



THE ROAD TO REFORM – US CAR WORKERS ON STRIKE



Scan to review worksheet

Expemo code:
1EJM-G1LC-E8B

1 Warm up

In the next exercise, you will listen to a report about trade unions and strikes in the US. In pairs, answer the following questions.

1. Have you ever been personally affected by a strike in your country? If so, what was the situation and outcome?
2. Do you think it is important for workers to organize themselves into unions?
3. If a company makes large profits, should they feel obliged to share them with its employees?

2 Pre-listening task: vocabulary

Match words and phrases with the correct definitions.

Group 1

- | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1. <u>u</u> nion (n) | a. turned down or rejected |
| 2. <u>r</u> ebuffed (v) | b. increased sharply |
| 3. <u>c</u> horus (n) | c. association of workers |
| 4. <u>s</u> ubstantial (adj.) | d. collective group |
| 5. <u>j</u> uxtaposed (v) | e. significantly large or meaningful |
| 6. <u>s</u> oared (v) | f. placed side by side for comparison |
| 7. <u>u</u> ndeniably (adv.) | g. in a manner that cannot be denied |

**Group 2**

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. seismic (adj.) | a. consequences of an action |
| 2. repercussions (n) | b. differences or inequalities |
| 3. unprecedented (adj.) | c. never before seen or experienced |
| 4. illuminated (v) | d. exceeding in speed or progress |
| 5. sacrifices (n) | e. relating to earthquakes or significant disruptions |
| 6. disparities (n) | f. lit up or highlighted |
| 7. outpacing (v) | g. acts of giving up something valuable |

3**Listening for specific information**

Listen to the report about industrial action at three car factories in the US. Write down information from the report to the corresponding statements provided below.

- _____ the number of workers who walked off the job in Detroit
- _____ between 1979 and 2022, the rise in wages of the top 1% of workers
- _____ the number of days that were lost to industrial action in July

4**Listening for comprehension**

Part A: Listen to the report again. Using information from the report itself, answer the questions true (T) or false (F).

- The UAW believe that they are in a strong position. _____
- The strikes at the car companies were organized to happen at the same time as strikes in other industries. _____
- Truck drivers were forced to accept a pay cut. _____
- Mary Barra believes her salary is fair because of the success of her company. _____
- Some bosses have suggested that there will be unwanted financial consequences of the strikes. _____
- The high availability of jobs will benefit the strikers. _____



Part B: In pairs, discuss the meaning of the underlined phrases below. In what type of situation might someone 'turn the screw'? Can you use 'in line with' in a sentence?

1. Despite being rebuffed, union members believe they might be in a position to turn the screw.
2. However, bosses ... have argued that their salaries are in line with how well they have run their businesses.

5**Vocabulary**

Part A: Match the words and phrases in bold with the correct definitions.

1. The company's management decided to **concede** to the workers' demands after a lengthy negotiation process. (v)
 2. The striking employees gathered at the **picket line**, chanting slogans and holding signs to express their grievances. (n phr.)
 3. The newly introduced safety measures helped **alleviate** some of the risks associated with the hazardous job. (v)
 4. The decision to cut funding for the project could **jeopardize** its success in the long run. (v)
 5. In response to the strike, the company introduced a **contingency plan** to ensure minimal disruption to its operations. (n phr.)
 6. After careful consideration, the management **implemented** several cost-cutting measures. (v)
 7. The consequences of the economic recession **cast a long shadow over** the company's financial prospects. (idiom)
 8. The union leaders issued an **ultimatum**, demanding immediate action to address the workers' concerns. (n)
- a. put something at risk
 - b. a line of striking workers who protest outside a workplace
 - c. put into effect
 - d. a predefined strategy designed to address potential unexpected events or emergencies
 - e. have a long-lasting negative impact on something
 - f. give in or yield, often in response to pressure or demands
 - g. a final demand, often issued with a threat of consequences if not met
 - h. make a situation less severe or relieve a problem or discomfort



6

Reading and Use of English - Part 2

Read the text about a famous strike in the US. Think of the word that best fits each gap. Use only one word.

The Rise and Fall of PATCO

A turning point in labor history

- A. By the 1980s, American unions had become less powerful. In 1981, one of those unions, the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO), attempted _____¹ improve its members' pay while reducing the stress its workers faced on the job. The controllers' employer refused the union's demands, and PATCO decided to call a _____² during the peak of the travel season. The union believed their bosses would have no _____³ but to concede in order to prevent the airline, shipping, and tourist industries from being affected. President Ronald Reagan instead responded with an ultimatum: The air traffic controllers were to return to work within forty-eight hours or be fired.
- B. On 3rd August, 1981, a strong majority of that membership took to the picket lines. PATCO wanted higher wages, a shorter workweek to alleviate the stress of the job, and better retirement benefits. At the _____⁴, the airline industry enjoyed revenues of \$30 billion (5) _____⁵ year, and the union assumed that going on strike would jeopardize that revenue. However, after the president fired the striking controllers, a contingency plan successfully restored air traffic standards to normal operating levels within a few weeks.
- C. More than eleven thousand air traffic controllers lost their jobs as a result of the strike, and the effects on American business were substantial. In _____⁶ to reducing the influence of unions in the airline industry, it sent a message to other unions and their members. For many years after the air traffic controllers' strike, unions were not respected as a valuable tool by employers. Many companies cut jobs, pensions, and other employee benefits. It was a turning _____⁷ in the labor movement – PATCO's defeat cast a long shadow over unions for many years to come.

Sources: *Encyclopedia.com, History*

7

Talking Point

In pairs or small groups, discuss the following questions.

1. Did President Reagan make the right call by firing the striking air traffic controllers?
2. Should there be legal limits on the duration or frequency of strikes to protect businesses and the public interest?
3. Should the government have a role in mediating industrial disputes between workers and employers?



8

Role-play activity

Part A: The conversation below has been reorganised. In pairs or groups of three, read through the conversation, and put each part of the dialogue in the correct order.

- ___ I saw it in the news. They're demanding higher wages and better conditions.
- ___ True, but I also read that some companies argue they need the money because the industry is undergoing changes.
- ___ I agree. It's a complex issue. We should weigh the pros and cons carefully before doing anything drastic.
- ___ It's a tough situation. On one hand, workers deserve fair pay, but on the other, the repercussions of a prolonged strike could be devastating.
- ___ Exactly. And with unemployment being at a historic low, workers are in a strong position to argue their case.
- ___ Hey, have you heard about the recent strike at the factory in Cardiff?
- ___ That's a valid point. But we should also consider the potential long-term consequences for our industry before we make any rash decisions.
- ___ I see where you're coming from. Given the disparity in wages between them and the executives, it's understandable that they want a better deal.
- ___ Yeah, and to be honest I don't blame them.

Part B: Using the conversation above as a reference, practice the conversation below in pairs. After completing the conversation, switch roles.

Student A is the CEO of a large car company who expects to have to invest a significant amount of money in adapting their factories so that they can produce electric vehicles. They plan to raise funds by not increasing their employees' wages for five years, despite inflation increasing by 5% per year.

Student B is the head of the union that represents workers at the factory where these changes will be implemented. He believes that workers should receive a share of the vast profits the company has generated and is willing to strike to make this happen.