4 Work-related Conflict

In this unit you will...
- meet words and expressions about strikes
- read an article about a strike
- practise detailed reading of a text

A What happens during a strike? What was the most famous strike in your country? When are strikes justified?
B These words and expressions are about things which can happen during or after a major strike. Match each word/expression to its definition

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>a ballot</td>
<td>A To admit that you have lost a fight</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>a picket</td>
<td>B When two sides directly oppose each other – sometimes violently</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>a breakaway party</td>
<td>C A striker who stands outside his/her workplace urging other workers not to break the strike</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>a confrontation</td>
<td>D When somebody secretly listens to your telephone calls</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>a historical re-enactment</td>
<td>E When there is a vote</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>to concede defeat</td>
<td>F A political party which is created from a split in an older one</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Phone-tapping</td>
<td>G When actors make a play out of a historical event</td>
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C Work with a partner. Invent a scenario/short story involving all of the items in the vocabulary box above.

D What are the following, and what do they do?
a political activist, a renowned and fiery orator

E What do the following words and expressions mean?
to declare, local, national prominence, the polls, crucial, a tactical error, funds, to seize, to concede defeat, to impoverish, hostile, to reveal, counter subversion

F Fill each gap with vocabulary items which you have met up to now in this unit.

Arnie Fischer, leader of the United Workers Union, is a _1_ and _2_ speaker. He came to _3_ when he led a national strike some years ago. There were both _4_ and national _5_ and a strike was _6_. He sent _7_ to talk to workers around the country, and there were _8_ with the police. The government _9_ the _10_ of the trade union, so the union had no money. The security service _11_ his phone.

G Look quickly at the article on the next page. Does the writer, Professor Otto Slovo, generally support the miners?

H Summarise each paragraph of the main article in one sentence or in a title.

I Write a summary of the article in not more than 100 words.

J ‘The right to strike is a basic right.’ Do you agree? Write a list of reasons for your opinion and discuss it with others in the class.

Reaching ‘breaking-point’ at work – real-life phrases
I’ve just about had enough of this…
That was the last straw!
Right. I’m walking!
Jack’s strike

Professor Otto Slovo outlines one of the most famous strikes in Grenberg’s history, the 1994 miners’ strike led by Jack Landau.

(1) In 1994, Northern Coal PLC announced that it would break an agreement reached with the Grenberg’s miners in 1984; the company intended to close twenty pits. Twenty thousand jobs would be lost, and many communities around Grenberg would lose their primary source of employment. The stage was set for conflict.

(2) Strikes broke out across the area, but they were strongest in those pits most heavily affected by the job losses. In the Meckham pit, strikes began on 5 March following a local ballot, and the following day pickets from Meckham appeared at pits in the villages south of Grenberg (one of the areas least threatened by pit closures). On 12 March 1994, Jack Landau – President of the Mineworkers’ Union – declared the strikes official, and ordered a strike across the whole Grenberg coalfield.

Jack Landau was born in 1938 in Meckham, just north of Grenberg, the son of Harold, a miner and member of the Communist Party. The young Landau became a miner himself after leaving school. He soon became a left-wing political activist, joining the Young Communist League, but later joined the Social Democrats as the influence of the Communist Party in the town waned. In 1981 he was elected leader of the Meckham miners, and in 2001 was elected President of Grenberg’s miners.

He is renowned as a fiery and effective orator. He bitterly opposed the industrial policies of several governments, and rose to national prominence during the 1994 Grenberg miners’ strike; defeat for the miners in this strike was followed by a split in the union.

In December 1995 he founded the Socialist Labour Party, after criticising what he saw as a further move to the right by the Social Democrats. His breakaway party has had little success in the polls.

(3) Crucially, although there was widespread support for the strike amongst mine workers, Landau did not call a ballot for the Grenberg-wide action. This tactical error made it easier for the Ministry of the Interior to bring the full weight of the law down on the striking miners and the union. The union’s funds were seized on 24 October 1994. The miners received no wages and were denied state benefits. The police were mobilised to deal with picket lines, on the grounds that they represented illegal public disturbances. The miners were also split, with a minority – mostly in the villages to the south of Grenberg – forming the anti-strike Union of Democratic Grenberg Mineworkers.

(4) One of the most famous clashes of the Miners’ Strike took place in Traunt, a small village east of Grenberg on 18 June 1994. This confrontation between striking miners and Ministry of the Interior police became known as the Battle of Traunt. It was the subject of a historical re-enactment for television in late 2005.

(5) The strike ended on 3 March 1995 – nearly a year after it had begun – when Landau conceded defeat, faced as he was with an impoverished membership and overwhelming state power.

(6) Rueben Stein, head of the Ministry of the Interior’s secret service, published an autobiography in late 2005. In this he revealed the extent of the service’s ‘counter-subversion’ exercises against Landau and the striking miners, which included the tapping of trade union leaders’ phones.

(7) The rights and wrongs of the strike and the behaviour of the state authorities still divide Grenberg. Local management consultant, Hector Jenner, believes, ‘Defeating the miners, and thereby breaking the power of the trade unions in the area, was a great gain for business in the area. I welcome it.’ But local councillor, Arnie Fischer, points to the lasting divisions and high unemployment in Grenberg. ‘The tactics used by the government were a disgrace,’ says an angry Councillor Fischer.

Prof. Otto Slovo lectures at the University of Grenberg. His book, 2004 and the Grenberg Miners’ Strike will be published later this year.
Exam Skills

A Read the following paragraph. Who do you think wrote it?

You need to get pickets at the factory gate to stop the workers going in. Often, to make things more difficult, there is a real problem of getting the message through, because most of the media is against the strike. Negotiators need to spend time with management. Collecting money is important, as is getting the message across to the public, who may be having difficulties because of the strike. Strikes are often harder work than going to work.

B Which of the following is the best title for the above text?

- Strikes can be fun
- Organising a strike
- How to end a strike

C Think of further appropriate titles for the text. Debate with your partner which is the best and why.

D Where is the topic sentence in the paragraph in A?

Exam tip: you need to read the text very quickly to work out what kind of text it is and what it is about.

E Look at the following ‘sentence heads’: unfinished sentences which can be completed by one of four multiple-choice options (here the multiple-choice options for each are not shown), Work out the topic of the text.

The strikers threw stones because…
The police arrested the three women when…
Mary’s husband thought that…
The conflict became worse when Mary’s husband…

Exam tip: Reading all the sentence heads for the multiple-choice questions (not the multiple-choice options) will tell you what the text is about.

F Look at the following question (without multiple-choice options), and work out in which of the two following paragraphs the answer can be found. Why can’t the answer be found in the other paragraph? Write a question which has its answer in the other paragraph.

Why did Mr Fischer call a strike?

1 Conditions for workers in the whole region have been getting worse for several years now. The number of houses built by the local council for ordinary working people has declined, and little money has been put into education. Unemployment in the region has now passed two million. Protest and unrest are now common.

2 At PKZ Engineering, where I represent over half the workers, conditions have actually improved in the last year. A major order from Saudi Arabia boosted production, profits and employment levels in the factory. In these circumstances I found it strange that the managing director, Mr Grice, should choose to end the profit-sharing agreement worked out last year.

Exam tip: Read the questions and work out exactly the kind of answer required.
G Read the following paragraph, written by Arnie Fischer, and answer the multiple-choice question. Give reasons for the correct answer and explain why the ‘distractors’ are incorrect.

The strike…

A was supported by all the members of the executive committee.
B received Mr Fischer’s vote.
C was supported by a majority of the members of the union.
D was opposed by a minority of those who voted.

‘Whether the strike would go ahead or not was not decided till the last minute. The executive committee of the United Workers Union, of which I am chairman, voted eight to four in favour of a strike, but then there had to be a vote of all the workers. We sent out voting papers for a postal ballot, but less than half the members returned the ballot papers. Of those who voted, 59% voted for the strike, and the executive committee then endorsed the strike seven to five.’

Exam tip: work out why the distractors are wrong before choosing the correct answer.

Extra Task

Read the pieces of speech below (1 to 6). Which of the following people (A to F) do you think said each one?

A. Jack Landau – the miners’ union president
B. a police officer from the Ministry of the Interior
C. a miner on the picket line
D. the mayor of Grenberg
E. Rueben Stein – state security service
F. Hector Jenner – management consultant

(1) ‘We were running like hell. Mrs Green at number 47 opened her front door. We thought we were OK, but then the whole door was knocked in.’

(2) ‘Well, we have people everywhere. We have a unit at the telephone exchange, and of course we get information from the odd miner – but we pay “under the table” for that. Then we have people in the media.’

(3) ‘We get our orders. We have shields and batons, of course. If we use gas, we need masks.’

(4) ‘Trade unions get in the way of profit-making and the market. I welcome anything which weakens their power.’

(5) ‘It’s not just a question of the miner’s jobs, but the whole community is dependent on the mining industry.’

(6) ‘What is terrible is that all this is happening in the first place. We’ve already had two deaths, and the effects will be felt in Grenberg for many years to come.’
Exam Practice: Everybody Out!

A When workers get angry with pay and conditions, what (apart from leave!) can they do?

B What do the following mean?

- go slow
- work-to-rule
- industrial dispute
- line manager
- negotiation
- non-contractual work

C Which forms of industrial action are most successful and why?

D Read the following letter from Arnie Fischer. Why is he writing?

Dear Colleague,

You will by now be in receipt of the letter from Regional Office, outlining the latest revised view concerning the current pay dispute. It has come as some surprise to me, as it is mistaken and is now superseded by this letter. To help you understand the events leading up to the present situation, I will endeavour to explain them.

Last month the union decided that we would begin a work-to-rule protest. In other words, we would only do what our contracts require of us and no more.

The ‘work-to-rule letters’ which all members were asked to send to their line managers came to the attention of the company manager, Mr Edgar Grice. In response, Mr Grice declared that he had withdrawn from negotiations, and wrote to me indicating this, also questioning the legality of the branch taking industrial action against the company. I contacted the Regional Officer to request direction from national officers. Their immediate response was unequivocal: we were in dispute, and the dispute was legal for the reason in the following paragraph.

The company was informed of the pay claim and the intention to ballot the membership for strike action on 24 April 2003. No challenge was received. The ballot was conducted following all legal requirements. I read this statement to Mr Grice at the last industrial works council, and there was no protest made at the time.

Following a meeting of the regional committee of the United Workers Union on 9 May, the regional officer (Ms O’Brien) circulated a letter to members in this branch, stating that the latest advice from National Office was that we would have to be excluded from the action in November. I understood there was now some doubt over our legal position, and that National Office did not want to risk the integrity of the entire national ballot.

In consequence of the above, I must further advise you that this branch of the United Workers Union and its members are in dispute with employers in pursuance of the national pay claim. The industrial action on 5 November will proceed as originally planned. The work-to-rule is also to proceed with immediate effect as part of the national industrial action. This has consequences for all non-contractual work, including the Open Day on 9 November. Advice regarding action on Open Day can be viewed on the branch website.

Yours fraternally,

Arnie Fischer
United Workers Union, Branch Chair
1. This letter…
   A. comes from the Regional Office of the union.
   B. is the first that members have heard of the industrial action.
   C. corrects an earlier letter.
   D. confirms an earlier letter.

2. The Union will ask its members…
   A. to go on strike.
   B. to break their contract with their employers.
   C. to break company rules.
   D. not to do any work not specified in their contracts.

3. Mr Grice…
   A. refused throughout to negotiate about the pay claim.
   B. thinks a ‘work-to-rule’ isn’t an industrial dispute.
   C. has told Mr Fischer that he has finished discussing the issue.
   D. doesn’t know the details of the industrial dispute.

4. About the ballot…
   A. Mr Grice questioned it from the beginning.
   B. Mr Grice was given notice of it.
   C. It was organised illegally.
   D. Mr Fischer and Mr Grice discussed it before it was held.

5. Ms O’Brien…
   A. wrote to the members of the branch.
   B. opposed a national strike.
   C. ignored the advice of the national officers.
   D. believed the national ballot would have to be held again.

6. The latest position is…
   A. as Ms O’Brien described it.
   B. that the branch will not join the national industrial action.
   C. that the national union is not in dispute.
   D. that the branch will start a ‘work-to-rule’.

7. Most of the letter is about…
   A. the history of the industrial dispute.
   B. what members of the branch should do.
   C. Ms O’Brien’s opinions.
   D. the national officers of the United Workers Union.
Unit 4: Work-related Conflict

(p.1) B 1E, 2C, 3F, 4B, 5G, 6A, 7D

(p.1) D political activist: somebody who engages in political activity, usually unpaid (not a politician); a renowned and fiery orator: renowned: well-known; fiery: adjective related to fire (here it means ‘passionate or hot-tempered); orator: a public speaker.

(p.1) F 1. renowned, 2. fiery, 3. national prominence, 4. local, 5. ballots, 6. declared, 7. pickets, 8. confrontations, 9. seized, 10. funds, 11. tapped.

(p.1) G The article is mainly factual and includes comments from both pro- and anti-strike people. The article, however, largely explains the strike from the miners’ point of view.

(p.1) H (possible answers) 1. the reasons for the strike, 2. the start of the strike, 3. the politics of the strike, 4. The Battle of Traunt, 5. the end of strike, 6. the role of the secret service, 7. present-day opinions on the strike

(p.3) A a trade union organiser

(p.3) B organising a strike

(p.3) C A strike is hard work, Many things to do in strike…

(p.3) D arguably the last one: Strikes are often harder work than going to work.

(p.3) E Mary’s husband is involved in violent confrontations during a strike.

(p.3) F The answer can be found in the second paragraph, because it states a possible reason for the strike. The first paragraph talks about the social decline of an area.

(p.3) G The correct answer is D, a minority (i.e. 41% of those voting) opposed the strike. A is incorrect because the votes at the executive meeting were split. For B there is no evidence, as we have no idea how Mr Fischer voted. C is incorrect, as a majority of the members of the union didn’t vote.

Extra Task 1 C, 2 E, 3 B, 4 F, 5 A/D, 6 A/D

(p.5) D to clarify the status of the strike to branch members

(p.5) E 1C, 2D, 3C, 4B, 5A, 6D, 7A,