant impact. To understand in more detail why the strikes were not impacting BA as much as the strike leaders had hoped they would, it is important to consider the range of counter-mobilisation strategies used by BA throughout the dispute. As well as this, it is also

necessary to discuss how those leading the strikes attempted to neutralise these manoeuvres for it is in this relationship that a dispute can grow in magnitude that was unforeseen at the outset (Hiller, 1928).

In contrast to the events of 2009-11, BA did not seek court injunctions to try and stop the strikes during ~~this~~ the Mixed Fleet dispute, although the company did use a variety of alternative measures to try and undermine the action and mitigate any disruption caused by the strikes. This included using the legacy crew to cover the routes not flown by Mixed Fleet members on strike with BASSA reluctant to break the law on secondary action, chartering flights from other airlines, crew were brought in from Gatwick, back office staff were drafted in, flights were merged, and crucially aircrafts and crew were wet-leased from other airlines. As well as this, to punish cabin crew for going on strike bonuses and staff travel concessions were taken away, and at the same time bonuses were paid to those workers who carried on working through the strikes and awarding employees the pay rise if they confirm they were not members of Unite.

Workplace Rep 4 explained how BA attempted to divide the cabin crew by sending out threatening emails about the consequences of taking industrial action, as well as letters to employee's homes. However, Workplace Rep 2 argued that these counter-mobilisation tactics actually had the effect of "galvanising more people" as by trying to undermine the strike, cabin crew saw through it and "you had to rely on the solidarity, you had to rely on people to keep their nerve and hold tight, this is exactly what we were expecting them to do".

The General Secretary argued that the difficulty such tactics by BA caused was that as the dispute progressed the majority of BA airplanes were still flying, as Mixed Fleet were still only around 15 percent of the workforce. He compared this to the 2009-11 dispute in which there

were virtually no planes flying, or at least very few, and those that were flying did so half empty. Because of this, in the Mixed Fleet dispute the impact on the company was not as dramatic as the union had hoped, as “when you go out on strike you are always looking to financially affect the company to bring them back round the table”.

As Regional Officer 1 explained, one of the main problems for the strike organisers that really undermined their efforts when the strikes began was that BASSA continued to fly Mixed Fleet’s routes when they were on strike, and this became a contentious issue throughout the dispute. Since Mixed Fleet’s establishment they had always flown completely separate routes to Worldwide and Eurofleet, and every time enough BASSA members had left the company, the route was given to Mixed Fleet. However, when the strikes started, BA simply informed the other fleets that they had to cover Mixed Fleet’s routes, and BASSA’s leadership complied. Their argument was that because of the legislation on secondary action, they would be breaking the law by refusing to fly Mixed Fleets routes as they were not involved in the industrial action:

That for me was very disappointing, now I get secondary action legislation but I also get picking a fight over something else and allowing us to get that solidarity, I never thought they would actually do [Mixed Fleets] work ... and that was a massive blow to our campaign to have them flying the routes that Mixed Fleet did, and the problem with that is [in] the future it's a massive mistake, because what they have taught the Mixed Fleet members is that when there is a dispute, like 'secondary action - can't do anything about it' (Regional Officer 1).

Workplace Rep 4 also raised this as an important issue:

Also you know we were part of cabin crew so the way that it is set up in this country we were employed by the same employer doing the same job but all on different contracts, and that

meant that different work groups were not able to join us in support so Worldwide Fleet the Eurofleet - the BASSA guys - you know it's classed as secondary picketing, it is prevented, so you can work for a big employer who can divide up the workforce with different contracts different terms and conditions all doing the same job yet you cannot support each other and that's what we were up against as well ... so they were able to cover as much of the work as they could, however the way it is organised we definitely had an impact on the number of flights that we were flying as part of our Mixed Fleet schedule that wouldn't operate so the company had to bring in charters, had to bring in other carriers to cover that work because they couldn't do it in house those fleets at British Airways had their own work already, so there was a limit to how much they could cover the work that Mixed Fleet were doing.

As well as the legacy fleets flying Mixed Fleet's routes during the strikes, BA also wet-leased fully-crewed aircraft from Titan Airways and other airlines during the early period of the dispute, and consequently the impact of the strikes was not as severe as the strike leaders had hoped. However, as the dispute progressed it was thought that by the summer it would be a lot more difficult to wet-lease as these other airlines would be busier and have their own flight schedules to maintain. This changed when Qatar Airways was banned from flying over Saudi Arabia which consequently freed up 15 A320 aircraft which Qatar offered to BA as they were part of IAG, "and even though we used that Parliamentary influence, and we got people in Parliament wearing our pens and asking questions, the Transport Minister [Chris] Grayling [MP] signed it through the day before it was allowed without even looking at it".

While Workplace Rep 1 questioned BA's ethics for wet leasing Quatar Airways at such a huge financial cost, this became the key battleground in the latter stages of the dispute. Essentially, BA thought it could just hold out by spending millions of pounds wet leasing fully crewed aircraft, however, as discussed above, Unite were able to counter this by paying out enhanced

strike pay to their members. While this was probably one of the central reasons for the dispute escalating throughout July and August 2017, ultimately it would result in BA eventually backing down as Unite were financially in a strong position to pay their members strike pay.

There was also a feeling expressed among the strike organisers that BA was actively keeping the dispute out of the news and as such “it was a real struggle to get the news that we thought it should have got ... we can only speculate but from day one we knew that BA were trying their best to try and suppress [the reporting of] the action” (Workplace Rep 2). Workplace Rep 1 also commented on this and explained that while Channel 4 initially covered the dispute as well as LBC Radio and Sky News to a lesser extent, the BBC never did, “it was annoying because we wrote to the BBC asking why aren’t you doing anything, we went and protested outside the BBC, why are you not covering us?, we got moved on pretty quickly”. It was felt that BA was powerful enough and had enough influence to be able to suppress news reports, and that “allegedly ... there was emails going around at the BBC lots of different news outlets as well basically dissuading people to cover our dispute” (Workplace Rep 3). As Workplace Rep 2 argued:

British Airways is a very powerful company [with] a very strong, well-funded well-resourced media relations department, now whatever they did to try to keep the story out of the papers or out of the news channels I don't know, but it seemed very strange that British Airways, a high profile global company you know everyone recognises the brand, the cabin crew are on strike threatening the travel plans of millions of people based on low pay poor working conditions exploiting mainly young and a mainly female workforce it was hard to understand why it wasn't getting the coverage we felt it deserved.

However, the lack of media coverage is more than likely related to BA's ability to maintain their flight schedules and thus continue to supply a service to their customers during the dispute by using the various strategies discussed above. As Hiller (1928) argues, a key factor in any dispute is the manipulation of public opinion, and in most cases the wider public (normally through the media) are only interested in a strike if it interferes with the flow of a commodity or service. Additionally, the established media outlets in a capitalist society will not report on an incidence of industrial action from the perspective of the workers involved, or in this case, in light of the *actual* causes of the dispute.

The other counter-mobilisation tactic that backfired and extended the length of the dispute was the sanctions BA imposed on those MFU members that had taken strike action between January and March 2017. As Workplace Rep 3 argued, if not for this, the strike probably could have been settled after March 2017 as in the months following the initial period of strikes, both sides had in principle agreed on a pay formula that could be put to the membership. However, by punishing cabin crew for exercising their right to take industrial action, "at branch level we made that decision, and we stood firm ... we kind of stuck at it, we won't be penalised for exercising our right to [take] industrial action". For Workplace Rep 4 the dispute escalated directly because of this issue, "so that's pretty much why we went on strike again, and then after this we said we're not even discussing anything now with you until the sanction issues are sorted because there is no point".

The approach management takes in strikes will inevitably shape the way in which workers will mobilise to sustain the action, and this was a feature of this dispute as the counter-mobilisation tactics deployed by BA ultimately prolonged events. Additionally, employer attempts to undermine a dispute can have the effect of further developing solidarity among

those striking and to a considerable degree serve as the *source* of further solidarity – with these types of employer actions acting as ‘a fire that tempered the steel of solidarity’ (Fantasia, 1988: 233).

The legal context

Unlike the 2009-11 BA-BASSA dispute BA did use court injunctions to stop the strikes, although as discussed above this was threatened at one stage. Yet, the law on industrial action did shape the nature of the dispute from the first ballot in November 2016 through to the settlement almost one year later. The General Secretary argued that the laws restricting industrial action were introduced to try and weaken the confidence of workers and make them and trade unions scared of going on strike, “and it sets a climate where doubts appear in worker’s minds and our task is to remove those doubts and to replace them with confidence ... and that’s the key to industrial relations”. Regarding the introduction of the thresholds that were introduced by the 2016 Trade Union Act, he explained how he told the Conservative Government at the time that he would accept the legal changes provided they also allowed trade unions to hold industrial action ballots in the workplace.

He argued that while the Conservatives are always complaining about low turnouts in industrial action ballots, they also know full well that postal ballots invariably produce these low turnouts. He claimed that he told Sajid Javid, who was the Business Secretary in the Conservative Government that introduced the new legislation, there was no way as General Secretary that he would distance himself from a strike if a majority of those voting did so in favour of industrial action, just because it was below the threshold for voter turnout. He described low turnout in industrial action ballots as a “democratic deficit”, and called the

Conservative Government hypocrites as the major reason for this situation is the legal requirement for postal balloting which they themselves had introduced:

I said you can easily resolve that by giving us the opportunity to vote in work, safe voting so that people don't get intimidated, we'll introduce a method so it's safe we'll set up booths for individual people just like in a General Election, but of course they were not interested in that, all they were interested in is making it difficult for workers to take away their confidence, so confidence is the key ... and sorry it then is a question that trying to make certain that our officers and our shop stewards go the extra mile and persuade people, look your ballot has come through tomorrow, you must pick it up, don't lose it if you haven't got one let us know, we'll get you a replacement, and in the main, again I haven't got the figures on this but the vast majority of our industrial action ballots now are way above the thresholds so I think that's developing as well.

Regional Officer 1 described how Unite had to run the second ballot, as the Trade Union Act 2016 stated the mandate from the first ballot had expired after six months. Additionally, this was the first time Unite had to meet the new threshold of not only a majority of those voting doing so in favour of industrial action, but also that over 50 percent of those eligible to vote also do so (Labour Research Department, 2018). "[Because of internal Unite issues] we were given 15 days to run an industrial action ballot ... so it really was relying on us using our social media stuff to get them to ballot, and when it came back ... [the result] was kind of a knockout blow to the company".

Regional Officer 2, who also had responsibilities for legal affairs, stated that this was the first ballot under the 2016 Act, and as well as extending the notice period to employers from seven

to fourteen days and thus enabling more preparation time for the other side, the new ballot thresholds have created a situation where there are now two distinct phases:

One phase instead of just turning out the strike now it's turning out the vote - right - the turning out the vote is all important, it just means that there are two phases of mobilisation, I mean that's probably important ... so you've got to mobilise the vote almost more than you've got to mobilise the strike so that's actually important - you've got to get the turnout.

In this respect, it was argued that union officers are learning from this. For example, it is important that if someone is not going to vote, union representatives have to urge them to do so, even if you think they might vote against the strike. Obviously it is important to have the yes vote, but now, you also have to make sure you get the turnout:

For all of the strikes we have done post Trade Union Act [2016], loads and loads of you know 'comms', all about the comms where you would go - we'd do bulk texts to them and we would put leaflets out and the leaflets would say you know like your vote is your voice use it, then four days later - is your ballot paper still in a pile of post at your front door - or is your ballot paper buried at the bottom of your gym bag you know go out post it now, and then last chance post your ballot paper you've got nothing to say about the pay nothing to say unless you are perfectly happy with all your terms and conditions ... so you have all those - and that was one of the things with Mixed Fleet, we put out so many things of like last chance - countdown ... and also I'm just thinking also what it does is in a way and I think about all of the strikes ... that we have had in London only half of them - it's quite interesting half of all the strike ballots ended up in strike action actually being taken because actually before we would have like 12 percent turnout you know employers would think who cares but now because we've got to mobilise the vote not just mobilise the strike - mobilise the vote and you get the whole factory floor or you get the whole bus carriage or whatever voting they say that people are you know - and you're more

likely to get a deal, you get a great turnout and you're more likely to get a deal whereas before 12 percent - who cares - let's see what happens with the strike ... the thing about 'repeal the Trade Union Act' - it's not worth it, don't bother ... repeal the other laws repeal the Thatcher and Major stuff repeal the secondary picketing stuff, forget about the Trade Union Act it's nothing ... it means people are more engaged ... because we had to turn out the turn out, it's interesting actually I had never thought about it like that the more they shift the frontier of control the more we'll just find more creative ways (Regional Officer 2).

Workplace Rep 2 discussed how as reps finding themselves involved in organising industrial action for the first time they were learning about the law as they went along, and they were also reliant on support from their union Unite at regional level:

So right from the very outset we had lots of legal obligations that had to be met to make sure the strike was valid and proper and of course we knew that BA would do all they possibly could to discredit that, go for an injunction, all this kind of thing, all those tactics were designed, you know, to take the wind out of everyone's sails, and to put hurdles in place ... because of the data base, we had to make sure that when we emailed members that we were making sure the data base was current, we didn't have any people who had left who were no longer members, and you know the company was scrutinising that so it was important that we complied ... as far as possible you had to obviously work within it, it was restraining, it was constraining, it was designed to restrain organised strike action people legitimately trying to get the money they think they deserved, the terms and conditions they think they deserved, which were poor and lower than already there in British Airways.

Workplace Rep 3 also argued that the law makes it difficult to strike:

I mean the law made it difficult during our dispute when they introduced the new labour laws which was in March wasn't it, so that was huge, and again because we had basically everyone

essentially where we wanted them to be and engaged while we was able to turn around ... that amazing ballot result we had ... and I think that was under 2 weeks I think we did it in and again so there are lots of elements to that ... huge communication and the ability for people to actually vote and communicate and update all addresses and that sort of stuff, you know played a huge part but the pure introduction of that law and those terms in itself yeah you know it was just a step backwards so the law in this country doesn't work, it isn't for the workers it isn't to support people being able to actually fight for you know the rights and whatever it is that the dispute is about ... the law actively discourages that ... so it's fundamentally important that people are engaged and have that knowledge for them to actually know what it means when the law is changing or we don't have a law to protect us on this or for you to be able to do X,Y or Z you need to be able to do jump through lots of hoops ... and again the support from Unite to navigate that path was so important.

This highlights how the various legal restrictions on industrial action do make going on strike more difficult for trade unions and their representatives, although as discussed it is possible to work within the parameters of the legislation. In this respect those leading strikes have become a lot more aware of navigating around the hurdles placed in their way as well as educating members who may be worried about striking. As Workplace 4 explained, the members needed guidance and reassurance that they could legally strike as well as guidelines on what do on strike days such as not reporting to management that you are on strike. With BA threatening to apply for an injunction claiming the union were taking unauthorised and illegal industrial action members began to question how the strike leaders were organising the dispute:

We had to really turn that back around, you've got to be really on top of the game with them ... and that's really good that we have Unite for that because you know as a branch we are not

stupid, but we're not legally trained specialists in industrial law so we said what we want to ballot on and then it was for the legal teams to formulate that into wording that was appropriate for the ballot, to make sure we wouldn't get injunctioned we had to take a lot of guidance on how to run the ballot what do we need to do to make sure we are not injunctioned (Workplace Rep 4).

For Workplace Rep 3 while the cabin crew reps were inexperienced they were also fortunate as they had input from officers in Unite who had been involved in the 2009-11 dispute and were able to draw on these experiences and offer advice based on how BA had acted in the past:

So you know the reality of that was making sure we know the process and any boxes that need to be ticked or anything that needs to be done. The actual legwork of that was namely me stood for hours on end in my garden on a Friday, whenever we was trying to announce or you know give notice and things like that, to make sure it was done correctly and again there was lots of things, I mean the advances just in terms of communication, even from you know 2009-2011 to 2017, you know we were able to communicate as reps more efficiently so just things like that you know, so sort of when one of the reps were on an aircraft it didn't matter as soon as they got Internet connection you could ring them, or WhatsApp them, message or emails all of that you know it was a lot more quicker today so that made it easier as well.

One of the discussions that arose in the interviews was related to injunctions and why BA did not try and stop the strikes by this method as they had in the 2009-11 dispute. The main issue was the company was able to minimise disruption to their flight schedule by using other methods all of the methods discussed above, but mainly in the July and August strikes by wet-leasing Qatar aircraft or was it because they did not apply for injunctions as the strike organisers had done their jobs correctly. Regional Officer 1 claimed that BA did actually threaten injunctions as:

At one time a poster hadn't been put up in time when it should have been put up on a notice board ... the law makes it harder to go on strike, instead of one weeks' notice we have to give two weeks' notice, so once you've taken a company on under a collective bargaining agreement you've gone through all their processes, a failure to agree then ballot your members then give two weeks' notice they've got the complete and utter upper hand to prepare completely you know.

However, Regional Officer 2 argued that "because you have to be so careful now with the Trade Union Act [2016], everything has to be so precise, so it's made the union, in a way you're almost cutting off the threat of injunctions", and that on reflection because there are so many checks in place and because there are legal officers checking all the time in preparation for ballots and during the strikes it is just more difficult for companies to apply for injunctions, "I think it was that it was watertight".

The General Secretary agreed that because the laws relating to strikes are so complex now, and for the most part have been in place for many years, trade union officials and shop stewards have learnt how not to make mistakes when they are preparing for industrial action ballots. However in this case there were other factors influencing BA's decision not to go down the legal route:

But there is no doubt that in this particular situation, because Mixed Fleet only represented 15 percent of the flying capacity (BA) felt that it wasn't a sufficient threat to their finances and they were going to just let it run its course and it was only when we made it clear to them that this will go on and on, and I also made it clear to them that if you think for one minute that this is not going to sour the relationship that you have with Unite, I mean Unite have I think 26, 000 members in British Airways, and like any employer, employer's weigh up what to do and what the pros and cons are and if we stick out we win, are we going to achieve a huge amount and

when they are faced with ... if this just leads us to constant problems with Unite and other groups within the company maybe we should be a bit more flexible and that's when they started to be more amenable to try and reach an agreement.

Settlement

With the last day of the strikes taking place on the 30th August 2017, Unite announced another 'pause for peace' in which they urged BA to enter constructive talks to try and settle the dispute. The new offer was put to the members in a ballot and on the 31st October 2017 Unite announced that 84 percent had voted overwhelmingly to accept the pay deal on a turnout of 80 percent. The overall settlement worked out at an 11 percent increase on basic pay by March 2018 (subject to inflation and depending on experience), plus an additional four percent on the hourly rate and the introduction of a new £10 daily overseas allowance (Taylor and Moore, 2019; Short, 2017).

Crucially, the settlement deal saw travel concessions and bonuses restored to cabin crew who took industrial action, in addition to guarantees that deductions will not be made to any applicable bonuses. In accepting this, Unite proceeded to drop the legal action it was pursuing on behalf of MFU members who had been sanctioned by BA for taking industrial action. This section will discuss the participants views on settlement and immediate aftermath of the dispute and includes an element of reflection on the strikes as the interviews were conducted in most cases over a year later. As Hiller (1928) argues, for some a strike they have been involved in is the most glorious episode in their lives and it is important to capture the perceptions of those leading the strikes in this context. The General Secretary discussed his personal involvement in negotiating the settlement that ended the dispute:

Eventually as in all disputes an agreement was reached, obviously there was local officials and national officials involved, my Assistant General Secretary was involved ... but towards the final part of the dispute I was asked to lend my weight to the negotiations and we concluded a deal and got everybody back to work and Mixed Fleet have gone on from strength to strength ... this dispute made British Airways sit up and realise they couldn't treat these young people with disrespect and they had to deal with them in a proper manner.

Regional Officer 1 discussed the dispute in the context of the money Unite paid out in strike pay, and then how the MFU branch had grown by more than 1,000 members over a period of months and continued to grow after the dispute finished. For this union Officer, the cost of the dispute to Unite was worth it as over 1,000 members were recruited during the strikes who are all now paying membership fees. In this context, at the time of the interview in early 2019 Mixed Fleet Unite has grown to nearly 4,000 members and if looked at from an unemotional business perspective it was a sound decision to use the money from the strike fund. However, the dispute did have an emotional impact in other aspects:

I would argue that I was very unemotional in a sense of decision making and about the strategy, of course I was emotional about seeing all these young people with no future and low pay who basically you know were bringing their own banners along and their own placards and like a girl who joined Unite, she was like 19 or 18 or might have been younger, and she basically joined BA and her first day at work walked out on strike in her uniform and joined us on the picket line ... I was just blown away by that and that's not about being emotional that's being unemotional and seeing what an organising opportunity this was, and Mixed Fleet are on the map now they're not going anywhere, and they're only going to be growing, so I look back and think well it was definitely worth doing.

For Workplace Rep 2, the strike was an overall success in terms of the increase in wages and additional payments, and crucially in relation to the membership holding out for so long and getting the bonuses and travel allowances reinstated as part of the settlement. However, for this rep as well as these tangible improvements to pay, success was also measured by the actual act of going on strike:

More importantly it's been successful in organising, and Mixed Fleet actually standing up to a really well organised and pretty ruthless employer, and that's hard for people to understand unless you are actually employed by them, and you are at the receiving end of what they want to do. They are very good at putting on a show, they can manipulate, and they can present themselves in the best possible light ... and I think we tried very hard to show the reality of working for that company and it was great that they succeeded, that Mixed Fleet Unite succeeded and challenging that so directly you know it was the longest ever industrial action in civil aviation.

Workplace Rep 2 went on to argue that the tactics used by BA had actually backfired as now there are another group on workers who have gone through industrial action like Worldwide and Eurofleet had done so in 2009-11. As well as this, the dispute also had a major impact on the cabin crew who did not go on strike and who prior to this event may have viewed themselves as against the union and “pro-BA”, and it was felt that a lot of the cabin crew who did not get involved in the strikes would think twice about backing the company if and when it happens again. As the inferior working conditions were just as important as low pay in the build up to the dispute, an industrial agreement that improves working time and rest periods is something that the union reps are now working towards. Crucially though, the events taking place over the course of this dispute has taught these young workers about the values of standing in solidarity with one and other and against exploitation:

I think the focus on solidarity ... they were relatively young and a lot of them it was their first job I mean British Airways targeted these people, these were the people who were going to make up and who do make up their new Mixed Fleet ... but you know they are people who are ambitious, are new to the world of work you know earning a secure regular salary, full time employment you know with travel benefits so quite a good package but are being exploited for that ... we need to recognise that this is not going to go away, this core of people who have been exploited by a very powerful company getting a taste very early on of solidarity and of standing up for what is right I think those people are going to be, they have learned that lesson very early on in their working lives and we've got to take some comfort in the fact that these people are now unionised they know the benefit of belonging to a union.

Workplace Rep 3 explained that the settlement agreement was complicated as there were lots of different components to it in relation to the pay increases and how they would be applied. However, the pay rise was only one successful outcome in the dispute and getting the sanctions revoked was also a huge testament to everyone involved demonstrating that workers do not need to be bullied into backing out of take industrial action. On a personal level, involvement in leading the strikes changed colleagues perceptions of this rep in a very positive way:

Once we had settled, because people went back to work and then I was still involved in all the negotiations, and the meetings, so I didn't necessarily go back to work as it were I didn't get back on a jet, I spent a lot of time in the office but then when I did it was really weird so when I walked through the crew report centre it was weird people kind of put you on a pedestal. I couldn't actually walk through the crew centre for people stopping, like conversations and asking questions and like hugs and kisses, it was really weird it was a weird scenario and thing to witness, and it was great to see you know all the people and people started to talk to each other and it actually built quite a big connection to a lot of people and I've got a lot of friends now that

I never had before and all the rest of it but yeah it was a bit weird that people were putting you ... on a pedestal if you like, you are kind of the person who led it and things like that because that's not what I went into it for.

Workplace Rep 4 discussed the impact of the dispute on this group of union representatives who at the start were very inexperienced, yet by the end they had “developed so much as individuals and we pulled together as a really strong group of reps ... we knew what had to be done, when it had to be done, we had everything organised and it became a really well-oiled machine that just worked”. After finding themselves involved in an escalating episode of industrial conflict, it was only afterward everything had been settled that they could reflect on what they had achieved. In this context, there was an element of understanding the historical context of this dispute and the magnitude of what the strike leaders had gone through from the initial ballot in November 2006 through to the settlement almost a year later.

[With] the deal that was reached ... it was after the August strikes that the negotiating committee met together in a pub and we agreed, no sorry it was back in April between the two blocks of strikes where we were negotiating back in ACAS, we sat in a pub and agreed what would be an acceptable resolution, so it was £1000 on the three ranks that weren't senior trained and £2000 on the rank that was senior trained uplift per year, and then we negotiated and then we went on strike and came back to it again, and when we got to the point where this was as far as we can go, they're going to give us our staff travel back we had the settlement for the legal challenge that had gone in, and the pay deal was what we had negotiated, we sat down and we actually said well actually if you take this back to where we were back in April when we agreed on the minimum, we have well gone over that now. So actually it was a massive win, I think we achieved a lot more than we actually expected to and the members generally were very happy and on top of that everybody got their bonuses and staff travel and everything reinstated immediately. And then we also got a settlement per person for the legal challenge

that had gone in about the blacklisting because BA didn't want to challenge it in court, so I think overall it was a massive success, it was a long hard way to get there, but I think that did pave the future for actually our branch is not to be messed with and our members will walk out.

For Workplace Rep 2, involvement in the dispute took its toll on a personal level, and was a major factor in the decision to leave BA and work elsewhere. However, the solidarity experienced during the strikes had a profound effect and left a lasting impression.

I think I gave it my all, I was really committed, I still am, I am still a Unite member I will support all my ex colleagues who fly with British Airways and other airlines you know, it's a really hard job to do, it's an unhealthy and unsafe job at times. So I felt really proud of the people I stood alongside at the time I thought we were doing the right thing and they still think we did the right thing it was great to - what made it really frustrating and even more so that we didn't get the support from BASSA, we shared the picket line with people who like I said it was their first job some people had so much to lose we had people who were single parents, people in their 20s bringing up a child on their own, very, very different circumstances socially and economically to some of the people who were BASSA members and for them to walk out and share the picket line with us was it was just incredible and that is the true essence of solidarity, so I'm left with a really strong sense of pride and respect for so many people and I'm also left with a sense of being let down with a great many people in the trade union movement and so it's - this is a matter of fact ... so like I said I'm not bitter about it, those things happened but it's left a legacy ... I'll be there again when they have the next strike.

Finally, Workplace Rep 3 reflected on how being so involved in organising the dispute had a politicising effect beyond the actually strikes and resulted in a greater awareness of what was happening in the country and globally both politically and in the wider trade union and labour movement.

As much as I said it was politicising you know young people and new workers, it's also politicised me, I'm far more engaged and in tune to what's happening in politics and the country and in unions, and again what the global shift is on workers power, so it's definitely, definitely you know opened my eyes ... so the takeaway from it is that the structures that we have, I mean this is me talking with my young worker hat on, the traditional unions and traditional union structures still are far away from where they need to be to support the modern day worker and young people, so you know this is why we have the inception of workers self-organising themselves, and if you look at any people that are self- organising or branches or groups of people now that have started a movement or even the socialist movement it's because there isn't a union that has the space or is appealing to them to do that so it feeds into that wider narrative of unions need to change and whether that be just their processes or their structures, they've got to be able to listen to the workers of the time and going through such a huge high profile dispute has kind of set me in good stead.

Summary and discussion

The findings from the qualitative research have highlighted a number of themes in relation to the Mixed Fleet dispute which have been discussed throughout this chapter. This can be related to key events from the union building in the early years of Mixed Fleet, through to the 11 months of conflict and then the settlement and aftermath of the dispute. While not set out using a theoretical framework drawn from the existing literature such as Hiller (1928) or Meredeen (1988), the findings were structured to provide an account of the 'strike process' of this particular dispute, with the aim of detailing the crucial stages as it progressed.

Crucially, there was sufficient amount of data generated from the semi-structured interviews to focus on the role of the union representatives and officers who organised and led the strikes throughout this long dispute. As discussed in chapter three, there is a research gap regarding

studies in the industrial relations strike literature dealing with the role such actors play in a major dispute, and this resulted in the following research question being asked: *How do trade union workplace representatives and officials organise effective strike action?* The following discussion will build on the broader issues outlined across the eight themes included above, and focus explicitly on the methods, strategies and tactics the union representatives at workplace, regional and national level used to effectively organise the strikes during the Mixed Fleet dispute and secure a favourable settlement for the members and the union.

One of the interesting aspects of this dispute was the growth in union membership and density in the period following the establishment of the Mixed Fleet category of cabin crew during the 2009-11 BA – BASSA dispute (and then accepted in settlement agreement in June 2011), up to the pay negotiations in late 2016. While these developments could be included within a broader discussion regarding union organising and recruitment campaigns, they are also relevant to the research question which seeks to explore how trade union representatives and officials organise effective strike action.

Simply put, without this active period of union building throughout these years as the membership increased from the hundreds into the thousands there would have been no strikes, and as such the methods used by the regional officer and workplace representatives to grow the union warrants some attention. As pointed out in chapter two, strikes by non-union members in the UK are extremely rare (Hyman, 1989; Kelly, 1998; Gall, 2006) and without this period of recruitment and organising to get the workforce “strike ready” (Regional Officer 1) the industrial action would have been difficult (Williams, 2014).

Crucially, Regional Officer 1 worked within the existing UK industrial relations legal framework and exploited the *individual* statutory right to representation in disciplinary/grievance cases

to make contacts and recruit members. Then, with the momentum building, the *collective* statutory right to recognition (under certain conditions) was utilised in the face of sustained employer opposition to force BA to eventually sign a voluntary recognition agreement. Bearing in mind that one of BA's key objectives in establishing Mixed Fleet was a non-unionised, weak and compliment workforce, this was a major achievement in such a short period of time.

Yet rather than falling into complacency after recognition, the officer and reps in the MFU branch continued to actively organise and win campaigns over a range of issues of importance to the cabin crew, which in turn resulted in further membership growth. As discussed above, while these developments are not necessarily related to the organisation of effective strike action, the recruitment drive in the build up to the 2016 pay negotiations was explicitly designed to increase density to strengthen the union's bargaining power as a means of improving pay, and, if required go on strike to achieve this. Ultimately, this period of organising between 2011 and 2016 provided the foundations for the industrial dispute and strikes that followed.

Because Mixed Fleet were treated as separate to the rest of BA's workforce included in the 'corporate pay offer', when the two percent pay offer was rejected by the MFU members the union was able to put in a failure to agree over pay and then proceed to the ballot for industrial action. In this context, BA's strategy of not including Mixed Fleet in the same structure as their other employees backfired and what had started out as a series of routine pay talks had now resulted in around 15 percent of cabin crew voting to go on strike over pay. This was a key stage in the social organisation of conflict (Edwards and Scullion, 1982) towards industrial

action, and the union leadership among the crew and at regional level in Unite embarked upon a mobilising campaign to secure a positive result.

This involved setting up phone banks and sending out emails to all members urging them to use their ballot and vote for a strike, as well as involving the local Unite Community branch who handed out 'vote yes' leaflets to crew as they were going into work. Crucially, social media was used in this process of mobilisation, including platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, which were aimed at reaching out to this predominantly young workforce using the platforms where they predominately interacted. The most effective use of such modern communication methods was the BA Cabin Crew Solidarity Page, set up during the balloting period by the two Regional Officers leading the dispute, with participants quickly growing into the thousands.

This provided MFU members, many of whom were new to trade unionism, with a forum in which they could discuss events with each other, BASSA members from Worldwide and Eurofleet, as well as other workers and trade unionists who had joined to show solidarity. However, for the strike organisers this platform was also used to encourage MFU members to vote yes in the ballot which they achieved by writing lengthy posts exposing the union's position. As well as this, members were encouraged to include photographs of themselves posting their ballot papers alongside comments confirming they had voted.

Using social media in this dispute was key to the mobilisation process as the workforce were very isolated due to the nature of their job and it was difficult for the strike organisers to access them in person. However, the BA Cabin Solidarity Page also created an online strike community that would never have existed on such a large scale and involved so many workers and supporters. This process continued in the weeks after the positive vote for industrial

action had been announced and in the build up to the first strikes. The strike organisers would first communicate to members by email, and then across all the other platforms to reach as many workers as possible. During this period arguments in favour of striking were put forward by the strike organisers, as well as arguments countering BA's attempts at undermining the strikes. However, as important as these methods were they also created a situation in which it was difficult for those organising the strike to gauge how many MFU members would withdraw their labour when the strikes started, although ultimately the mobilisation strategy proved to be successful when the action began.

There were a number of issues relating to the effective organisation of the strikes during the dispute which the union officers and reps needed to consider, one of which was related to tactics. In the early period of strikes the organisers decided upon a strategy of discontinuous action with the purpose of lessening the financial burden on the members, and this resulted in a period of 26 strike days over three months ranging from two to seven days. Crucially, as the dispute progressed and in response to BA's counter-mobilisation strategies (chiefly sanctioning union members for going on strike and wet-leasing aircraft), the strike organisers changed tactics and extended the duration of each separate incidence of strikes to two week blocks covering a two month period.

It is here that the earlier decision made by Unite's General Secretary to pay enhanced strike pay for the duration of the dispute provided the necessary confidence and financial support to the striking cabin crew to stay out for such a long period of time. In this context the dispute became a 'trial of strength' (Hyman, 1989) between low paid workers supported financially by their union, and a company spending millions of pounds wet-leasing aircraft to maintain their

flight schedules. The decision to build up a massive strike fund in Unite would ultimately prove to be essential in the effectiveness of forcing BA back to the negotiating table to settle.

The final point regarding the effective organisation of the strikes relates to the protests that took place at various points around Heathrow Airport. While prevented by security from establishing picket lines of six people inside the airport terminal, this did not stop the organisers of the strike from adapting to the situation and establishing a visible presence, especially at the Terminal Five roundabout where the crew buses had to pass on their way into work. A continuous group of at least twenty MFU members were always present, and the strike organisers hired mini-buses to maintain a steady rotation from the strike headquarters at Bedfont Football Club to each protest point throughout the day. As well as this, a welcoming and inclusive atmosphere was fostered at the protests to try and win over colleagues who may have previously worked on strike days to join in the action.

To strengthen support for the strikes and place further pressure on BA to cover the work of Mixed Fleet crew on strike days, the strike organisers actively tried to recruit new members during the first ballot period and then throughout the strike. While it was also the case that members were becoming more active and recruiting each other, and there was also an element of social pressure to join the union, the workplace reps were also instrumental in the recruitment process. This was achieved by introducing innovative methods such as including a QR code on the ballot leaflets that people could scan with their mobile phones and be directed to information about joining, as well as including a link on the cabin crew Facebook forum that also directed people to this information.

The workplace reps and union officers also organised a range of activities over the course of the dispute which had three objectives; building and maintaining morale, placing pressure on

BA through collective protest, and to publicise and promote the strike in response to media and public indifference. To build morale and prevent strike fatigue, events were constantly planned throughout the dispute for instance attending Pride marches, various trade union events (Tolpuddle, the Miner's Gala In Durham), or taking buses of crew to Manchester and Glasgow airports to support the union members who worked there.

By contrast, although linked to morale building, other events were organised to try and pressurise BA to settle the dispute, for example protesting outside their corporate partners M&S, Heathrow Airport Limited, Qatar Airways, and the CAA. A theme emerged in the interviews that BA were powerful enough to actively suppress news reports of the dispute, although as discussed the lack of media coverage was possibly due to the limited impact of the strikes on BA's operations as the majority of their operations continued. Nevertheless, the strike organisers responded by protesting outside the BBC and Parliament to try and gain media attention.

Wider solidarity from other workers and the trade union movement was also displayed in the form of donations to food banks and financial donations from union branches. Again, innovative methods were introduced by the organisers of the strikes with one workplace rep setting up a 'Google Document' which enabled access to supporters who could then offer help to crew on strike such as a spare room, or to care share, and some sympathetic workers in other BA fleets and even other airlines donated staff travel to those who had been sanctioned.

Crucial to maintaining morale over the course of the dispute was having Bedfont Football Club on the outskirts of Heathrow Airport as a base for the strike organisers and members to congregate. This became the headquarters for the whole dispute, and without the decision made by the strike organisers to use this building rather than the Unite Office, morale would

have been difficult to maintain for those active members and their representatives. As well as being used to coordinate transport to and from the protests around the airport, Bedfont was also the scene of many rallies with guest speakers such as John McDonnell MP and others showing their support. However, it was also a place where those on strike could socialise, have drink at the bar and unwind, or get something to eat for free from the daily BBQ the strike organisers provided. Such things are instrumental in bonding workers in struggle together, and a strong sense of community was provided here that carried on and sustained the union reps and active supporters as the dispute intensified.

Throughout the strikes, BA used a range of counter-mobilisation tactics designed to lessen the impact of the disruption caused to their flight schedules, and to undermine the Mixed Fleet cabin crew. It has already been discussed above how the strike organisers responded to this in relation wet-leasing by extending the duration of the strikes and financially supporting members who took strike action. This was also linked to the sanctions imposed on crew who had gone on strike in the earlier period of the dispute, and as this was a key demand in the second industrial action ballot the dispute would carry on until these were restored. Alongside these developments, Unite had also initiated legal proceedings against BA on behalf of the 1,400 sanctioned cabin crew and used this method to place further pressure on BA to settle. This legal action, and the strike payments highlight the crucial role of the union at national level in executing effective industrial action.

Finally, in contrast to the 2009-11 BASSA dispute the law on industrial action did not play a major role in events, primarily because BA managed by other means to maintain their flight schedule throughout strikes, albeit at a massive financial cost to the company. That said, the organisers of the strikes were always conscious of the potential impact of the legal restrictions

and had to constantly work within this framework using resources at workplace, regional and national level. With the *threat* of an injunction always in the background a major effort was made to follow the correct procedure during the ballots, ensure every member received their ballot paper and were notified of the result and provide BA with all the required notice periods regarding ballots and strike periods, all of which could provide grounds to apply for an injunction.

As well as this, the strike organisers had to communicate effectively and reassure and educate the members about their legal position when striking during the mobilisation process, largely as a means of instilling confidence in these young workers in the face of threats from their employer of the consequences of going on strike. This can be linked back to the earlier discussion on the mobilisation process as communications regarding legal issues in the form of question and answers were emailed to all members, as well as posted on social media sites.

The Trade Union Act 2016 became law during the dispute, and this resulted in the union officers and reps having to adapt to the new legal framework. While they were now required by law to hold another ballot in April 2017 as the 6-month mandate had expired since the first one, this enabled the strike organisers to issue a new question which included the reinstatement of the sanctions. As well as this, they had to adapt during the second period of strikes and issue 14 instead of seven days' notice for each separate incidence of strikes, however the most potentially problematic area in the Act related to the thresholds. While this could have been an issue as the strike organisers had to mobilise over 50 percent of the workforce to vote, by the time of the ballot momentum was building to the extent that this was achieved easily even with the very short time frame the reps and officers were given to hold the ballot.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Introduction

The first section of this concluding chapter will briefly review the discussion in the introduction to this thesis concerning the decline and historically low levels of strikes since the late 1970s and early 1980s in the UK and the general diminution of academic interest in the topic since then. The research aims, objectives and principle question will then be outlined to provide the context for the discussion that follows. The chapter will then move on to section two and outline the general contribution the research in this thesis has made to the industrial relations literature before considering in more detail how the research findings can be related to theory and practice in the field of study. This will include a discussion on the association between trade union membership and industrial action and the period of sustained membership growth and union recognition in Mixed Fleet in the period 2011-16. Then, the theoretical association between strikes and union membership growth will be examined by detailing the social processes involved in the increase in membership and density during the Mixed Fleet dispute. Following this, the chapter will then reflect on the implications of the findings in relation to mobilisation theory and the 'framing' of strike demands (Batstone et al, 1978; Kelly, 1998; Benford and Snow, 2000). The next section will focus on the alternative forms of collective action such as protests, campaigns, lobbying and legal action against BA, and demonstrations that emerged during the dispute alongside the strikes, and as such gains further appreciation of the different ways that labour conflict can manifest itself. The organisation of the strikes will then be covered with a particular focus on strike tactics (discontinuous action of varying lengths), the 'protest points' that replaced picket lines, and the important impact of enhanced strike pay. After this, the implications of legal context of

the dispute will be discussed with a specific focus on the extent the law changed the nature of the dispute, and the impact of the 2016 Trade Union Act on events. The final part of this section will consider strike process literature including a discussion of Hiller (1928) and Meredeen's (1988) analytical frameworks and their influence on the structure of the thesis and ongoing relevance. Section three will reflect on the limitations of the research carried out including concerns with the sample size of interview participants, how the research could have been strengthened by including a questionnaire, and the related issue of BA management participation. Finally, in section four, the chapter will consider recommendations for future research and include a discussion on more recent developments in the field of study relating to the wave of strikes in the UK throughout 2022 and 2023 and the implications for research going forward.

Research aims and objectives

In the introduction to this thesis it was argued that an important feature of industrial relations in the UK since the late 1970s and early 1980s has been the decline of strike activity on all three official measurements, a stark contrast to the historically high levels experienced in the preceding fifteen years (Hyman, 1989; Goddard, 2011; Lyddon, 2015). The observation was also made that while strike activity has been cyclical since recording began, the decline and low levels witnessed over recent decades has resulted in the longest period of declining strike activity on record (Kelly, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2018).

The chapter went on to argue that one crucial consequence of this protracted period of strike decline has been a general diminution in academic interest shown in the subject (see Atzeni, 2010; Goddard, 2011; Seifert, 2015; Kelly, 2015) although there are notable exceptions which have been discussed in this thesis. Yet, while academic interest may have diminished over

time, an argument has also been made that strikes are still an important and essential feature of working life and as such they remain an important topic to study (Van der Velden, 2007). As Kelly (2015) argues, studying strikes is still vital because of the potential economic and political impact of such action, their ability to highlight the underlying conflict in the employment relationship, as well as providing important insights into the trade union movement and broader class relations in society. It was also claimed that detailed analysis of strikes illustrate the potential power that can be exercised by the organised working class, and therefore present a challenge to the dominant narrative concerning the decline of collectivism in the UK (Seifert and Sibley (2005).

As Blyton and Turnbull (2004) insist, this narrative was always misguided, and a number of theories or explanations have been advanced to account for the sharp decline in strikes through the 1980s and the historically low levels witnessed from the 1990s onwards. This includes economic and labour market developments (Edwards, 1995; Lyddon, 2007, 2009; Arrowsmith, 2010; Williams, 2014), the related decline of trade union membership and density, collective bargaining coverage, and union representation in the workplace (Hyman, 1989; Lyddon, 2015; Kelly, 2015; McIlroy and Daniels, 2009). As well as these developments successive Conservative Governments between 1979 and 1997 enacted six major pieces of legislation designed to restrict industrial action in the areas of picketing, secondary action and balloting (Lyddon, 2007).

This legislation was left virtually intact by the 1997-2010 Labour Governments, and while no legal changes emerged during the 2010-15 Coalition Government, one of the first announcements made by the Conservative Government in 2015 was legislation dealing with industrial action (French and Hodder, 2016). Indeed, the Trade Union Act 2016 would ensure

the UK's restrictive laws on strikes would become even harder to navigate in relation to ballot thresholds and notice periods before strikes (Labour Research Department, 2018; Tuckman, 2018).

While these factors acted in combination to reduce the number of strikes and make it increasingly difficult for UK workers to organise effective industrial action (Edwards, 1995; Dix et al, 2008; Dickens and Hall, 2010; Williams, 2014), strikes continued to occur in areas of the economy where union membership and collective bargaining coverage remain, including civil aviation (Lyddon, 2007, 2009). This is understandable considering the relationship between trade unions and strikes in the UK (Hyman, 1989; Gall, 2006) and as the underlying causes of industrial conflict generating grievances and discontent in the workplace remain and if anything are becoming ever more severe (Harvey and Turnbull, 2004; Seifert, 2015; Gallas, 2018).

Building on this discussion, the purpose of the thesis was to add to the diminishing body of literature on workplace conflict and strikes by conducting a detailed analysis of a contemporary occurrence of strike activity and answer the principal research question: "How do trade union workplace representatives and officials organise effective strike action?". The research objective was to gain an insight into strikes in UK, given the range of factors potentially undermining and restricting industrial action. To achieve this, an in-depth case study of the 2016-17 Mixed Fleet - BA industrial dispute was conducted with a specific focus on the activities of the union representatives involved at workplace and regional level. The Mixed Fleet dispute involved thousands of workers, lasted for almost one year and included 85 days of strikes (Allday, 2017).

Key findings: Theory and practice

The research findings will be summarised below with a specific focus on how they contribute to the field of study in relation to a number of relevant theories in the literature. Additionally, a close examination of this case reveals some important and practical lessons for the wider trade union movement, not only regarding how union representatives and officers organise effective industrial action both within the law and in the face of sustained employer attempts to undermine the action, but also in other important areas including mobilising, the framing of workers' demands, recruiting members and securing union recognition. However, before these crucial issues are addressed, the general contribution of conducting a case study of this major contemporary industrial dispute will be outlined.

The research carried out has made an important contribution to the industrial relations literature concerning strikes by examining in detail a large and protracted dispute in civil aviation during a period of historically low levels of strike activity in the UK. As well as being an example of a modern day (private sector) 'trial of strength' (Hyman, 1989), the case study is also important as the majority of cabin crew and their workplace representatives were overwhelmingly young (the average of union membership was under 30) and new to trade unionism with no previous experience, and were taking on a well-resourced employer determined to use a vast array of tactics to undermine their action, yet they fought back, held out for almost a year and achieved a positive outcome when the dispute was settled. This serves as an example to other groups of workers, both unionised and non-unionised, of what can be achieved by organising, mobilising, and deploying a collective response to workplace injustice and exploitation.

As such, this case study of the 2016-17 Mixed Fleet dispute is the first to be conducted in relation to this major episode of industrial conflict which would become the longest ever strike in UK civil aviation history. This includes the crucial historical and political/economic background context in the civil aviation sector, and an overall narrative account of the strikes as they developed throughout the course of the dispute. As this was also the first industrial dispute to take place in the context of the 2016 Trade Union Act which became law three months into the strikes in March 2017, the research also highlights important observations relating to this latest attempt by the Conservative Party to make it more difficult for workers in the UK to strike.

Additionally, the research adds to the industrial relations literature by incorporating detailed qualitative material gathered from in-depth semi-structured interviews with the key organisers of the strikes in Unite at workplace and regional level, as well as the insights of the General Secretary Len McCluskey. Given the difficulty researchers can have in gaining access to participants who are so close to the organisation of industrial action, this account provides a detailed record of events by those closely involved. This contributes to the field of study as it is rare to find contemporary accounts in which the key leaders and organisers speak so candidly and openly about the strategy and tactics used in organising strikes, how union members are recruited and mobilised, the methods used to maintain morale and develop solidarity as the dispute progressed, and how to navigate and even use to their advantage the laws designed to undermine their action.

The research therefore addresses a research gap in relation to analytical case studies of major disputes in recent years, and more specifically accounts which deal with the 'strike process' itself in the UK context. For while there are a number of recent exceptions (for example Gall,

2003; Seifert and Sibley, 2005; Taylor and Moore, 2019), the majority of detailed analytical case studies of strikes are set in a very different industrial relations context (see Gouldner, 1954; Lane and Roberts, 1971; Batstone et al, 1978; Hartley et al, 1983; Karsh, 1982; Meredeen, 1988; Fantasia, 1988). Hartley et al (1983) commented four decades ago when strikes and industrial conflict were a central feature of UK industrial relations, studies examining the strike process explicitly were very rare, and research into this important topic has diminished even further alongside the decline of strike literature more generally (Lyddon et al, 2015).

The findings from this study reinforce the theoretical association between trade union membership and strikes in the UK and while a range of factors have been used to explain the decline of strikes, the correlation between their occurrence and union density is very strong with the trend of membership and density decline remarkably similar to the downward trajectory of strikes (Kelly, 2015). As discussed in chapter two, strikes by non-union workers in the UK are extremely rare (Hyman, 1989; Gall, 2006) and industrial action is very hard to organise without the involvement of a union and their representatives in the workplace and the expertise, knowledge and experience of full-time officers. As will be outlined in more detail below, such representation and leadership is required to mobilise the members, respond to employer counter-mobilisation, maintain morale and encourage solidarity, offer financial support, and navigate the complex measures in UK law (Williams, 2014; Kelly, 2015).

As Mixed Fleet emerged as a separate workforce in the immediate aftermath of the 2009-11 BA-BASSA dispute, union membership among the new crew was less than 200. However, rather than accepting the situation for what it was Regional Officer 1 viewed this as a “clean sheet” and slowly grew membership by meeting workers in pubs, after work and in their

houses, and by attending every disciplinary and grievance case to show these young workers the benefits of being in a union. As well as this, organising issues were identified (the “skirt issue”) and future workplace leaders and activists identified as the momentum grew to the eventual voluntary recognition agreement in 2013. Union membership then increased to 1,500 (40 percent density) by early 2016 and following the recruitment drive in advance of that year’s pay talks to 2,000 (50 percent density).

Regardless of the underlying and immediate causes of the dispute, without the sustained and active recruitment by Regional Officer 1 and a small number of workplace activists (getting the members “strike ready”), it is unlikely that this strike would have occurred at all. Furthermore, with the new legislation contained in the 2016 Trade Union Act a high level of union density has become even more necessary in order to meet the required threshold of 50 percent in ballots. While this was not an issue in the first ballot in November 2017, it became one in the second ballot in April the following year, and the increased membership and density achieved by this point was more than sufficient to meet the legal requirements.

This has practical implications for the trade union movement as the new legislation requires the bargaining unit concerned has the union membership and density to meet these new legislative demands. Until this law is changed strikes cannot now be called on extremely low turnouts in ballots and it is imperative that trade unions consider this important factor. This could be positive in increasing pressure on workplace representatives and officers to focus attention on recruitment and building density in the workplace if they are to retain the option of taking/threatening industrial action to improve and defend pay and conditions or for other reasons. Additionally, in this case the high levels of voter turnout and the positive vote for

industrial action in both ballots legitimised the union's argument and ongoing action throughout the dispute.

A connected point and one that addresses a research gap is the relationship between strikes union membership growth. Hodder et al (2017) argue very little research has dealt with this topic which is unusual given the scale of membership decline and the potential for collective action to increase these levels. After analysing a seven year data set from the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) it was found that months with strike action also had a significantly higher rate of membership growth, while data from new recruits suggested perceived injustice and union effectiveness both motivated the decision to join. Darlington's (2009) study of the Rail Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) also found that frequent strikes securing significant pay rises led to membership increasing from 56,037 to 75,939 in the period 1999 to 2007 - a period of stable or declining membership for many other unions.

The research carried out in this thesis improves upon these findings and something new to the literature by providing a detailed qualitative account of the social processes involved in workers joining a union during an industrial action ballot and during the strikes. Over 1,100 workers joined Unite from the start of the balloting process in November 2016, and then as the strikes began in January 2017 increasing membership density from 50 percent to 77.5 percent in a relatively short period of time. A number of reasons were outlined for this increase. For instance, the process of joining was made easier during the industrial action ballot with leaflets handed out by Unite Community members with QR codes on them taking people to a "landing page". Additionally, the "Solidarity" Facebook page, accessed by so many, had a link to Unite's application site and it was argued that social media was a key driver of recruitment.

As well as making the process of joining easier, communications on the Solidarity page and other methods such as email and text messaging were used to explain how workers would be legally covered during the strike and this further encouraged recruitment. Another factor highlighted was strike pay, and as this would only be paid to Unite members some may have joined to protect themselves financially. However, the strike leaders claimed crew joined the union so they could also join the strike and the movement that was growing. It was also argued that a degree of social pressure played a part among cabin crew who felt compelled to stand alongside their colleagues and friends and fight back against the low pay and inferior working conditions they had grown tired of.

There are practical lessons the trade union movement can learn from this discussion and instead of adopting a pluralistic 'partnership' approach to industrial relations it is clear that when they are necessary strikes pay, not only in relation to outcomes for workers but also in growing membership and consolidating union organisation in the workplace. This, in turn, should prepare workers for future struggles as not only has membership increased but these members have gone through the experience of organising and participating in industrial action which can have a politicising effect.

However, it is necessary here to make the point that high levels of union membership and density alone are not enough, and as Hyman (1989) argues, for conflict to be turned into collective action it is usually necessary for someone to take the lead in articulating it and providing an organised form to workers discontent. This relates to the discussion in the literature concerning the 'agitator theory' of strikes, a largely unitary concept that strikes are *caused* by trade union representatives at various levels (see Fox, 1966). While this perspective underpins the approach to industrial relations and strikes post-1979 in the UK, as already

outlined this is easily refuted by pluralist and Marxist accounts stressing the underlying conflict of interests existing in the capitalist employment relationship (Flanders, 1965; Hyman, 1975, 1989). As Knowles (1952) argues it is difficult to agitate for industrial action successfully without the existence of widespread grievances and viewing trade union representatives as agitators ignores the conciliatory role they can play in resolving conflict (Batstone et al, 1977). Yet, as Darlington (2002) argues while it is correct that strikes are not *caused* by trade union representatives, and the underlying and immediate causes of the Mixed Fleet dispute covered throughout this thesis confirm this, dismissing the agitator theory completely downplays the important role such activists in a strike situation.

In this context, the research contributes to the literature on worker mobilisation generally, and Kelly's (1998) 'Mobilisation Theory' more specifically, by highlighting the social processes involved in building union organisation in the movement towards a strike (including the ballot for industrial action), *and* in maintaining morale and fostering solidarity over the course of a protracted and often bitter dispute. Kelly argues, collective organisation and activity ultimately stem from employer actions which generate a sense of injustice among workers. In Mixed Fleet this was low pay compared to Worldwide and Eurofleet, inferior working conditions, and the general way cabin crew were treated by management. However, for Kelly it is not enough that workers feel aggrieved, they must also feel entitled to their demands and expect that there is some chance the situation can be changed by 'collective agency'.

Therefore grievances and discontent are *necessary* but not *sufficient* for workers to collectivise, and mobilisation theory helps understand how a group of individuals with a sense of injustice form a social group with a collective interest. First, workers must acquire a common identity differentiating them from their employer, then they must attribute the

injustice to their employer, as well as possessing the willingness to engage in collective action to remedy the situation. In this process, individual feelings of discontent are translated into collective action through organisation and mobilisation, and central to this 'micro-mobilisation' is the role of small groups of trade union activists who provide the required leadership. This key group promote a sense of grievance among workers, persuading them that the situation is unjust, sustain a sense of social identity and cohesion, and then urge the appropriateness of some form of collective action as a means of remedying the situation while legitimising collective action in the face of hostile criticism and employer counter-mobilisation. Without the committed and active leadership displayed by this core group of union representatives at regional and workplace level, supported financially at national level by their union it is doubtful this industrial dispute would have been as successful or even occurred at all.

Mobilisation theory also highlights the importance of 'framing' issues which then lead to collective action, and since the willingness of workers to act is an essential power resource for unions these 'injustice' or 'illegitimacy' frames are critical for detaching workers from loyalty to their employer. The research carried out confirms the central proposition of Kelly's mobilisation theory as although the dispute was initially about (poverty) pay and to a lesser extent bargaining rights, it was also framed by the strike leaders in terms of injustice (and exploitation and unfairness) regarding the vast differences in pay for workers essentially doing the same job (see also Brown-Johnson and Jarley, 2004).

Mobilisation began prior to the pay negotiations, carried on during the ballot for industrial action, and then throughout the dispute including varying periods of discontinuous strike action. The main methods used were email, text, WhatsApp and social media platforms such

as Facebook, Twitter and Instagram. This highlights the critical role of this small group of workplace representatives and union officers in mobilising the membership to vote for industrial action and then to go on strike, and these communication methods were necessary because of the nature of cabin crew's job in which they are literally dispersed all over the world.

The Facebook page "BA Cabin Crew Solidarity" was essential in this process with tens of thousands participating on the forum creating an online community. In line with Kelly's theory the strike leaders used social media and other platforms as a means of promoting a sense of grievance and injustice relating to pay, created a sense of cohesion and solidarity *online* and then urged industrial action to redress the pay differentials. They also used these platforms to legitimise collective action through constant communication and in the face of employer criticism and counter-mobilisation. Social media was a key to mobilisation in this dispute and while this may not translate to all groups of workers trade unions should certainly attempt to engage with younger workers on these platforms. This case illustrates how thousands of workers can be mobilised and organised to strike while never actually being in the same physical location and is an example of new repertoires of collective action emerging.

Batstone et al (1978) argued a crucial part of the movement towards a strike is the 'vocabularies of motive' or 'rationales' in favour of action forwarded by certain individuals, and this was achieved with the initial "poverty pay" framing of the strike. For Benford and Snow (2000), these collective action frames (or core framing tasks) are constructed as actors attempt to negotiate an understanding of the situation they define as in need of change, identify who is to blame, and then urge others to act collectively to affect this change. Using a 'diagnostic frame' articulating the injustice of low pay, BA management were then identified

as the cause of this, and then a 'prognostic frame' proposed a solution urging cabin crew to vote to strike. During this process, BA constructed a 'counter-frame' that the pay was fair compared to the wider labour market and other airlines. 'Motivational framing' then developed the 'rational' for engaging in collective action to try and redress the pay gap with the other fleets. Crucially, these frames changed as the strike became more protracted to include restoring travel concessions and bonuses to those union members who went on strike.

Mobilisation theory has been criticised for its analysis of leadership and for failing to consider the confidence of workers (Gall (1999, 2000), yet this case shows how those leading strikes can develop and strengthen this confidence so workers can fight back and change their situation. This small group of workplace representatives with no prior union experience and officers at Regional level managed between them to mobilise a group of workers, also new to trade unionism and with no experience of industrial action, to carry out the longest strike in civil aviation history - and achieve a positive outcome when the dispute was settled. The consideration of leadership and mobilisation in the findings demonstrate that even in an industrial relations framework designed to restrict and undermine the ability to organise a strike, it was still possible by providing committed and active leadership in the workplace and at regional level with national support.

The research findings also contribute to an understanding of alternative repertoires of contention used alongside or instead of established and traditional forms of collective action such as the strike, and therefore enhances our appreciation of alternative ways in which labour conflict can manifest itself in protests, campaigning (including online), lobbying, and demonstrations (Kelly, 2015; Williams, 2020). This was an important factor in the Mixed Fleet dispute as it was so protracted with varying numbers of strike days followed by lengthy periods

where the union members were back at work. Therefore, such action was organised as a means of raising morale among the activist base of strikers, adding an extra layer of pressure on BA, as well as drawing public attention on the union's case.

To achieve this the strike leaders communicated with members at all times and planned a series of events and activities, for example, the 'green dress day' or 'red dress' day and organising events at Glasgow and Manchester Airports to support cabin crew who lived in these locations. Attendance at trade union events such as Tolpuddle and the Durham Miners Gala, as well as various Pride marches were also encouraged as the strike leaders identified many of their members as LGBT. Symbols for the strike such as XXXX, borrowed from the BA-BASSA strikes, or the colour yellow were used to create a sense of belonging and solidarity among strikers.

Protests were also used to raise morale and highlight the profile of the dispute in the media, or to increase the pressure on BA by targeting their corporate partners such as Marks and Spencer (Workplace Rep 1). For example, protests were held outside the BBC, i360 in Brighton, Qatar Airways, the Civil Aviation Authority, and outside Parliament. As Workplace Rep 2 argued "no one can stop you taking your picket line somewhere else in the form of protest". Crucially this made sure the core base of around 100 active members were occupied, raised morale *and* maintained a visible presence throughout the dispute (Workplace Rep 4). As Workplace Rep 1 argued, this was crucial as these active members were getting worn down, stressed and anxious and suffering from "strike fatigue".

These activities can be related to mobilisation theory as the strike leaders had to mobilise members to vote for industrial action, to go on strike, and then stay involved and engaged in the dispute between strike days over almost one year. A crucial element in this was the use of

Bedfont Football Club, the 'strike HQ', with Workplace Rep 5 claiming without it the strike would not have been as successful and was "100 percent essential". Again, in relation to mobilising it gave the striking crew a 'physical' community to be a part of where DJs, films, BBQs and parties were held, there was a bar, and it was made fun and like a party atmosphere and all organised by the strike leaders to keep the core activists spirits up (Regional Officer 2). Workplace Rep 4 claimed that without Bedfont it would have been hard to cope because it was a support network which you could attend on strike days and be around likeminded people. Wider solidarity emerged with BASSA members donating staff travel, car sharing and even spare rooms, and money that was donated to the strike fund by BASSA members and other trade unions was used to organise a food bank to help struggling Mixed Fleet strikers. Such activities demonstrate a spirit of collectivism and solidarity emerging alongside the traditional strike weapon and is a testament to the organising capabilities of the strike leaders, an example to be followed by other groups of workers in struggle.

Related to this discussion is the actual organisation of the strikes themselves, and again, wider lessons can be learned from this case for the trade union movement. In line with Lyddon (2009) and Seifert and Sibley's (2005) analysis of more recent strikes, short periods of discontinuous action were used in the early stages escalating from two to seven days in the period January to March 2017 and totalling 26 days. The rationale behind this decision initially was to lessen the financial burden on the members, and on the union in relation to strike pay from Unite. However, pressure to increase the length of the strikes was coming from the membership when these early strikes had not proved effective. In March the idea of "Forty days for lent" was getting unanimous support from members, workplace representatives and

branch officials although Region Officer 1 argued this would not have gained support from Unite at National level due to the cost of strike pay which was already estimated at £1million.

By June the context had changed, and the decision was made to escalate the strikes for longer periods throughout July and August by issuing four separate notice periods covering almost two months. This must be viewed in the context of the second industrial action ballot which included the added strike demand of restoring the travel concessions and bonuses to striking crew. Additionally, the strike leaders were aware that cabin crew still working were running out of 'flying time' regulations and by taking sustained action it forced BA into reaching a settlement.

In terms of the day-to-day organisation of the strikes there were no picket lines in the true sense of the term in which striking workers try and prevent their colleagues from entering the workplace. However, this was not because of any legal requirements (the code of practice limitations of six for example) but rather Heathrow Airport Limited (HAL) security who would not permit access to the area where crew were arriving for work. Instead, they contacted Regional Officer 1 when the strikes were announced and provided designated assembly points on Heathrow Airport's perimeter and at nearby Hatton Cross Tube Station where in the end "token picket lines" or "Protests" were established. Regional Officer 1 also secured access to Heathrow's Terminal Five roundabout which was crucial as anyone driving into Heathrow had to drive past this area, including all the buses transporting in cabin crew for work.

These 'protest points' were organised to ensure there was always a visible presence at Heathrow on strike days with the MFU branch renting mini-buses and dropping members off from the strike HQ at Bedfont Football Club. Furthermore, by calling these gatherings 'a protest' the strike leaders were able to negotiate with HAL security that a maximum of 20

crew could assemble at these points though and certain times this would increase to 40 during the mini-bus handovers. These protest points became a focal point for the visibility of the strikes and additionally the striking crew tried to make them welcoming and inclusive to encourage other cabin crew workers who had to join the strike, rather than adopting the more traditional hostile approach to strike-breakers. Perhaps this tactic is a viable one when still building density in a workplace, though not necessarily so when long standing union members cross a picket line.

A major factor in the success of the dispute was the enhanced strike pay provided and without this support at national level it would have been very difficult for these workers to sustain strike action for so long. This was made possible because of the separate strike fund Unite had built up over many years, which the General Secretary claimed was the largest in Europe. The financial support available to members enabled Unite to effectively neutralise BA's counter-mobilisation strategies and this became crucial in the latter stages of the dispute when strikes were called throughout the whole of July and August. It was towards the end of this period that the General Secretary made it clear to BA that Unite had tens of millions in their strike fund and would not back down in any shape or form; "It was at that time that the CEO said we need to see if we can sort this dispute out and we did".

As Mixed Fleet's salary was so low it was estimated that in some cases members were getting more money in strike pay than wages, and the consensus was that members were mobilised by strike pay or at least it was an important factor: it was "vital and made a big difference in mobilising crew early on in the dispute" (Workplace Rep 2). The General Secretary maintained he had anecdotal evidence from conversations with Unite reps and officers that employers had conceded in disputes on the basis that members are receiving that level of strike pay and

as such “they are never going to defeat the union, so they decide to call it a day and reach agreement”. The ability to pay strike pay is therefore “crucial for the movement going forward ... I’ve preached for a long time that all unions should build a huge strike fund” (General Secretary). This is another key finding from the research that can be generalised to the wider trade union movement and potentially offers a new approach to organising strikes. On the basis of this observation building a large strike fund and signalling your intention to deploy it can have the effect of ending disputes earlier with positive outcomes for union members, or alternatively as in this case it can enable workers to undertake protracted industrial action without suffering major financial hardship.

Another interesting theme in the literature was the the range of structural and institutional determinants explaining the decline and historically low levels of strikes witnessed after the early 1980s in the UK. While the debate focuses on the impact the post-1979 legislation had on decreasing strike levels in comparison to other factors (for instance the economy, labour market developments, the decline of union membership, collective bargaining and workplace union representation) the general consensus was that these laws *contributed* rather than *caused* decline (see Edwards, 1995; Waddington, 2003; Dix et al, 2008; Lyddon, 2009; Dickens and Hall, 2010). The research carried out in this thesis makes a contribution to this literature by showing the extent to which an organised and committed group of trade union representatives and officers with support at regional/national level can work around and within the legal framework on industrial action to carry out effective strikes.

Additionally, while it is apparent that the legal changes have changed the nature of strikes in the UK (Edwards, 1995) there is a paucity of analytical case studies dealing with this important aspect of industrial action (see Gall, 2003; Seifert and Sibley, 2005; Taylor and Moore, 2019

for recent examples). While BA did not seek an injunction to stop industrial action, the research did highlight the extent to which the law on strikes influenced the course of the dispute and reinforces Lyddon's (2009) argument that the legislation can prolong disputes. The legal requirement to hold a postal ballot before striking began on the 16th November 2016 and after four weeks of voting the result was announced on 14th December 2016 (Unite, 2016b, Unite, 2016c). At this stage only a majority in the ballot was required regardless of turnout (Labour Research Department, 2018) and with no improvement in BA's pay offer Unite gave the legally required seven days' notice and announced strikes on Christmas Day and Boxing Day (Calder, 2016). After further negotiations at Acas an improved offer was made by BA and the Christmas strikes were suspended while this was put to members (Unite, 2016e). This was rejected by the members in early January 2017 by a margin of 7-1 (Topham, 2017).

At this stage events were again shaped by the legislation as MFU members were required by law to take industrial action within 28 days of voting for it – unless BA extended this mandate (Labour Research Department, 2018). BA refused to do so and seven days' notice from Unite was issued for strikes to take place on the 10th and 11th January (Unite, 2017a) almost two months since the ballot had opened. In this early stage of the dispute separate seven day notices were issued for strikes on the 19th - 21st January, 5th – 7th February, 9th – 11th of February, 17th – 20th February, 22nd – 25th February, and the 3rd – 9th March (Unite, 2017a, 2017e, 2017f, 2017g).

During this period as part of the range of BA counter-mobilisation techniques Worldwide and Eurofleet were asked to cover Mixed Fleet routes affected by the strikes. BASSA's leadership complied with this as they would be breaking the law on secondary action as they were not

involved in the industrial dispute (Regional Officer 1). The other fleets at Heathrow covering the Mixed Fleet routes on strike days certainly contributed to BA's counter-mobilisation strategy and lessened the impact of the action in these early stages. However, it is difficult to ascertain the actual reason for BASSA adopting this position and whether it was the legal factors or reluctance to become involved in a dispute relating to a fleet that was ultimately designed to replace their members in the long term. Further qualitative research among this section of workers and union representatives regarding this aspect of the dispute would be required to shed more light on the situation.

As the dispute progressed, the 2016 Trade Union Act became law on the 1st March 2017 and because of this Unites were now required to provide BA with seven days' notice that they were re-balloting their members as the 6-month mandate on the November 2016 ballot was going to expire. As well as the requirement to re-ballot, the new law stipulated that industrial action would not be lawful unless 50 percent of those entitled to vote in the ballot did so and the majority of this percentage also voted in favour of action (Labour Research Department, 2018). Crucially, rather than making the strike more difficult, the requirement to re-ballot worked in favour of the union as they were able to broaden the strike demands beyond the initial pay and CSM bargaining rights issues to include the reinstatement of the bonuses and travel concessions taken off crew who had participated in the earlier strikes (Sewell and Harper, 2017). In this sense the reasons for the strike changed at this stage moving beyond pay, and this was legitimised in the new ballot to incorporate the new demands. This legitimisation process resulted in the lengthening of the dispute with a fresh 6 month mandate, and it appeared that the re-ballot pressurised BA into returning to the negotiating table at Acas (Reuters, 2017a) as a 'pause for peace' took place from April to June.

Crucially, the new legislation on balloting resulted in increased mobilisation or a situation where there are now two phases of mobilisation in a strike. One phase instead of turning out the strike is to turnout the vote “you’ve got to mobilise the vote almost more than you’ve got to mobilise the strike. You’ve got to get the turnout”. Members have to be mobilised to vote even if they might vote against the unions recommendations (Regional Officer, 2). This has the result of legitimising the strike even more as there is an increased turnout and mandate. Regional Officer 2 even argued that section of the 2016 Act should not be repealed as it has led to officers, workplace reps and members being more engaged. Unions have to “turnout the turnout ... the more they shift the frontier of control we’ll just find more creative ways”.

In this dispute, the result of the second ballot was announced on 4th April and 91 percent had voted in favour of industrial action on a turnout of 69 percent well above the new ‘threshold’ of 50 percent (Socialist Worker, 2017b). As well as broadening the demands to include reinstating the bonuses and travel concessions, this ballot extended the mandate by another six months. Therefore the new law further legitimises industrial action during a long dispute and gives unions the legal device to change and adapt their strike demands.

Another change to the law meant that unions now had to serve 14 days’ notice instead of seven before a strike which gave employers more time to prepare (see Appendix 1; Labour Research Department, 2018). Although the pay issue appeared to be resolved, negotiations throughout June failed to move BA on restoring the bonuses to sanctioned strikers, and for the rest of the dispute separate 14 days’ notice periods were given for a series of four separate strikes lasting throughout all of July and August. The strike leaders were adept at working within the law to organise strikes covering this period, while still maintaining the flexibility to suspend action if required.

One crucial advantage of qualitative research is the ability to dig deeper into issues of relevance that may be more difficult to ascertain from secondary sources and documentary analysis. This is the case when it comes to the issue of injunctions. As discussed, In a marked change of tactics from the 2009-11 BA did not apply for injunctions to prevent the strikes taking place. However the threat of an injunction was always there, and the reps were making sure they kept their data base of members up to date and ensuring all members were notified at all times. While “constraining” they managed work around all the ‘traps and hurdles’ (Ewing, 2011) that makes going on strike in the UK difficult. Crucially they had input from experienced union officers and Unite’s Legal Department. However, as the General Secretary argued in this case as Mixed Fleet only represented 15 percent of the workforce BA used other means if undermine the action and were prepared to let it “run its course”.

Finally, the case study also contributes to the industrial relations literature by considering the under-researched area of the ‘strike process’ itself (Lyddon, et al, 2105). To re-cap on the more detailed discussion in chapter three, Hiller (1928) provides the earliest known attempt at providing an analytical model applicable to all industrial disputes by developing a ‘processual model of strikes’ (Hartley et al, 1983). Less interested in the causes of strikes, Hiller focuses attention on how a situation becomes collective, the behavioural characteristic of the striking group itself, and the range of techniques used to direct action once the strike has begun. To understand these issues it is argued that there are a number of successive phases of the strike cycle applicable to all but the shortest of disputes; the organisation of the strike, the beginning of concerted action, the maintenance of group morale, controlling strike breakers, neutralising the manoeuvres of the employer, manipulating public opinion, and finally the demobilisation of action.

Building on Hiller, Meredeen (1988) also developed a seven-stage analytical framework which can be used to show what occurs at crucial chronological stages of *every* industrial dispute. This includes the pre-dispute context, the 'challenge' thrown down by one side which initiates the dispute, the initial responses made to the challenge which often triggers the conflict, the consequences that follow, the climax or point of greatest pressure which immediately precedes resolution, the settlement of dispute, and finally the aftermath which determines the substantive outcomes.

When considering the usefulness of these analytical frameworks as a means of structuring the account of the Mixed Fleet dispute it was found that while Hiller's analytical model and Meredeen's seven-stage reconstructive device for structuring a chronological account were both useful and useable, they also impose unnecessary restrictions on the researcher when focusing solely on one industrial dispute. Rather than trying to 'crowbar' events into a pre-existing framework it was easier to draw on the critical realist/abductive approach and structure the research around the background context, a narrative account of the dispute, and then a number of crucial and important themes that emerged from the qualitative research with the strike participants. That said, it would be useful for researchers to adopt either Hiller or Meredeen's analytical frameworks if carrying out a comparative approach to strike analysis as this would allow for an element of structure and uniformity to be applied to the research findings of each separate incidence of industrial conflict. .

Research limitations

The chapter will now move on to reflect on the limitations of the research carried out, as well as some of the potential weaknesses of the study. One limitation relates to the sample size of

the semi-structured interview participants from the Unite union at workplace, regional and national level. When planning the interviews in the early stages of the research I contacted a large group of workplace representatives and MFU Branch Officers by email and also by travelling to a branch meeting and talking about the research that I was going to conduct. Additionally, during the dispute I attended a large protest outside Parliament, and on one of the strike days I visited Bedfont Football Club, the strike headquarters and spoke to a number of MFU representatives. As well as this I attended one of the protests organised as a substitute for a picket line on the perimeter of Heathrow Airport.

While I provided these potential participants with further information and arranged suitable dates and times to conduct interviews, I could not conduct as many as I would have liked. However, it has to be understood that gaining access is very difficult for researchers especially when dealing with a major episode of conflict where people may be worried about the consequences of speaking about their experiences. This is even more the case if the potential participants are still employed by the company concerned. There is also the additional issue of the researcher gaining the trust of participants, and it became apparent that some potential participants were concerned about being interviewed even though anonymity was promised.

However, as I got to know all of those involved and spent time with them during and after the dispute it became apparent that the research participants were key to the negotiations with management, the organisation of the ballots and recruitment/ mobilisation of cabin crew and members, as well as the crucial day-to-day organisation of the strikes, and crucially the settlement that ended the dispute. As such, while the data is limited to an extent in *quantity*, the *quality* of the interviews which were extremely lengthy, detailed, and captured the rich

qualitative data required to add depth to the pre-dispute context and narrative account of the strike.

On reflection the research could also have been strengthened by conducting a large questionnaire/survey to try and capture the opinions and perceptions of the MFU membership over a range of important issues. While such research methods will never provide the detailed information that can be gained from interviews, doing this could have provided an additional perspective on the dispute and strikes. This would have been particularly useful when discussing strike causes, why members joined the union before and during the dispute, membership views on the leadership provided by the workplace representatives and regional officers, and crucially membership opinions on the settlement agreement.

A related point concerns the omission of interviews with representatives of BA and while press statements were used to build up as accurate a picture as possible, perhaps the research could have been strengthened by including management opinion (see Nichols, 1992). However, as the research was primarily concerned with how union workplace representatives organise effective industrial action the decision was taken to focus solely on the union side of the dispute. Practically, even if I had wanted to include data representing the perspective of BA management on events I would have probably lost the trust of the union side in doing so, especially as the dispute had only just been settled when I commenced with the research.

Recommendations for future research

The final section of this concluding chapter will outline recommendations for future research and will focus on important developments taking place regarding industrial action in the UK, and therefore of direct relevance to this thesis. The wave of strikes occurring in the UK

throughout 2022 and into 2023 signifies a major development in the industrial relations field of study, and more specifically in relationship to literature dealing with trade unions, workplace conflict and industrial action. These events will have a major influence on the debates outlined in this thesis (strike causes, mobilisation, organisation and tactics, strike pay, the law) given the four decades of low levels of strike activity that preceded this outbreak of collective action. While taking place in the public and private sector and involving a number of unions with their own industry specific demands, the major issue in these disputes is the severe cost of living crisis facing workers in the UK as wages have failed to keep up with rising prices (Singh, 2022, Stewart, Adams, and Walker, 2023).

As discussed in chapter two, while strike activity in the UK has always fluctuated (Hyman, 1989; Kelly, 2015), the propensity for strike numbers to be recorded in the hundreds rather than thousands per year has been a consistent feature of the last three decades as strikes reached historically low levels (Lyddon, 2015; Office for National Statistics, 2018). The Office for National Statistics (ONS) even stopped recording strikes in the period 2020-June 2022 claiming its capability and capacity to do so had been impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Gall, 2022); although there is no evidence of a major resurgence in worker resistance during these years - perhaps understandingly given the global public health crisis.

However, as the pandemic neared its end in late 2021 the cost of living in the UK was already rising above wages and Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, in combination with other factors, would result in rising inflation throughout the rest of that year (Hansen, 2022). In fact, after decades of relative stability the 'Consumer Price Index' (CPI) measure of inflation increased from 2.9% to 9.2% between September 2021 and December 2022, while the Retail

Price Index (RPI) measure increased from 5.4% to 13% over the same period (Office for National Statistics, 2023).

This economic situation set the scene for a series of strikes by HGV drivers, bus drivers and refuse workers in late 2021/early 2022 closely followed by rail, post, communication and hospital workers. By the end of 2022, strikes action was taken by dockers, train drivers, University Lecturers, Criminal Barristers, ambulance workers, the civil service and the Border Force (Hansen, 2022; Stewart, Adams, and Walker, 2023).

While there is no strike data for the first half of 2022 (see above), the ONS reported 625 strikes between June and November of that year with almost 323 occurring in November alone - the highest number of strikes recorded in (half) a year since 1990 (Office for National Statistics, 2018, 2023). Significantly, this trend has shown no sign of abating during the early months of 2023 with strikes taking place among rail and bus workers, train drivers, National Highways Officers, DVLA workers, Driving Examiners, the Civil Service, Ambulance drivers, nurses, the Environment Agency, Physiotherapy staff, teachers, the civil service, and workers at the British Museum (Stewart, Adams, and Walker, 2023). It is essential in light of these major developments in the field of study that research is undertaken to examine the above phenomena and gain an in-depth understanding of its causes, dynamics and outcomes in relation to pay increases, union organisation and membership growth.

Summary

In summary, this chapter has discussed a number of key contributions to the industrial relations field of study in relation to theory and practice. The research has contributed to the literature on strikes as it is the first case study of the longest strike in civil aviation history and the first major dispute to occur in the context of the 2016 Trade Union Act. This account

includes detailed qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with the key strike leaders at workplace and regional level in Unite and reflections on the dispute by the union's General Secretary. This addresses a research gap in terms of analytical case studies of strike in recent years and in particular studies that focus on the organisation of the strikes in the UK context. The research reinforces the theoretical association between trade union membership/density and strikes, and the relationship between strikes and union membership growth. The account of the social process involved in the movement towards the strike and the strike demands confirms Kelly's (1998) mobilisation theory and the critical role of the small group of leaders involved in mobilising cabin crew to strike using social media and other communication methods. The findings show that social media and in particular the "Solidarity" Facebook page were key to the mobilisation process in this dispute. As well as exploring mobilisation, the findings also highlight the importance of alternative forms of collective action that take place alongside the more traditional strike, for example protests, campaigning and demonstrations. Strike organisation was also discussed including the tactic of discontinuous action, and instead of picket lines effective protests at designated areas at Heathrow Airport. Crucial in the overall success of the strike was the ability of Unite to provide financial support with enhanced strike pay and this is a key finding in terms of trade unions organising effective industrial action. Regarding the legal context, another key finding was the effect the 2016 Trade Union Act has had on strikes in legitimising further action, providing the union with the ability to broaden their strike demands, and crucially resulting in increased mobilisation to meet the new ballot thresholds. After discussing the limitations of the research regarding the sample size of participants and gaining a deeper understanding of membership perceptions through a questionnaire the chapter ended with recommendation for future research in the field of study. With the increase in strike activity throughout 2022 and 2023 signalling new

developments in industrial relations in the UK, themes emerging from this case study can be built upon to further our understanding of the changing context of workplace conflict and strikes.

Bibliography

Primary Sources

Allday, R. (2017a), 'Red sky thinking: BA strikes and their lessons for today', Counterfire, July 11, 2017, <http://www.counterfire.org/articles/opinion/19086-red-sky-thinking-ba-strikes-and-their-lessons-for-today>

Allday, R. (2017b), 'British Airways strike action: The fight goes on, Counterfire, August 1 2017, <http://www.counterfire.org/news/19137-british-airways-strike-action-the-fight-goes-on>

Allday, R. (2017c), 'BA mixed fleet: The strike continues', Counterfire, August 12, 2017, <http://www.counterfire.org/news/19156-ba-mixed-fleet-the-fight-continues>

Allday, R. (2017d), 'Strikes trim BA's wings', Counterfire, November 2nd, 2017, <http://www.counterfire.org/news/19290-strikes-trim-ba-s-wings>

BBC News, (2005), 'BA's Long History of Staff Disputes', 12 August 2005, [BBC NEWS | Business | BA's long history of staff disputes](#)

BBC News, (2014), 'British Airways cabin crew 'ready to strike' over pay claim', BBC News, 22 June 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jun/22/british-airways-strike-action-threat-pay-claim-ba>

BBC News (2016), 'BA owner IAG reports big rise in profit', BBC News, 26 February 2016, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-35662763>

BBC News (2017), 'British Airways cabin crew suspend four-day strike', 10 June 2017, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-40233324>

British Airways (2017a), 'Explore our past: Celebrating 100 years of flying with pride', <https://www.britishairways.com/engb/about-ba/history-and-heritage/explore-our-past>

British Airways (2017b), 'British Airways Plc: Annual Report and Accounts Year Ending 31 December 2017'

Calder, S. (2016), BA cabin crew strike: 40, 000 journeys in jeopardy, The Independent, London, Independent Digital News and Media, December 6, 2016

Calder, S. (2017a), 'British Airways Strike: What it's about, and the possible effects', The Independent, 4th January 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-airways-strike-cabin-crew-unite-flights-a7508561.html>

Calder, S. (2017b), 'British Airways Strike: Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell backs latest cabin crew walkout', The Independent, 19 January 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-airways-cabin-crew-strike-john-mcdonnell-shadow-chancellor-unite-flights-cancelled-a7534811.html>

Calder, S. (2017b), 'British Airways Strike: Shadow Chancellor John McDonnell backs latest cabin crew walkout', The Independent, 19 January 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-airways-cabin-crew-strike-john-mcdonnell-shadow-chancellor-unite-flights-cancelled-a7534811.html>

Calder, S. (2017c), 'BA strike: Is the airline's brand beginning to nosedive', The Independent, 16 June 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-airways-cabin-crew-dispute-unite-union-crisis-a7794146.html>

Calder, S. (2017d), 'British Airways Strike: Everything you need to know 1 July cabin crew walkout', The Independent, 27 June 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-airways-strike-cabin-crew-1-july-why-dates-what-flights-delay-cancellations-when-times-a7797746.html>

Calder, S. (2017e), 'BA passengers expecting strike delay get luxury upgrade', The Independent, 1 July 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-airways-unite-union-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew-strike-heathrow-qatar-airways-a7817896.html>

Calder, S. (2017f), 'British Airways Strike: 'It's like working for North Korean Airlines' say BA Mixed Fleet cabin crew', The Independent, 5 July 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-airways-strike-cabin-crew-mixed-fleet-unite-heathrow-north-korean-airlines-a7824801.html>

Calder, S. (2017g), 'British Airways to pay strikers' bonuses to cabin crew who are working normally', The Independent, 8 July 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/british-airways-cabin-crew-unite-the-union-strike-mixed-fleet-a7830216.html>

Calder, S. (2017h), 'BA Strikes: Talks likely to begin after two months of cabin crew protests', The Independent, 30 August 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/ba-strikes-latest-delays-flights-cabin-crew-talks-to-begin-a7921026.html>

Calder, S. (2017i), 'BA cabin crew staff accept pay rise after bitter dispute', The Independent, 31 October 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/news-and-advice/ba-british-airway-cabin-crew-staff-pay-rise-dispute-resolved-a8029811.html>

Carter, P. (2017), Solidarity and Workers' Liberty, No. 441, 14 June 2017, page 11

Caswell, M. (2017), 'British Airways applies to wet lease Qatar Airways A320s', Business Traveller, 23 June 2017, <https://www.businesstraveller.com/business-travel/2017/06/23/british-airways-applies-wet-lease-qatar-airways-a320s-strike-period/>

Chaplain, C. (2017), British Airways strike: Almost 50 Heathrow flights expected to be cancelled in cabin crew walkout', Evening Standard, 7 January 2017, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/transport/british-airways-strikes-almost-50-heathrow-flights-expected-to-be-cancelled-in-cabin-crew-walkout-a3435131.html>

Darlington, R. (2017), 'The BA cabin crew dispute: Why Academics 'Take Sides'', The Institute of Employment Rights, 24 March 2017, <http://www.ier.org.uk/blog/ba-cabin-crew-dispute-why-academics-'take-sides>

Fleming, P. (2017), 'BA's failures fly in the face of 'customer as king'. This is the new normal.', The Guardian, 30 May 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/may/30/ba-failures-customer-heathrow-gatwick-shareholders>

Gall, G. (2022), The Government has quietly stopped sharing strike data: how convenient, Novara Media, 15 August 2022, <https://novaramedia.com/2022/08/15/the-government-has-quietly-stopped-sharing-strike-data>

The Guardian (2017a), 'To fly-to starve-BA cabin crew deserve better', Letters, The Guardian, 13 March 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/mar/13/to-fly-to-starve-ba-cabin-crew-deserve-better>

The Guardian (2017b), 'British Airways cabin crew to stage fresh strikes in pay dispute', Press Association, The Guardian, 5 July 2017,

https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jul/05/british-airways-cabin-crew-stage-fresh-strikes-pay-dispute?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other

Hansen, K., (2022), '2022: The Year Trade Unions Came Back', Tribune, 31/12/2022, <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/12/strikes-industrial-action-labour-movement-2022/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%20trade%20unions%20responded%20to%20the%20cost,representatives%20on%209%20December%202022%20in%20London%2C%20England>

Harvey, G. and Turnbull, P. (2017), 'Why British Airways cabin crew are striking', The Conversation, January 9, 2017, <https://theconversation.com/why-british-airways-cabin-crew-are-striking-70950>

Jones, A. (2017), 'British Airways Strike: Cabin crew declare new 48-hour walkout after rejecting pay offer', The Independent, 3 January 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/british-airways-strike-cabin-crew-new-48-hour-walkout-pay-offer-a7507796.html>

Kavanagh, P. (2017), Striking BA crews stand united against poverty pay, Morning Star, July 28, 2017, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-c422-striking-ba-air-crews-stand-united-against-poverty-pay-1>

Milmo, D. and Curtis, P. (2010), 'Gordon Brown intervenes in BA strike', The Guardian, Sunday 14 March 2010, [Gordon Brown intervenes in BA strike | British Airways | The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/business/2010/mar/14/gordon-brown-intervenes-in-ba-strike)

Mitchell, R. (2017), 'British Airways cabin crew strike at Heathrow Airport', World Socialist website, 9 February 2017, <https://www.wsws.org/en/articles/2017/02/09/cabi-f09.html>

Monaghan, A. (2017), 'British Airways cabin crew extend strike for further two weeks', The Guardian, 3 August 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/aug/03/british-airways-cabin-crew-extend-strike-further-two-weeks>

Morning Star (2016), 'Poorly paid BA cabin crew 'forced to sleep in cars'', 11 November 2016, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-c7a1-poorly-paid-ba-cabin-crew-forced-to-sleep-in-cars-1>

Morning Star (2017), 'British Airways Strikers stop 100 flights', January 11th2017, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-7722-british-airways-strikers-stop-100-flights-1>

Nias, S. (2015), 'Smurfit Kappa facing second strike at Northampton facility', Printweek, Monday, April 13 2015, [Smurfit Kappa facing second strike at Northampton facility | Printweek](#)

Noble, S. (2015), 'Smurfit Kappa strike on hold: Four day strike at Northampton packaging firm suspended', Unite Live, Thursday April 16th 2015, [Smurfit Kappa strike on hold - UNITElive.org](#)

Professional Pilots Rumour Network (2022), (<https://www.pprune.org/cabincrew/438061-how-ba-mixed-fleet-you-enjoying-8.htm>)

Raymie K. and Sewell, D. (2017), 'BA walkout is a flying success', Socialist Worker, No. 2536, 11-17 January, page 18-20)

Reuters (2017a), 'British Airways and Unite union to seek end to pay dispute', Reuters, 15 March 2017, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-britain-strikes-british-airways/british-airways-and-unite-union-to-seek-end-to-pay-dispute-acas-idUKKBN16M2LZ>

Reuters, (2017b), 'British Airways will use Qatar planes during cabin crew's strike – IAG Willie Walsh', Reuters, June 29, 2017, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-iag-britishairways->

strike/british-airways-will-use-qatar-planes-during-cabin-crew-strike-iags-walsh-idUKKBN19K2FK

Reuters (2017c), 'British Airways cabin crew begin two-week strike in pay dispute', Reuters, July 1, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-iag-britishairways-strike/british-airways-cabin-crew-begin-two-week-strike-in-pay-dispute-idUSKBN19L2ZS>

Rodionova, Z. (2016), 'British Airways cabin crew to strike over pay dispute', The Independent (online), London, Independent Digital News and Media, December 14, 2016

Ross, A. (2017), 'British Airways tries to break strike by threatening to cut staff perks', The Guardian, 15 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/feb/15/british-airways-tries-to-break-strike-by-threatening-to-cut-staff-perks>

Sewell, D. and Harper, T, (2017), 'BA strikers hold mass airport pickets', Socialist Worker, No 2545, 15-21 March 2017, page 16

Sewell, D. (2017a), 'British Airways walkout off to a flying start', Socialist Worker, 10th January, 2017

Sewell, D. (2017b), 'High flying strikers take on low-down bosses at BA', Socialist Worker, Tuesday 24th January 2017, p.17

Sewell, D. (2017c) 'BA cabin crew chart course to victory with six days of strikes', Socialist Worker, No. 2540, 8-14 February, page 8

Sewell, D. (2017d), John McDonnell vows support for BA strikers rallying outside Parliament', Socialist Worker, 12 July 2017,

<https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/44979/John+McDonnell+vows+support+for+BA+strikers+rallying+outside+parliament>

Sewell, D. (2017e) Socialist Worker, 'Cabin crew stand up to bullying British Airways', No 2561, 5-11 July, page 19-20

Sewell, D. (2017f) 'Unite needs to stop BA's strike-breaking operation', Socialist Worker, No2562, 12-18 July, page 19

Sewell, D. (2017g), 'Bosses bully strikers by giving their pay to those who don't take action',

Sewell, D. (2017h) 'BA cabin crew will not be conned by brutish bosses', Socialist Worker, page 19, No 2565, 2-8 August 2017)

Sewell, (2017i) 'BA cabin crew protest outside Heathrow HQ', page 18, Socialist Worker, No 2568, 23-29 August 2017).

Sewell, D. (2017j), 'British Airways dispute takes off with two-week strike', Socialist Worker, 27 June 2017

Short, G., (2017a) 'Cabin crew strike again', Solidarity and Workers Liberty, No 427, 18th January 2017, page 11

Short, G. (2017b) 'British Airways workers win pay rise', Solidarity and Workers' Liberty, Issue No. 453, 8 November 2017, page 11

Singh, T., (2022), 2022 saw historic strikes in the UK: 2023 will see them escalate, Peoples Dispatch, peoplesdispatch.org

Smith, S. (2016), 'British Airways 'to deliver full Christmas service despite strikes'', Evening Standard, 19 December 2016, <https://www.standard.co.uk/news/uk/british-airways-to-deliver-full-christmas-service-despite-strikes-a3424041.html>

Socialist Worker (2017a), 'BA crew call fresh strikes', No 2543, 1-7 March, page 18

Socialist Worker, (2017b) No 2552, 3-9 May 2017, 'Don't let BA bosses ground dispute with 'insulting' deal, page 19

Socialist Worker, (2017c) 'Escalation can break impasse in BA battle', page 18, No 2569, 30 August – 5 September 2017)

Statista (2021), 'Proportion of employees whose pay and conditions were agreed in negotiations between the employer and a trade union in the United Kingdom from 1996 to 2019, by sector, <https://www.statista.com/statistics28729/uk-collective-agreement-coverage>

Stewart, H., Adams, R. and Walker, P., (2023), 'Ministers and unions dig in amid widespread strike action across the UK, The Guardian, Wednesday 1 February, 2023

Stone, W. (2017a), 'Underpaid cabin crew launch strike', The Morning Star, January 10th 2017, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-964e-underpaid-cabin-crew-launch-strike-1>

Stone (2017b), 'MPs 'should debate cabin crew's treatment by BA', The Morning Star, February 2nd 2017, <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/a-277e-mps-should-debate-cabin-crews-treatment-by-ba-1>

Tengely – Evans, T. (2017), 'Striking workers protest against bosses in London as pay fight heats up', Socialist Worker, 3 August 2017,

<https://socialistworker.co.uk/art/45092/Striking+workers+protest+against+bosses+in+London+as+pay+fight+heats+up>

Topham, G. (2012), 'New BA recruits in union push for better pay: Hundreds of BA staff join Unite amid concerns over pay and conditions, rotas and effects of erratic workloads', The Guardian, Thursday 15th November 2012

Topham, G. (2014), 'British Airways Cabin Crew 'Ready to Strike' over pay claim', The Guardian, 22 June 2014, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2014/jun/22/british-airways-strike-action-threat-pay-claim-ba>

Topham, G. (2017a), 'British Airways cabin crew to go on strike next week in pay dispute', The Guardian, 03 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jan/03/british-airways-cabin-crew-to-go-on-strike-next-week-in-pay-dispute>

Topham, G. (2017b), 'British Airways cabin crew to hold four-day strike over pay dispute', The Guardian, 2 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jun/02/ba-shutdown-caused-by-contractor-who-switched-off-power-reports-claim>

Topham, G. (2017c), 'BA cabin crew call two-week strike in July over pay dispute' The Guardian, 16 June 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/jun/16/ba-cabin-crew-call-two-week-strike-in-july-over-pay-dispute>

Topham, G. (2017d), 'British Airways cabin crew strikers prepare for the long haul', The Observer, 15th July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jul/15/british-airways-cabin-crew-strikers-prepared-for-long-haul>

Unite (2016a), 'British Airways cabin crew in strike vote over poverty pay levels', 11 November 2016, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/?page=91>

Unite (2016b), 'British Airways 'bargain bucket' pay rates could lead to staff shortages warns Unite', 25 November 2016, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-bargain-bucket-pay-rates-could-lead-to-staff-shortages-warns-unite/>

Unite (2016c), 'British Airways cabin crew set to strike over poverty pay levels and broken promises', 14 December 2016, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-cabin-crew-set-to-strike-over-poverty-pay-levels-and-broken-promises/>

Unite (2016d), 'Unite warns British Airways against misleading statements on pay', 19 December 2016, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/unite-warns-british-airways-against-misleading-statements-on-pay/>

Unite (2016e), 'Unite: Cabin crew agree to suspend British Airways Christmas strike', 22 December 2016, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/unite-cabin-crew-agree-to-suspend-british-airways-christmas-strike/>

Unite (2017a), 'British Airways cabin crew announce new strike dates as airline refuses talks', 03 January 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-cabin-crew-announce-new-strike-dates-as-airline-refuses-talks/>

Unite (2017b), 'Unite reveals membership surge ahead of British Airways 'mixed fleet' 48-hour strike', Unite the Union, 9 January 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/unite-reveals-membership-surge-ahead-of-british-airways-mixed-fleet-48-hour-strike/>

Unite (2017c), 'Striking 'mixed fleet' cabin crew call on M&S to demand British Airways ends poverty pay', Unite the Union, 10 January 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/striking-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew-call-on-ms-to-demand-british-airways-ends-poverty-pay/>

Unite (2017d), 'Unite hails 'fantastic support as British Airways cancels flights', Unite the Union, 11 January 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/unite-hails-fantastic-support-as-british-airways-cancels-flights/>

Unite (2017e), 'British Airways' 'mixed fleet' cabin crew announce second wave of strike action', Unite the Union, 12 January 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew-announce-second-wave-of-strike-action/>

Unite (2017f), 'Strong support for British Airways cabin crew in strike against poverty pay', Unite the Union, 19 January 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/strong-support-for-british-airways-cabin-crew-in-strike-against-poverty-pay/>

Unite (2017g), 'British Airways facing six days of strike action by cabin crew', 27 January 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-facing-six-days-of-strike-action-by-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew/>

Unite (2017h), 'British Airways mixed fleet cabin crew get set for six days of strikes over poverty pay', Unite the Union, 03 February 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew-get-set-for-six-days-of-strikes-over-poverty-pay/>

Unite (2017i), 'Striking British Airways cabin crew take poverty pay battle to Parliament', Unite the Union, 06 February 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/striking-british-airways-cabin-crew-take-poverty-pay-battle-to-parliament/>

Unite (2017j), 'British Airways urged to settle poverty pay dispute or face four more days of strikes', Unite the Union, 10 February 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-urged-to-settle-poverty-pay-dispute-or-face-four-more-days-of-strikes/>

Unite (2017k), 'British Airways mixed fleet pile on the pressure over poverty pay with more strike days', Unite the Union, 14 February 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-mixed-fleet/>

Unite (2017l), 'British Airways mixed fleet cabin crew announces further wave of strikes as profits rise', Unite the Union, 24 February 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew-announce-further-wave-of-strikes-as-profits-rise/>

Unite (2017m), 'Striking cabin crew to take low pay battle to British Airways Brighton Landmark', Unite the Union, 03 March 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/striking-cabin-crew-to-take-low-pay-battle-to-british-airways-brighton-landmark/>

Unite (2017n), 'British Airways' punishment policy prompts cabin crew to call more strikes', Unite the Union, 02 June 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-punishment-policy-prompts-cabin-crew-to-call-more-strikes/>

Unite (2017o), 'Unite questions British Airways' desire to resolve mixed fleet cabin crew dispute', Unite the union, 14 June 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/unite-questions-british-airways-desire-to-resolve-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew-dispute/>

Unite (2017p), 'BA mixed fleet cabin crew announce two week strike amid blacklisting accusations', Unite the Union, 16 June 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/ba-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew-announce-two-week-strike-amid-blacklisting-accusations/>

Unite (2017q), 'Aviation authority urged to block British Airways leasing Qatari aircraft to cover strike', Unite the Union, 23 June 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/aviation-authority-urged-to-block-british-airways-leasing-qatari-aircraft-to-cover-strike/>

Unite (2017r), 'Striking cabin crew in Qatar HQ protest as Unite launches 'wet lease' legal action, Unite the Union, 4 July 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/striking-cabin-crew-in-qatar-hq-protest/>

Unite (2017s), 'British Airways cabin crew announce 14 more days of strikes', Unite the Union, 05 July 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-cabin-crew-announce-14-more-days-of-strikes/>

Unite (2017t), 'Striking British Airways cabin crew get MPs backing', Unite the Union, 11 July 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/striking-british-airways-cabin-crew-get-mps-backing/>

Unite (2017u), 'British Airways cabin crew extend strike action by a further two weeks', Unite the Union, 19 July 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-cabin-crew-extend-strike-action-by-a-further-two-weeks/>

Unite (2017v), 'Colossal profits confirm BA can easily afford to end obscenity of cabin crew poverty', Unite the Union, 28 July 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/colossal-profits-confirm-ba-can-easily-afford-to-end-obscenity-of-cabin-crew-poverty2/>

Unite (2017w), 'Unite calls on British Airways to hammer out a deal to avoid more strikes', Unite the Union, 03 August 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/unite-calls-on-british-airways-to-hammer-out-a-deal-to-avoid-more-august-strikes/>

Unite (2017x), 'Unite chief calls on British Airways to use 'pause for peace' to resolve cabin crew dispute', Unite the Union, 22 August 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/unite-chief-calls-on-british-airways-to-use-pause-for-peace-to-resolve-cabin-crew-dispute/>

Unite (2107y), 'British Airways mixed fleet cabin crew overwhelmingly back pay deal and end long running dispute', Unite the Union, 31 October 2017, <http://www.unitetheunion.org/news/british-airways-mixed-fleet-cabin-crew-overwhelmingly-back-pay-deal-and-end-long-running-dispute/>

Qureshi, W. (2015), Four day strike at Smurfit Kappa Northampton site suspended, www.packagingnews.co.uk/news/materials/corrugated/smurfit-kappa-northampton/15-04-2015

Secondary sources

Achur, J. (2011), Trade Union Membership 2010, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, [Trade Union Membership 2010 \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](http://publishing.service.gov.uk)

Ackroyd, S. and Karlson, J.C., (2014); 'Critical Realism, Research Techniques, and Research Designs' in P. Edwards, J. O'Mahoney, & S. Vincent (Eds.) (2014), *Studying Organisations Using Critical Realism: A Practical Guide*, Oxford University Press

Allen, V.L. (1964), 'Trade Unions in Contemporary Capitalism', *The Socialist Register*

- Allen, V.L., (2009), 'The Year Long Miners' Strike: March 1984-March 1985', a memoir' *Industrial Relations Journal*, 40:4, 278-291
- Allen, V.L., (2009), 'The Year Long Miners' Strike: March 1984-March 1985', a memoir' *Industrial Relations Journal*, 40:4, 278-291
- Arrowsmith, J. (2010), *Industrial Relations in the Private Sector*, in T. Colling and M. Terry (eds), *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice*, Wiley and Son
- Atzeni, M. (2009), 'Searching for injustice and finding solidarity? A contribution to the mobilisation theory debate', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 40: 1, 5-16
- Atzeni, M. (2010), *Workplace Conflict: Mobilization and Solidarity in Argentina*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Bamber, G.J., Hoffer Gittel, J Kochan, T.A. and von Nordenflycht, A. (2009), *Up in the Air*, Cornell University
- Batstone, E., Boraston, I. and Frenkel, S. (1977), *Shop Stewards in Action: The Organisation of Workplace Conflict and Accommodation*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford
- Batstone, E., Boraston, I. and Frenkel, S. (1978), *The Social Organisation of Strikes*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford
- Bélanger, J. and Edwards, P. (2013), 'Conflict and Contestation in the Contemporary World of Work: Theory and Perspectives', in Gall. G. (ed), *New Forms and Expressions of Conflict at Work*, Palgrave, Macmillan, London

- Bell, J. (2010), *Doing Your Research Project-A guide for first time researchers in education, health and social science*, 5th Edition, Open University Press, Maidenhead.
- Benford, R.D. and Snow, D.A. (2000), *Framing Processes and Social Movements: An Overview and Assessment*, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 26:611-29
- Bennett, J. (2000), 'The Origins of British Labour Statistics', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, (Spring 2000), pp. 17-23
- Beynon, H. (1984), *Working for Ford: Second Edition*, Penguin Books
- Blyton, P. and Turnbull, P. (1996), 'Confusing Convergence: Industrial Relations in the European Airline Industry – A Comment on Warhurst', in *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 7-20
- Blyton, P. and Turnbull, P. (2004), *The Dynamics of Employee Relations: 3rd Edition*
- Blyton, P. and Jenkins, J. (2013), 'Mobilizing Protest: Insights from Two Factory Closures', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 51: 4 December 2013, pp. 733-753
- Blyton, P. Martinez Lucio, M., McGurk J. and Turnbull, P. (2003), *Contesting Globalisation: Airline Restructuring, Labour Flexibility and Trade Union Strategies*, 2nd Edition, International Transport Workers Federation
- Blyton, P. Martinez Lucio, M., McGurk J. and Turnbull, P. (2001), 'Globalisation and trade union strategy: industrial restructuring and human resource management in the international civil aviation industry', *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 12: 3, May 2001, 445-463

- Blyton, P. and Jenkins, J. (2013), Mobilizing Protest: Insights from Two Factory Closures, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 51:4 December 2013, pp. 733–753
- Boyd, C. (2001), 'HRM in the Airline Industry: strategies and outcomes', *Personnel Review*, Vol. 30, Issue 4, pp. 438-453
- Braverman, H. (1998), *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, Monthly Review Press, New York
- Brown, W. (1981), *The Changing Contours of British Industrial Relations*, Blackwell, Oxford
- Brown-Johnson, N. and Jarley, P. (2004), 'Justice and Union Participation: An Extension and Test of Mobilization Theory', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 42: 3, September 2004, pp. 543-562
- Buttigieg, D.M., Deery, S.J., and Iverson, R.D. (2008), Union Mobilization: A Consideration of the Factors Affecting the Willingness of Union Members to Take Industrial Action', *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 46: 2, June 2008, pp. 248-267
- Burchill, F. (1989), *Pendulum Arbitration*, Institute of Supervisory Management Members Occasional Papers, ISM, Lichfield
- Burchill, F. (2008), *Labour Relations: 3rd Edition*, Palgrave Macmillan
- Clegg, H. (1979), *The Changing System of Industrial Relations in Great Britain*, Blackwell, Oxford
- Coates, K. and Topham, T. (1988), *Trade Unions in Britain*, 3rd Edition, Fontana, London

- Colling, T. (1995), 'Experiencing Turbulence: Competition, Strategic Choice and the Management of Human Resources in British Airways', *Human Resource Management Journal*, Vol. 5, No.5 pp. 18-32
- Cronin, J.E. (1979), *Industrial Conflict in Modern Britain*, Croom Helm
- Darlington, R. (2001), 'Union militancy and left-wing leadership on London Underground', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 32:1, 2, pp. 2-21
- Darlington, R. (2002), 'Shop stewards leadership, left wing activism and collective workplace union organisation', *Capital and Class*, Vol. 76, 2002, pp. 95-126
- Darlington, R. (2005), 'Workplace Militancy on Merseyside since the 1960s: Extent, Causes and Decline', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 19, Spring 2005, pp.123-52
- Darlington, R. (2009), 'Leadership and Union Militancy: The case of the RMT', *Capital and Class*, Vol. 99, 2009, pp. 3-32
- Davies, S. (2012), 'Crises? What Crises?: The National Rail Strike of 1911 and the State Response', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 33, pp. 97-125
- Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (2017), *Trade Union Membership 2016: Statistical Bulletin*
- Dickens, L. and Hall, M. (2010), *The Changing Legal Framework of Industrial Relations*, in Colling, T. and Terry, M. (eds), *Industrial Relations Theory and Practice*
- Dix, G, Forth, J. and Sisson, K. (2008), *Conflict at Work: The Pattern of Disputes in Britain since 1980*, Acas Publication

Dorey, P. (2013), 'It Was Just Like Arming to Face Hitler in the Late 1930s': The Ridley Report and the Conservative Party's Preparations for the 1984-85 Miners' Strike, *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 34, pp. 173-214

Duffy, B. (2010), 'The Analysis of Documentary Evidence', in J. Bell (2014), *Doing Your Research Project-A guide for first time researchers in education, health and social science*, 5th Edition, Open University Press, Maidenhead.

Dukes, R. and Kountouris, N. (2016), 'Pre-strike Ballots, Picketing and Protest: Banning Industrial Action by the Back Door', *Industrial Law Journal*, Vol. 45, No. 3

Durcan, J.W., McCarthy, W.E.J., and Redman, G.P. (1983), *Strikes in Post War Britain: A Study of stoppages of work due to industrial disputes, 1946*, George Allen and Unwin

Edwards, P. K. (1977), 'A Critique of the Kerr-Siegal Hypothesis of Strikes and the Isolated Mass: A Study of the Falsification of Sociological Knowledge, *The Sociological Review*, Vol 25 (3), pp.551-574

Edwards P. (1983), 'The pattern of collective action' in Bain G. (ed.) (1983), *Industrial Relations in Britain*, Blackwell, Oxford

Edwards, P. (1995), 'Strikes and Industrial Conflict', in P. Edwards (ed.), *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice* 2nd Edition, Blackwell

Edwards, P. (2003), 'The Employment Relationship and the Field of Industrial Relations', in P. Edwards (ed.) *Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice* (Second Edition)

Edwards, P., (2006), *Industrial Relations and Critical Realism: IR's Tacit Contribution*, *Warwick Paper's in Industrial Relations*, No. 80

- Edwards, P. Vincent, S., O'Mahoney, J., (2014), 'Concluding Comments', in in P. Edwards, J. O'Mahoney, & S. Vincent (Eds.) (2014), *Studying Organisations Using Critical Realism: A Practical Guide*, Oxford University Press
- Edwards, P.K. and Scullion, H. (1982), *The Social Organisation of Conflict, Control and Resistance in the Workplace*, Basil Blackwell, London
- Eldridge, J.E.T (1968), *Industrial Disputes: Essays in the Sociology of Industrial Disputes*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London & Humanities Press, New York
- Evans, S. (1985), *The Use of Injunctions in Industrial Disputes*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. XXIII, No 1
- Ewing, K.D., (2011), *Fighting back: Resisting 'union busting', and 'strike breaking' in the BA dispute*, The Institute of Employment Rights, The Russell Press
- Fairbrother, P. (2005), Review of Gall (2003), *Union Organizing: Campaigning for Trade Union Recognition*, London, Routledge, *Capital and Class*, 87: 257-263
- Fantasia, R. (1988), *Cultures Of Solidarity: Consciousness, Action and Contemporary American Workers*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London
- Flanders, A. (1965), *Industrial – What is wrong with the system*, Faber, London
- Flyvbjerg, B., (2006), 'Five Misunderstandings About Case Study Research', *Qualitative Enquiry*, Vol.12, Number 2, pp. 219-245
- Foner, P. S. (1977), *The Great Labour Uprising of 1877*, Pathfinder
- Fox, A. (1966), *Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations*, Donovan Commission, Research Paper, No.3, HMSO, London

- Fox, A. (1974), 'The Myths of Pluralism and a Radical Alternative', in Trade Unions under Capitalism' T. Clarke and L. Clements (eds), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge
- French, S. and Hodder, A. (2016), 'Plus cá Change: The Coalition Government and Trade Unions' in Employment Relations under Coalition Government, Edited by Steve Williams and Peter Scott, Routledge
- Gall, G. (1999), 'What is to be done with organised labour', Historical Materialism, 5: pp.327-344
- Gall, G. (2000), 'Debating Mobilisation, Class Struggle and the Left: A Response to a Reply, Historical Materialism, 7 (1): pp. 175-180
- Gall, G. (2006), 'Injunctions as a legal weapon in industrial disputes in Britain, 1995-2005', British Journal of Industrial Relations, Vol.44, No.2, pp.327-349, June 2006
- Gall, G. (2011), 'Worker Resistance and response to the crises of neo-liberal capitalism', Employee Relations, Vol.33 Issue 6, pp. 588-591
- Gall, G. (2016), 'Why has Britain stopped striking? Workers no longer feel empowered to act', The Guardian, 04 August 2016
- Gallas, A. (2018), 'The Politics of Striking: On the Shifting Dynamics of Workers' Struggles in Britain', in Workers' Movements And Strikes In The Twentieth Century: A Global Perspective, Edited by Jorg Nowax, Madhumita and Peter Birke, Rowman and Littlefield, London, New York
- Gennard, J. (2009), Voluntary Arbitration: The Unsung Hero, Industrial Relations Journal, 40 (4)

Gerring, J. (2004), 'What is a Case Study and What is it Good For?', *American Political Science Review*, 98 (2), pp.341-54

Gerring, J. (2007), *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

Gittell, J. H. and Bamber, G. J. (2010), 'High-and low-road strategies for competing on costs and their implications for employment relations: international studies in the airline industry', *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, Vol. 21, No.2, February 2010, pp.165-179

Godard, J. (2011), 'What has happened to strikes?' *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 49 (2), pp.282-305

Goodrich, C. (1920), *The Frontier of Control*, Pluto Press, London

Goodman, J. (2000), 'Building Bridges and Settling Differences: Collective Conciliation and Arbitration under ACAS', In Towers, B. and Brown, W. (Eds), *Employment Relations in Britain: 25 years of ACAS*, Blackwell, Oxford

Gordon, A. (2012), '1911: The First National Railway Strike and the Rail Union Amalgamation Movement', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 33, pp. 127-47

Gouldner, A. W. (1954), *Wildcat Strike: A Study In Worker-Management Relationships*, Harper and Row, New York, Evanston, London

Griffin, J.I. (1939), *Strikes: A Study in Quantitative Economics*, Columbia University Press, London, New York

- Grugulis, I., Wilkinson, A. and Kellner, A. (2013), 'Managing Culture at British Airways', in Contemporary Human Resource Management: Texts and Cases, pp.313-318, T. Redman and A. Wilkinson (eds), Pearson
- Hartley, J., Kelly, J. and Nicholson, N. (1983), Steel Strike: A Case Study in Industrial Relations, Batsford Academic and Educational Ltd
- Harvey, G. (2009), 'Employment relations in liberal market airlines', Employee Relations, Vol. 31, No.2, pp. 168-181
- Harvey, G. and Turnbull, P. (2004), 'Employment Relations, Management Style, and Flight Crew Attitudes at Low Cost Subsidiaries: The Case of British Airways/Go and bmi/bmibaby', European Management Journal Vol. 24, No. 5, pp. 330-337,
- Harvey, G. and Turnbull, P. (2010), 'On the Go: walking the high road at a low cost airline', The International Journal Of Human Resource Management, Vol 21, No. 2 February 2010, 230-41
- Harvey, G. and Turnbull, P. (2014a) 'Contesting The Financial Crises: Aviation Industrial Relations and Trade Union Strategies After The Financial Crises', International Transport Workers Federation
- Harvey, G. and Turnbull, P. (2014b), 'Evolution Of the Labour Market in the Airline Industry due to the development of Low Fares Airlines (LFAs)', European Transport Workers Federation
- Hiller, E.T. (1928), The Strike: A Study In Collective Action, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois
- Howell, D. (2005), Trade Unions And The State: The Construction Of Industrial Relations In Britain 1890-2000, Princeton University Press

- Hyman, R. (1975), *Industrial Relations: A Marxist Introduction*, Macmillan, London
- Hyman, R. (1989), *Strikes: Fourth Edition*, Macmillan Press
- Hyman, R. (2001), Trade Union Research and cross-national comparison, *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, 7 (2), pp.203-332
- Jarvis, P. (2014), *British Airways: An Illustrated History*, Amberly Publishing
- Kamenka, E. (1983) *The Portable Karl Marx*, Penguin Books
- Karsh, B. (1982), *Diary Of A Strike: Second Edition*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Chicago, London
- Kelly, J. (1998), *Rethinking Industrial Relations: Mobilization, Collectivism and Long Waves*, Routledge, London and New York
- Kelly, J. (2000), 'Mobilisation and Class Struggle', *Historical Materialism*, pp. 167-173
- Kelly, J. (2015), 'Conflict: Trends and forms of collective action', *Employee Relations*, Vol. 37, No.6, 2016, *Employee Relations*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2015
- Kerr, C. and Siegel, A. (1954), 'The Inter-Industry Propensity to Strike', in *Industrial Conflict*, Eds. A. Kornhauser, R. Dubin and A. M. Ross, New York, McGraw Hill, 186-212
- Kerr, A. and Sachdev, S., (1992), *Third among Equals: An Analysis of the 1989 Ambulance Dispute*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 30:1
- Kessler, S. and Bayliss, F. (1998), *Contemporary British Industrial Relations*, 3rd Edition, Macmillan Press Ltd, London
- Kitay, J. Callus, J. (1998), The Role and Challenge of Case Study Design, in *Researching the World of Work*, K. Whitfield and G. Strauss (eds), Cornell University Press

Knowles, K. (1952), *Strikes: A Study in Industrial Conflict*, Oxford, Blackwell

Labour Research Department, (2018), *Law at Work: The Trade Union Guide to Employment Law*,

Lane, T. and Roberts, K. (1971), *Strike at Pilkingtons*, Collins/Fontana

Lang, K., Geppert, M., Saka-Helmhout, A. and Becker-Ritterspach, F. (2015), 'Changing Business Models and Employee Representation in the Airline Industry: A Comparison of British Airways and Duetsche Lufthansa', *British Journal of Management*, Vol 26, pp.388-407

Langley, A., (1999), 'Strategies for Theorising From Process Data', *Academy of Management Review*, Vol.24, No.4, pp.691-710

Langley, A., Smallman, C., Tsoukas, H., and Van de Ven, A.H. (2013), *Process Studies of Change in Organisations and Management: Unveiling Temporality, Activity and Flow*, *Academy of Management Journal*, Vol 56, No.1

Lyddon, D. (1998), 'Rediscovering the past: recent British strike tactics in historical perspective', in *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, No.5, pp.107-151

Lyddon D. (2007), 'From Strike Wave to Strike Drought: Strikes in the United Kingdom, 1968-2005' in S. van der Velden, H. Dribusch, D. Lyddon, & K. Vandeale (eds), *Strikes around the world 1968-2005, Case Studies of 15 countries*, Amsterdam, Aksant Academic Publishers

Lyddon, D. (2009), 'Industrial Conflict under New Labour', in G. Daniels and J. Mcilroy (eds), *Trade Unions in a Neoliberal World*, London, Routledge

Lyddon, D. (2013), *A Historical Perspective on Recent Legal Restrictions on the Right to Strike in the UK*, Employment Policy and Equalities Research Group seminar, Keele University, 2013

Lyddon D. (2015), The Changing Pattern of UK strikes, 1964-2014, *Employee Relations*, Vol. 37, No 6, pp.733-745

Lyddon, D., Cao, X., Meng, Q. and Lu, J. (2015), 'A strike of 'unorganised workers in a Chinese car factory: the Nanhai Honda events of 2010', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 46:2, 134-152

Marx, K. and Engels, F., (1967) *The Communist Manifesto*, Penguin Classics

Marriot, L. (2000), *British Airways: Third Edition*, Ian Allan

McLellan, D. (2000), *Karl Marx selected writings: Second Edition*, Oxford University Press

McIlroy, J. and Daniels, G. (2009), 'An anatomy of British Trade Unionism since 1997: Organisation, Structure and Factionalism', in McIlroy, J. and Daniels, G. (eds.), *Trade Unions in a Neoliberal World*, New York, Routledge

Meredeen, S. (1988), *'Managing Industrial Conflict: Seven Major Disputes*, Hutchinson, London, Melbourne, Auckland, Johannesburg

McGuire, C., (2017), 'Going for the Jugular': The Steelworkers Banner and the 1980 National Steelworkers strike in Britain', *Historical Studies in Industrial Relations*, 38: 97-128

Nichols, T. and Armstrong, P. (1976), *Workers Divided: A Study in shopfloor politics*, Fontana/Colins

Nichol, D., (1992), *Unnecessary Conflict: NHS Management's View of the 1989-90 Ambulance Dispute*, *British Journal of Industrial Relations*, 30:1

Office for National Statistics (2016), *UK Labour Market*, December 2016

Office for National Statistics (2017), *Labour Disputes in 2016: Analysis of UK labour disputes in 2016, including working days lost, stoppages and workers involved*

Office for National Statistics, (2018), Labour Disputes in the UK: 2017: Analysis of UK labour disputes in 2017, including working days lost, stoppages and workers involved

Office for National Statistics (2019), Labour Market Economic Commentary: February 2019

O'Mahoney, J. and Vincent, S. (2014) 'Critical Realism as an Empirical Project: A Beginner's Guide', in P. Edwards, J. O'Mahoney, & S. Vincent (Eds.) (2014), Studying Organisations Using Critical Realism: A Practical Guide, Oxford University Press

Patmore, G. (1998), 'Digging up the past: Historical Methods in Industrial Relations' in K. Whitfield and G. Strauss (eds.) Researching the World of Work: Strategies and Methods in Studying Industrial Relations, New York, Cornell University Press, (pp.219-221).

Prassl, J. (2011), 'To Strike, to serve? Industrial Action at British Airways. British Airways plc v Unite the Union (Nos 1 and 2), Industrial Law Journal, Vol 40. No. 1, March 2011, pp. 82-91

Punch, M. (1998), 'Politics and Ethics in Quantitative Research' in N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (eds.), The Landscape of Qualitative Research: Theories and Issues, Thousand Oaks: Sage, pp. 166-169

Richardson, M., (2003), Leadership and Mobilisation: SOGAT in the 1986-87 News International Dispute, Historical Studies in Industrial Relations, 73-93

Rose, E. (2004), Employment Relations: Second Edition, Pearson Education Limited

Salamon, M. (2000), Industrial Relations: Theory and Practice, 4th Edition, Pearson Education

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2016), Research Methods For Business Students: Seventh Edition, Pearson Education Limited

- Simms, M. and Charlwood, A. (2010), 'Trade Unions: Power and Influence in a Changed Context', in *Industrial Relations Theory and Practice: 3rd Edition*, T. Colling and M. (eds), Wiley, UK
- Seifert, R. and Sibley, T. (2005), *United They Stood: The Story of the UK Firefighter's Dispute 2002-2004*, Lawrence and Wishart, London
- Seifert, R. (2015), 'Big bangs and cold wars: The British industrial relations tradition after Donovan (1965-2015)', *Employee Relations*, Vol.37, Issue 6, pp. 746-760
- Smith C., Clifton R., Makeham P., Creigh S., and Burn R. (1978), *Strikes in Britain: A Research Study of Industrial Stoppages in the United Kingdom*, Manpower Paper no 15, HMSO London
- Smith, P. (2009), 'New Labour and the common sense of neoliberalism: trade unionism, collective bargaining and workers' rights', *Industrial Relations Journal*, 40 (4), pp.337-355
- Strauss, G. and Whitfield, K. (1998), *Research Methods in Industrial Relations*, in *Researching the World of Work*, K. Whitfield and G. Strauss (eds), Cornell University Press
- Taylor, P. and Moore, S. (2015), 'Cabin crew collectivism: labour process and the roots of mobilization', *Work, Employment and Society*, Vol. 29 (1), 79-98
- Taylor, P. and Moore, S. (2019), *Cabin Crew Conflict: The British Airways Dispute 2009-11*, Pluto Press
- Tuckman, A. (2018), 'Kettling The Unions: A Guide To The 2016 Trade Union Act', Spokesman, Nottingham

Turnbull, P., Blyton, P. and Harvey, G. (2004), 'Cleared for Take-off? Management-Labour Partnership in the European Civil Aviation Industry, *European Journal of Industrial Relations*, Vol. 10, Number 3, pp.287-307

Turner, H., Clack, G., and Roberts, G. (1967), *Labour Relations in the Motor Industry*, George Allen and Unwin, London

Undy, R. (2001), *New Labour and New Unionism, 1997-2001: but is it the same old story*, *Employee Relations*, Vol 24. No. 6

Van Der Velden, S. (2007) Introduction. In S. van der Velden, D Dribbusch, D Lyddon and K Vandaele (eds.) *Strikes Around the World, 1968-2005: Case-studies of 15 countries*. Amsterdam University Press.

Waddington, J. (2003), 'Trade Union Organisation', in *Industrial Relations Theory and Practice: Second Edition*, P. Edwards (ed), Blackwell

Wanrooy, B.V., Bewley, H., Bryson, A., Forth, J., Freeth, S., Stokes, L., Wood, S. (2011), *The 2011 Workplace Employment Relations Study*

Wedderburn, K.W., (1986), *The Worker and the Law*, 3rd Edition, Penguin Harmondsworth

Williams, S. and Smith, D. A. (2010), *Contemporary Employment Relations: A critical introduction*, Oxford University Press

Williams S. (2014), *Introducing Employment Relations: A critical approach (Third Edition)* Oxford University Press, UK

Williams, S. and Scott, P. (2016), 'The UK Coalition Government 2010-15: An Overview', in *Employment Relations under Coalition Government*, Edited by Steve Williams and Peter Scott, Routledge

Williams, S., Scott, P., and Welch, R. (2016), 'Employment Relations under Coalition Government: Reflections, Legacy and Prospects', in *Employment Relations under Coalition Government*, Edited by Steve Williams and Peter Scott, Routledge

Yin, R.K. (2018), *Case Study Research and Applications: Design and Methods (Sixth Edition)*, Sage

Appendices

Appendix 1

The legal regulation of Industrial Action: A Chronology 1980-2017

1980 Employment Act (Jim Prior)

- Definition of lawful picketing restricted to own place of work
- Funds offered for union ballots
- Restricted right to take secondary action
- Code of practice (six pickets)

1982 Employment Act (Norman Tebbit)

- Further restrictions on industrial action – e.g. definition of trade dispute
- Further restricted action to 'own' employer
- Employers could obtain injunctions against unions and sue unions for damages

1984 Trade Union Act

- Secret ballots before industrial action

1986 Public Order Act

- Introduced new criminal offences in relation to picketing

1988 Employment Act (Norman Fowler)

- Members can seek injunction if no pre-strike ballot
- Union finances to be open to inspection
- Unions prevented from paying members' or officials' fines
- New restrictions on industrial action and election ballots
- Ballots for separate workplaces
- Election addresses controlled
- Independent scrutiny
- Establishment of CROTUM (Commissioner for Rights of Trade Union Members)

1990 Employment Act

- All secondary action now unlawful
- Unions liable for action induced by ANY official unless written repudiation using statutory form of words sent to all members
- Selective dismissal of strikers taking unofficial action
- Extended power of CROTUM

1992 Trade Union & Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act

- Brings together all collective employment rights including trade union finances and elections; union members' rights including dismissal, time off; redundancy consultation; ACAS, CAC and CROTUM; industrial action legislation
- Does not cover individual rights like unfair dismissal, redundancy pay, maternity etc (these are covered by 1978 EPCA)

1993 Trade Union Reform and Employment Rights Act

- Creation of Commissioner for Protection Against Unlawful Industrial Action
- 7 days' notice of ballots and of industrial action
- Members to be involved in ballot to be identified
- Independent scrutiny of strike ballots
- All industrial action ballots to be postal

1996 Employment Rights Act

- Must be employed one year for unfair dismissal complaint, subject to exceptions such as for taking protected industrial action, exercising health and safety rights, acting as employee representative

1999 Employment Relations Act

- Amendments to Trade Union Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992
- Dismissal for participation in official industrial action deemed unfair within a protected period of 8 weeks
- Ballot and notice provisions for strike or industrial action

2004 Employment Relations Act

- Provisions to increase the protections against the dismissal of employees taking official, lawfully-organised industrial action by extending the “protected period” from 8 to 12 weeks; exempting “lock out” days from the 12 week protected period.
- Procedural steps to resolve industrial disputes and measures to simplify the law on industrial action ballots and ballot notices

2016 Trade Union Act

The principal aims of the Act appear to be to make it extremely difficult or impossible for workers to engage in lawful industrial action, and to starve the trade unions and the labour movement of funds.

The major changes made under the Trade Union Act 2016 are:

- In all industrial action ballots, at least 50% of those entitled to vote must do so and a simple majority must be in favour of action. Therefore, if 100 members are balloted, at least 50 must vote. If 50 vote, at least 26 must vote yes for there to be a valid mandate. If all 100 vote, 51 would need to vote in favour.
- If the majority of those entitled to vote are ‘normally engaged’ in the provision of ‘important public services’ (specified as health, education, transport, border security and fire-fighting services) at least 40% of those entitled to vote must vote in favour of action (in addition to the 50% turnout threshold). Therefore, if 100 members are balloted, a minimum of 50 must vote and at least 40 must vote yes for there to be a valid mandate. A simple majority is still required in all ballots, so if all 100 members had voted, then 51 votes in favour would be required to enable action.

- This 40% threshold is arguably discriminatory: 73% of those likely to be in these 'important public services' will be women and the Act's definition of what counts as an essential service is out of keeping with international legal norms.
The International Labour Organization defines "essential services" as services where "the interruption of which would endanger the life, personal safety or health of the whole or part of the population". It is hard to see how the Central Line not running or a child missing one day of schooling would "endanger life, personal safety or health of the whole or part of the population".
- Unions now must give 14 days' notice of any industrial action (unless the employer agrees that 7 days' notice is enough). The previous requirement was to give 7 days' notice.
- Unions now have to include additional information on ballot papers, including a clearer description of the trade dispute and the planned industrial action, so that workers know exactly what they are voting for.
- Previously, industrial action must have taken place within four to eight weeks of the ballot and action could be taken indefinitely, provided the industrial dispute remains live. This was repealed under the 2016 Act which provides that a ballot mandate expires after six months, or up to nine months if both sides agree.
- For employers in the public sector (and some private sector employers that provide public services), 'check-off' (the deduction of trade union membership subs via payroll) will only be permitted if the worker can pay their subscriptions by other means and the union contributes to the cost of administering the system.
- Some of the current Code of Practice on picketing has been given statutory force e.g. the requirement to appoint a picket supervisor.
- A new process for trade union subscriptions is being introduced that allows new members to make an active choice about whether to pay into political funds. Information on opting out from such contributions will need to be provided on an annual basis. These provisions represent another bid to starve the labour movement of funds. After a transitional period, unions will only be permitted to invite new members to contribute to a union's political fund, and existing members will have to be reminded every year that they can opt out if they wish. Unions which establish political funds after the transitional period will similarly be restricted to inviting members to opt in to the fund.
- Employers in the public sector (and some private sector employers that provide public services) will have to publish information on 'facility time' such as the amount of paid time off for union duties and activities. The Act also allows the government to issue regulations restricting facility time at particular employers.
- The government must commission an independent review of possible methods of electronic balloting, although the Act does not include any commitment to its introduction.
- There are new powers under the 2016 Act for the Certification Officer to investigate and take enforcement action against trade unions for breaches of their statutory duties. Theresa May's Conservative government initiated a consultation exercise in April 2017 with proposals for the Certification Officer, who will be able to issue fines of up to £20,000 for breaking the law including serious breaches of election rules or mismanagement of their political funds.

Source: Institute of Employment Rights

<https://www.ier.org.uk/a-chronology-of-labour-law-1979-2017/>

Appendix 2



INFORMATION SHEET

Study Title: The Mobilization of Industrial Action in British Airways: A Case Study of the 2017 'Mixed Fleet' Strike.

Invitation

You are being invited to consider taking part in the research study, 'The Mobilization of Industrial Action in British Airways: A Case Study of the 2017 'Mixed Fleet' Strike'. This research is being undertaken by Richard Gallagher of Keele University as part of a PhD.

Before you decide whether or not you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read this information carefully and discuss it with friends and relatives if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is unclear or if you would like more information.

Aims of the Research

The aim of the research is to examine the strike by Unite the Union members, in the Mixed Fleet branch at British Airways in 2017.

Why have I been invited?

The research is examining the strike from the perspective of Unite members, activists, workplace representatives and branch officials, as well as Unite Regional and National officials. You have been invited to participate as you fall into one of these categories.

Do I have to take part?

You are free to decide whether you wish to take part or not. If you do decide to take part you will be asked to sign two consent forms, one for you to keep and another for our records. You are free to withdraw from this study at any time and without giving reasons. If you choose to withdraw, any information you have submitted will be destroyed as soon in as practically possible and not used in this study.

What will happen if I take part?

If you consent to taking part, you will be agreeing to an interview that is likely to take no more than 1 hour to complete. You will be provided with a copy of the broad questions for discussion, so you are clear about what will be discussed. If you agree to take part, you will be asked to sign a consent form at the start of the interview. The interview will be recorded. You will have the right to end the interview at any time. The date, time and place of the interview will be arranged to accommodate your availability and will be conducted on local Unite premises or at another suitable location.

However, no expenses can be paid for travel. Every effort will be made to maintain your anonymity with regard to any comments that you make during the interview. This means that when the research is presented your comments will be anonymised in any publication of the research findings.

Important: if you need any reasonable adjustment to be made to enable you to take part please contact the researcher, Richard Gallagher (contact details below).

What are the benefits (if any) of taking part?

There are no direct benefits of taking part. However, if you do consent to taking part, you will be contributing to research which aims to examine the industrial dispute you were involved in from the perspective of the workers, union members, activists and officials who took part.

What are the risks (if any) of taking part?

There are no foreseen risks associated with being interviewed. Likewise, any participation in the research is completely voluntary and there will be no implications arising from any decision not to take part. If you do take part your comments will be anonymised, and you will be asked whether you give consent to whether your statements in the interview may be directly quoted in the post-interview consent form, which you will need to sign. Anonymity will be ensured by the use of generic identifiers, for example union member 1; workplace rep 1, Regional Officer 1 etc. If you should find that you become upset discussing particular issues during the interview, it will be stopped.

How will information about me be used?

The researcher will take notes during the interview and will also record the interview. As indicated above, the information collected will be used as part of a PhD on the Mixed Fleet strike.

Who will have access to information about me?

You should tell the participants how their confidentiality and/or anonymity will be safeguarded during and after the study and who might have access to the study data (eg supervisor or co-researchers).

Who is funding and organising the research?

The research is funded and organised by Keele University

What if there is a problem?

If you have a concern about any aspect of this study, you may wish to speak to the researcher (who will do their best to answer your questions. You should contact Richard Gallagher at r.gallagher@keele.ac.uk. Alternatively, if you do not wish to contact the researcher you may contact his supervisor Dr. Patricia Dawson who's details are below.

Dr Patricia Dawson
Job Title
Keele Management School
Keele University
ST5 5BG
United Kingdom
Tel no.

If you remain unhappy about the research and/or wish to raise a complaint about any aspect of the way that you have been approached or treated during the course of the study please write to Nicola Leighton who is the University's contact for complaints regarding research at the following address:-

Nicola Leighton
Research Governance Officer
Directorate of Engagement and Partnerships
IC2 Building
Keele University

Contact for further information

Normally only Keele telephone numbers and e-mail addresses should be used in all study documentation. If there are reasons to depart from this then these must be explained in your Ethical Review Panel documentation.

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: The Mobilization of Industrial Action in British Airways: A Case Study of the 2017 'Mixed Fleet' Strike.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Richard Gallagher r.gallagher@keele.ac.uk

**Please initial box if you
agree with the statement**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet dated
(version no) for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions ☐
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time ☐
3. I agree to take part in this study. ☐
4. I agree to allow the dataset collected to be used for future research projects* ☐
5. I agree to be contacted about possible participation in future research project* ☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

***please delete as appropriate**

CONSENT FORM (for use of quotes)

Title of Project: The Mobilization of Industrial Action in British Airways: A Case Study of the 2017 'Mixed Fleet' Strike.

Name and contact details of Principal Investigator: Richard Gallagher r.gallagher@keele.ac.uk

Please initial box if you agree with the statement

1. I agree for my quotes to be used

☐

2. I do not agree for my quotes to be used

☐

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Researcher

Date

Signature

Appendix 3

Interview Questions

1. How long have you worked for British Airways?
2. How long have you been a member of Unite?

3. Why did you go on strike?
4. What was your role in the strike?
5. What are your opinions on the use of social media sites such as Facebook during the strike?
6. Do you think the protests during the strike were a good idea?
7. In your opinion, why did so many of your colleagues join Unite during the dispute?
8. Does the law make it more difficult to go on strike?
9. What difference did strike pay from Unite make to you during the dispute?
10. What are your views on the settlement which ended the strike?
11. Do you think the strike was successful?
12. Did going on strike have any effect on you?
13. Did going on strike change your opinion of British Airways?
14. How would you feel about going on strike again?
15. What are employment relations like now in the workplace?
16. Are there any other things you think are important?

