

BBC journalists' strike hits all UK service's major news programs

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Journalists at the British Broadcasting Corporation struck on Friday for 24 hours to protest 387 job losses at the World Service and BBC Monitoring.

More than 100 compulsory redundancies are threatened at the World Service alone. The strike followed a National Union of Journalists (NUJ) ballot last month, in which 72 percent voted in favour.

The BBC, a public broadcasting service, announced that it is imposing the cuts as a result of cuts to the grant funding the World Service and BBC Monitoring, part of the Conservative/Liberal-Democrat government's comprehensive spending review last October. From 2013/4 the costs of both services are to be absorbed by the BBC licence fee, paid by all households with a TV, at a time when spending cuts of 20 percent are being imposed across the BBC.

The action caused significant disruption across the BBC's radio and TV output, with picket lines set up at offices around the UK from midnight. Some of the corporations' major journalists, including BBC 5 Live presenter Nicky Campbell, BBC Business editor Robert Peston, and Kate Silverton, who works mainly in news and current affairs, supported the strike.

The strike severely affected the BBC's coverage of the aftermath of the resignation of Rebekah Brooks, the CEO of Rupert Murdoch's News International.

The Today Programme on Radio 4 was forced to start an hour later, while BBC Radio 5 Live Breakfast hosts Campbell and Rachel Burden were replaced by two other presenters.

The BBC's flagship evening news programme, BBC2's *Newsnight*, was off air on Friday evening, along with *The World at One* and *PM*, Radio 4's main evening news programme.

Radio 4's evening political discussion show, *Any Questions*, was also taken off air, as was the channels'

late evening news programme, *The World Tonight*.

The National Union of Journalists was involved in talks with the BBC until the last minute in order to reach an agreement to avoid industrial action. The union is on record that it is willing and able to assist in negotiating away the jobs that the BBC plans to shed. NUJ General Secretary Michelle Stanistreet said last week, "There are so many people who want to leave the BBC that this could be resolved through negotiations." Included in the NUJ's demands to the BBC are to "[e]xtend the leaving dates of those immediately at risk to allow for further talks" and for the BBC to "[a]gree to release volunteers".

The stance of the union in accepting redundancies is most clearly seen in that it chose July 17 as the date of strike action. This was the day when the BBC timetable for compulsory redundancies began. The *Daily Telegraph* noted that one BBC journalist, on the Bengali service, has been made compulsorily redundant and two more from BBC Monitoring service are to go this month.

The union's real attitude to job cuts was summed up in Stanistreet's comment: "If the BBC wants to provoke a strike over such small numbers it would be shameful. We call on the BBC to get around the table with us and sort it out."



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