

# 67 The workplace

## A An industrial dispute

Talks to settle the dispute between Royal Mail bosses and the CWU union have broken down again, so the union has decided, following the support of its members in a ballot, to set a date for strikes as early as next month. They claim it is not just a pay dispute, but an attempt to halt the closure of 2,500 post offices around the country. For the government, though, there is a great deal at stake. If the management gives in to the demands, it could set a precedent for other groups, who may feel more inclined to step up their own claims for higher wage settlements.

### SPOTLIGHT *set* + noun

**Set** is used with many nouns and often means 'fix something for others to copy', e.g. **set a standard / a precedent / an example**. It can also mean 'decide on something', e.g. **set a date/limit**.

### GLOSSARY

<b>settle</b>	put an end to an argument or a disagreement
<b>dispute</b>	a disagreement, often official, between people or groups: <i>a pay/industrial dispute; settle a dispute</i>
<b>break down</b>	(of talks/negotiations, etc.) fail
<b>ballot</b>	a system of voting in which votes are made in secret <b>ballot</b> <i>v</i>
<b>halt</b>	prevent sth from continuing
<b>closure</b>	a situation in which a school, factory, etc. is permanently shut
<b>at stake</b>	If sth is <b>at stake</b> , you will lose it if a plan or action is not successful.
<b>give in</b>	agree to do sth that you do not want to do
<b>precedent</b>	sth that happened in the past which is seen as a rule or example for others in a similar situation to follow
<b>inclined to do sth</b>	likely to do sth or tending to do sth
<b>step sth up</b>	increase the amount of an activity in order to achieve sth
<b>wage (ALSO wages pl)</b>	a regular amount of money you earn, often paid weekly: <i>a high/low wage</i>

### 1 Circle the words which suggest that something is stopping, failing or going wrong.

dispute      give in      step up      break down  
halt      precedent      closure      inclined to

### 2 Complete the sentences with a suitable verb.

- 1 The manager ..... the standard for others to follow.
- 2 We must act now in order to ..... the dispute.
- 3 The union must ..... their members before they can go ahead with strike action.
- 4 The 5% wage settlement has ..... a precedent for other unions.
- 5 The government has failed to ..... the economic decline, so things look bad.
- 6 If their demands aren't met, some workers will ..... their call for strike action.
- 7 We mustn't ..... to their demands. We will fight to the end.
- 8 The negotiations started well but they've just ..... for some reason.

### 3 Complete the dialogues.

- 1 Is it the only factory to close? ~ No, there have been lots of other .....
- 2 Are they taking a risk with the new IT company? ~ Yes, there's a lot at .....
- 3 Why are they going on strike? ~ It's a ..... over pay, I believe.
- 4 Has this happened before? ~ No, it would set a .....
- 5 Have they reached an agreement? ~ No, the talks .....
- 6 What will happen if you leave? ~ I think others may be ..... to follow.
- 7 Is the dispute about pay? ~ Yes, basically they want higher .....
- 8 Will they go on strike? ~ Maybe, but they must have a ..... of members first.



### TEST YOURSELF

## B Working conditions

### What fringe benefits can you expect from your job?

- \* a company pension?
- \* an annual bonus?
- \* health or dental insurance?
- \* paid sick leave?
- \* maternity/paternity leave?
- \* a commission (on certain jobs)

### What rights do you have?

- \* the right to join a trade union?
- \* Are you entitled to strike?
- \* the right to a minimum level of paid holiday?

#### GLOSSARY

<b>(fringe) benefit</b> (usually pl)	an advantage you get from a company in addition to the money you earn <b>SYN perk</b>
<b>pension</b>	money paid regularly by a government or company to sb when they retire: <b>a state/company pension</b>
<b>bonus</b>	an extra amount of money, often added to a wage or salary, as a reward: <b>an annual bonus</b>
<b>dental</b>	connected with teeth: <b>dental treatment</b>
<b>leave</b>	a period of time when you are allowed to be away from work for a holiday or a special reason: <b>annual/unpaid/sick leave</b>
<b>maternity</b>	the state of being or becoming a mother: <b>maternity leave</b> , <b>ALSO paternity leave</b> (for fathers)
<b>commission</b>	an amount of money paid to sb for selling goods which increases with the amount sold
<b>right</b>	a moral or legal claim to have or get sth or to behave in a particular way
<b>trade union</b>	an organization of workers that exists to protect its workers
<b>entitle (sb to sth)</b> (often passive)	give sb the right to have or do sth
<b>strike</b>	a period of time when an organized group of employees refuse to work because of a disagreement over pay or conditions: <b>be/go on strike</b>
<b>minimum</b>	the smallest that is possible or allowed: <b>the minimum wage/charge</b>

#### 4 Form seven compound words or phrases from words in the box.

minimum pension fringe strike maternity wage state leave dental union go on benefit trade treatment

#### 5 Complete the sentences.

- 1 Most countries have ..... leave, but not always paternity leave.
- 2 I've always belonged to a trade .....
- 3 We only get an annual ..... if the company is doing well.
- 4 The workers are planning to ..... strike next week.
- 5 The company pays sick ..... up to a certain number of weeks.
- 6 When you retire, will you be ..... to a state and company ..... ?
- 7 I think most workers in the UK have a ..... to join a ..... union, but I don't think members of the emergency services can go on ..... .
- 8 I get 10% ..... on everything I sell.
- 9 I believe everyone has the ..... to refuse overtime over a certain number of hours.
- 10 Most people have a ..... of 20 days' paid ..... every year.

#### 6 ABOUT YOU Write your answers, or talk to another student.

- 1 Have you got a job? If so, which of the perks above do you get? What other perks do you get? Which are the most important to you? .....
- 2 Are you entitled to all the rights above? .....
- 3 If you haven't got a job, which of the perks above sound the most important, and why? .....

