



ESL Podcast 252 – A Workers Strike

GLOSSARY

to strike – to refuse to work because the workers are protesting (showing that they do not approve of) something

* The teachers are striking because they want to get more money for the work that they do.

management – the group of people with the most power in an organization or business; the people who run, manage, and control an organization or business

* Many of the workers were mad when they learned how much money management was making.

grievances – complaints, especially about something where one works

* The hospital workers' grievances are that they are tired of working 12 hours each day and that they don't like the food in the cafeteria.

hold on – an expression that means, "Wait a minute," or "Don't be in such a hurry"

* When Sandra said she wanted to paint her house purple, I said, "Hold on. Are you sure that the neighbors won't be angry?"

hasty – too quick; too fast; in a hurry

* Going to Hawaii for vacation was a hasty decision, and they soon realized that they didn't have enough money to enjoy the trip.

sickout – a protest (showing publicly that one does not approve of something) against a company where all the workers stay home and say that they are sick on the same day

* When Walt received two calls from workers who said they were sick, he believed them, but when ten workers called, he knew that it was a sickout.

to mean business – to be serious; to mean what one says

* The boss's face was very serious and we knew that he meant business when he said we had to finish the project as quickly as possible.

to get (someone's) back up – to annoy someone; to make someone angry

* I didn't mean to get your back up when I said that the new plan wasn't what I had envisioned.



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collective bargaining – official meetings and talks between a union and a company about the workers' pay and benefits

* The collective bargaining session lasted all night, but they finally reached an agreement about how much money the workers should be paid for overtime.

contract – a legal, written agreement between two people or organizations

* When she started working for KPMG, she had to sign a contract promising that she wouldn't talk about her projects with people outside of the company.

to stall – to be delayed; to stop making progress; to stop moving forward

* Children often stall when their parents tell them to go to bed by asking for a glass of water, brushing their teeth very slowly, or asking their parents to read them a story.

to put pressure on (someone) – to try to make someone do something; to force someone to do something they don't want to do

* Riana's parents put a lot of pressure on her to become a doctor, but she wants to study music.

to come to (someone's) terms – to agree with someone; to agree to the conditions that another person or other side wants

* The two countries finally came to each other's terms and the war ended.

to picket – to protest (to show publicly that one does not approve of something) by standing in front of a building with large signs

* The students are picketing in front of the university president's office because they are angry that their tuition is going up.

to cross a picket line – to walk through a line of people picketing (protesting with signs) to go to work

* Crossing a picket line is difficult because it means that you don't support what your co-workers are doing.

scab – an insulting term for a person who crosses a picket line (a group of people protesting with signs) to go to work

* When the workers crossed the picket line, the picketers threw rocks at the scabs and told them that what they were doing was wrong.

to count (one) out – to not include someone; to not rely on someone

* If you're going to go to that party just so you can drink, count me out. I'm not interested in seeing you get sick again.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Masako feel about the union?
 - a) She thinks it is negotiating too slowly.
 - b) She thinks it means business.
 - c) She thinks it is putting pressure on the company.

 2. Why doesn't Salvador want the workers to picket?
 - a) He doesn't want to cross the picket line.
 - b) He thinks the workers might lose their jobs.
 - c) He thinks it will make some workers feel bad.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

to strike

The verb “to strike,” in this podcast, means to refuse to work because the workers are protesting something: “The airline workers are striking because they want to work fewer hours each week.” The verb “to strike” can also mean to hit someone or something very hard: “The man and his wife were arrested after striking their children in public.” The verb “to strike” can mean to hit a ball: “The baseball player struck the ball as hard as he could and won the game for his team.” We also use the verb “to strike” to talk about lightening, the electricity people see in the sky when there is a storm: “During the storm, lightening struck the clock in the main square.” Finally, the verb “to strike” can be used to refer to something that comes to one’s mind or brain very quickly and unexpectedly: “When she saw the photos of her grandfather, she was suddenly struck by memories of him.”

contract

In this podcast, the noun “contract” (pronounced “CONtract”) means a legal, written agreement between two people or organizations: “You have to sign a contract with the car rental company before you can drive a rented car.” As a verb, “to contract” means to make a legal agreement with someone so that he or she will work for you, usually for a short period of time: “We need to contract a web designer to make our website look better.” “Contract” can also be used as a verb in two other ways if it is pronounced with the stress on the second syllable: “conTRACT.” It can mean to become smaller: “Your muscles contract and expand when you exercise,” or it also mean to get an illness: “Many people who live in tropical areas contract malaria when they are bitten by mosquitoes.”



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CULTURE NOTE

In the United States, more than 15 million workers are in unions. Unions try to help workers get better pay and “working conditions” (the safety and comfort of where they work). The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (known as “AFL-CIO”) is a group of 54 national and international unions. The “mission” (purpose) of the AFL-CIO is to improve the lives of working people and their families.

Many types of workers are in unions. Some well-known unions are the Air Line Pilots Association, the American Federation of Government Employees, the American Federation of Teachers, the Farm Labor Organizing Committee, the Federation of Professional Athletes, and the Writers Guild of America.

Unions and management try to work well together, but sometimes they cannot reach an agreement. When that happens, the unions tell their workers to strike. This is difficult for the companies because they cannot do their work. It is also difficult for the workers because they do not receive money while they are striking. Sometimes, when a strike occurs in an “industry” (an important part of the economy, such as transportation, oil, or teaching), the government tries to help the union and management reach agreement quickly.

On average, workers in the US who are in unions get 28% more money than workers who are not in the same industry. But these union workers have to pay “membership dues,” or an amount of money paid each week or month, to be a member of the union. Being in a union is “optional,” meaning that is not required, but there is often a lot of pressure from one’s co-workers to join a union.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – c



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COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 252: A Workers Strike.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 252. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Remember to visit our website at eslpod.com to download the Learning Guide for this episode. It contains all of the vocabulary, definitions, sample sentences, additional explanations, cultural notes and a complete transcript of this episode.

This episode is called "A Workers Strike." We're going to hear a conversation between Masako and Salvador talking about whether they should have a strike at their workplace. A strike is when the workers refuse to work in order to get more money or other benefits. Let's get started.

[start of story]

Masako: I think we should strike. We need to force management to listen to our grievances.

Salvador: Hold on. I think you're being too hasty. It's up to our union to call a strike, not the workers.

Masako: I'm not suggesting a formal strike, but we could organize a sickout. That would send a message that we mean business.

Salvador: Yeah, but that may also get their backs up. We need to give collective bargaining a chance to get us the contract we want.

Masako: The union has been negotiating for two months and things have stalled. We need to do something to put pressure on the company to come to our terms. At the very least, we should picket outside the building.

Salvador: We should only do that if there's a strike. We don't want to make employees feel like they're crossing the picket line every time they come to work. That would be bad for morale.

Masako: Nobody's going to feel like a scab if they all know why we're picketing. Let's call a meeting and see what everyone else thinks.



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Salvador: You can do that if you want, but count me out. I'm going to let the union do its job.

[end of story]

Our dialogue begins with Masako saying, "I think we should strike." Strike, "strike," is both a noun and a verb. In this case, it's a verb, to strike, which means, in this dialogue, to stop working in order to make your boss - your employers - give you more money or more vacation and so forth. Strike can also be a noun meaning the action of going on strike. Usually we use that expression, to go on strike, to mean the same as to strike. Strike has a couple of other meanings in English as well; we talk about those in the Learning Guide for this episode.

Masako says, "We need to force management to listen to our grievances." Management, "management," is the group of people with the most power in an organization or a business. It's the people who run, manage and control an organization or a business - it's your bosses, essentially.

Grievances, "grievances," are complaints - things that you don't like about where you work. You may have a grievance that the food in the company's cafeteria - the place where they serve lunch - is really bad. That's true here at the Center for Educational Development! So, that would be a grievance. That would be a complaint that you could take to your boss, and your boss would say you, "If you don't like the food, eat at McDonald's."

Salvador doesn't agree with Masako does. He doesn't want to strike, he says, "Hold on." Hold on is an expression that means wait a minute or don't be in such a hurry - you're moving too fast. He says, "I think you're being too hasty," "hasty." Hasty means too fast - too quick - in a hurry, "Don't make a hasty decision" is a common expression. A hasty decision would be a decision that you make without thinking about it enough - without giving it enough thought.

Salvador says that it's up to the "union to call a strike, not the workers." Notice also that verb, to call. To call a strike means to begin a strike or to announce a strike - to decide to have a strike.

Masako says that she doesn't want "a formal strike", where the union says we are now going on strike, "but," she says she wants to "organize a sickout." A sickout, "sickout," (one word) is a kind of protest. It's like a strike where all of the workers stay home for a day or two days and say that they're sick. Of course, they're not really sick, they're just trying to send a message - trying to let the



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management know that they are not happy. So, a sickout is a type of strike, but it's not a organized or formal strike.

Masako says that a sickout “would send a message” - would give a message to the management - “that we mean business.” The expression to mean, “mean,” business means to be serious - to mean what you say.

Salvador said, “Yeah, but that may also get their backs up,” or get the management's backs up. To get your back up, or to get someone's back up, is to annoy someone - to make somebody angry, usually to cause someone to have a negative reaction that might hurt your chances with that person in the future, or will make it more difficult for you to get what you want.

Salvador says that “We need to give collective bargaining a chance to get us the contract we want.” Collective, “collective,” means all together - everyone as a group all working together. Bargaining, “bargaining,” is when you talk to your, in this case, your bosses - the management - about what the pay should be - how much you should make at your job, and you come to an agreement. Collective bargaining is when everyone - all the workers - get together and they bargain or negotiate with the company. We usually use this expression when we are talking about a union. A union is a group of workers, who form an organization that helps protect their job and their pay.

There are many unions in the United States, but it is not as popular as in other countries. Unions used to be much stronger - much more popular - but in the last 30 or 40 years, the unions have become smaller, and there are fewer unions. There are still some areas of work where you will usually find a union. Government employees usually have unions that would include teachers, for example, fire fighters, police officers. Private companies sometimes have unions and sometimes don't. Most American workers, however, are not in a union. In fact, I think only about one in five or one in six workers belong to a union.

Salvador says that if we use collective bargaining we can get “the contract we want.” A contract, “contract,” is a legal written agreement between two people or two organizations. So in this case, it's a work contract; it's a contract between the company and the workers in the union. The word contract has other meanings in English as well; again, look at the Learning Guide for this episode for additional definitions.

Masako then says that “The union has been negotiating” - they've been bargaining - “for two months and things have stalled.” To stall, “stall,” means to



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be delayed - to stop making progress - to stop moving forward. In this case, the negotiations have stalled - they haven't made any progress.

“The union has been negotiating,” but the negotiations have stalled, Masako says, “We need to do something to put pressure on the company to come to our terms.” To put pressure, “pressure,” on someone means to try to make someone to do something - to influence them so that they will do what you want them to do. Parents sometimes put pressure on their children to do well at school - they influence them. To put pressure has a somewhat negative meaning - a somewhat negative sense. It's often considered a bad thing to put pressure on people. Sometimes you might hear someone say, “Don't put pressure on me” - don't try to make me do something that I don't want to do.

Well, Masako thinks the workers have “to put pressure on the company to come to our terms.” To come to our terms, “terms.” To come to someone's terms means to agree with someone. The terms are the details - the specific things that you are agreeing to. We have another expression, the terms of the agreement, meaning the details - what the agreement actually says. To come to someone's terms means to agree with somebody - to make an agreement with someone.

“At the very least,” Masako says, “we should picket outside the building.” To picket, “picket,” means to protest, usually by standing in front of a building and holding up large signs with words on them to tell everyone who goes into the building or who is driving by the building that you are not happy; that's a protest. You can have a political protest; in this case, it's a protest at the workplace.

Salvador says that “We should only do that” - we should only picket - “if there's a strike. We don't want employees feel like they're crossing the picket line every time they come to work.” When a company has a strike - when the workers go on strike, they usually picket in front of the company's doors - the building - and they walk back and forth and they form a line in front of the door and we call that the picket line. To cross the picket line means to go and work for the company even though the workers are on strike.

Someone who goes to work for a company where there is a strike - where the workers are striking - is called a scab, “scab.” Now, a scab is a very negative, insulting term for a person who crosses a picket line - who goes to work at a company where there is a strike. So, it's not a nice word, but it is a word that you sometimes see, especially when unions are describing people who go and work for these companies when they are striking.



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Salvador says that he doesn't want to call a meeting. Masako says that we should call a meeting. Salvador says, "count me out." To count someone out means to not include someone - not to rely on someone. Your friends may say, "We're going to a movie, do you want to come with us," and you say, "Count me out" - I'm not going; I don't like that movie.

Now let's listen to the dialogue, this time at a native rate of speech.

[start of story]

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Salvador: You can do that if you want, but count me out. I'm going to let the union do its job.

[end of story]

The script for today's episode was written by Dr. Lucy Tse.

If you have a question, comment or a suggestion for our podcast, send us an email. Our address is eslpod@eslpod.com.



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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. We'll see you next time on ESL Podcast.

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