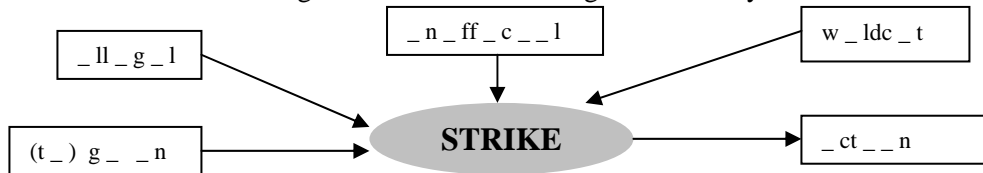


## On strike!

For the third consecutive summer, British Airways has suffered strike action. What is behind the latest dispute?

1 Replace the vowels in the following terms related to striking. Check that you are familiar with all these terms.



2 Match the titles with the paragraphs.

- (a) Refunding customers       (b) Reducing spending       (c) Striking in support       (d) Another holiday period of chaos

## Airport chaos

[1] It has been yet another difficult summer for thousands of passengers at Heathrow airport. Firstly, on 10<sup>th</sup> August, Gate Gourmet sacked around 670 staff after they illegally walked out in protest at the firm's restructuring plans to reduce the workforce. Gate Gourmet supply meals for BA flights. So, British Airways ground staff later walked out in sympathy at what they saw as unfair treatment of staff they viewed as colleagues. The unofficial strike lasted two days, and BA was forced to cancel hundreds of flights and find hotel rooms for stranded passengers. It took a week to clear the backlog.

[2] The strike brought chaos to Britain's busiest airport at a peak time of the year. This is the third summer in succession that BA workers have staged strike action. Last year, staff decided to strike over pay. In 2003, ground staff walked out in protest over a new check-in timekeeping

system. The original dispute at Gate Gourmet is a bitter one. The managers blame what they see as an inflexible workforce; workers blame the management policy of cost reduction, leading to low wages.

[3] Deciding if the cause of a delay is the fault of the airline or not can be difficult. This was a wildcat strike. An airline, under new EU rules, is not obliged to pay compensation if it can prove that a cancellation was caused by 'extraordinary circumstances' such as security risks or, as in this case, 'strikes that affect the operation of an air carrier'.

[4] BA is one of many airlines trying to lower its supplier contract costs. With the rise of rival budget airlines, the company must lower these costs in order to compete. While the strike is not directly BA's fault, for the third year in a row the company's reputation has been damaged, with a cost to the airline of around £10m a day.

3 Read the article again. What caused the strike? What were the effects of the strike?

4 Find the following words and expressions in the article from their definitions:

- |  |               |
|--|---------------|
| (a) To organize a company in a different way, so that it will operate better             | (paragraph 1) |
| (b) An amount of work that you should already have done                                  | (paragraph 1) |
| (c) Period when the largest number of people is doing something                          | (paragraph 2) |
| (d) Not willing to change your ideas   | (paragraph 2) |
| (e) Written legal agreement between two people that says what each must do for the other | (paragraph 4) |
| (f) To try to be more successful than other businesses                                   | (paragraph 4) |
| (g) The opinion people have about how good or bad something is                           | (paragraph 4) |
- (Definitions from or based on the Macmillan English Dictionary (2002) Text © Bloomsbury)

5 Work in small groups to discuss these questions. Be ready to report back on the results of your discussion.

- Have you ever participated in or been affected by a strike? What was the reason for the strike? What happened in the end?
- Describe an industrial dispute in your country. Do you feel sympathy for the management or workers?
- Do you feel wages are too low in some sectors? Which ones?