

Strikes in the Business Sector

SUBMITTED BY: Lee Jackson

SUBJECT(S): Management

GRADE LEVEL(S): 9, 10, 11, 12

≡ OVERVIEW:

This lesson introduces students to the mechanics of a labor strike, as well as its causes and effects. Students will explore the interconnectedness of labor unions and policy, as well as their influence on business.

≡ NBEA STANDARD(S):

- Management, VII. Organized Labor

≡ WHARTON GLOBAL YOUTH PROGRAM ARTICLE:

- [“Public Policy: Tackling Today’s Challenges”](#)

Common Core Standard(s):

- Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research.

Objectives/Purposes: Following this lesson, students will be able to describe the role of organized labor and its influence on government and business.

Knowledge@Wharton Article: “[Labor Pains: Is Industrial Unrest Growing or Slowing?](#)”

Other Resources/Materials:

- Whiteboard, chart paper, markers, photos.
- Septa Transit Strike video:
http://www.myfoxphilly.com/dpp/news/investigative/111009_Its_Your_Dime_SEPTA_Transit_Strike_Costs_Philadelphia_Big_Bucks

Activity:

1. Open the class by having students read the article. (5 mins).
2. Allow them to discuss the key points from the article. (10 mins)

Key takeaways from the article:

- Strikes, killings and closings are all framed in resistance to pay, working conditions and other worker concerns.
- An increase in knowledge workers led to a decline in unionism.

3. Let students view the video, tie it to today’s article and respond to the following questions:

- What good is a transit strike?
Possible answer: Workers showed displeasure with their salary and benefits, causing much upheaval in the community. Such a large loss of revenue for the city made negotiations possible.
- How did it impact citizens?
Possible answer: People missed or were late for work; the city lost millions of dollars in revenue; taxis made more money; people sought other forms of transportation.

4. Discuss key terms with students. (5 mins)

- **Organized labor** – An association of **workers** united as a single, representative entity for the purpose of improving the workers' economic status and working conditions through collective bargaining with employers.
- **Collective bargaining** – This is a process of negotiations between employers and the representatives of a unit of employees aimed at reaching agreements.
- **Vertical Union** – This is a labor union that admits all workers in a given industry irrespective of their craft.

5. Tying It All Together (5 min)

Questions to generate discussion: How many of you have ever been part of a transit workers' strike? How did it impact you?

In New York City, as in many large cities, only 1 in 400 people own a car. Most people depend daily on public transportation such as buses, subways and trains to get to work and school. In August 2003, attempting to increase wages and benefits such as retirement and sick leave, transit workers in the five boroughs held a massive strike whose impact was felt in nearly every home in the city. Collectively, transit workers were able to negotiate all their demands, a feat that may have been impossible on the individual level.

Ask students to consider the perspectives of individuals impacted by the transit strike, including:

- Citizens going to work, including those from other boroughs and the surrounding areas such as New Jersey and Connecticut.
- The workers of the MTA (Metropolitan Transit Authority).
- Students depending on public transportation to get to school.
- Parents of two or more children who attend different schools, possibly in different parts of the city.
- The mayor of the city, who is up for re-election in a few months.

Next, have students write from the perspective of one of the stakeholders in the strike. Give each student one to two minutes to brainstorm. What are some things they had to consider? (10 mins)

Finally, have students act out their points of view. What motives, inclinations or agendas were revealed in the process? (10 mins)

Practice Outside of the Classroom: Have students investigate the latest transit strike (such as SEPTA). What were the terms of the strike? Who was impacted and what were the goals of the union?

What Worked and What I Would Do Differently: Students needed more time to create a complete “case study” of their stakeholder. This is a time-consuming activity that has the potential to be really exciting for students, so making sure that they get time to express themselves / work independently was vitally important. I would shorten the other discussion time to focus on this activity.

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