

# RIGHT TO STRIKE ACTIVITY PACK

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## Introduction

On 30<sup>th</sup> June, somewhere close to a million lecturers, teachers, and other public sector workers will strike for a day as industrial action against pension reforms proposed by the government. This workshop, written by members of the Woodcraft Campaigns & Communications Committee aims to achieve the following:

- ▲ Provoke a debate between members about the right to strike
- ▲ Allow for a debate about the particular issues of pensions
- ▲ Get members to think about their own position, and how they want to respond to the strike
- ▲ Complete a concrete action from the workshop



## Energiser Game – “Workers, Bosses & Politicians”

In a witty and creative reincarnation of Giants, Wizards and Elves, this game both offers the opportunity to run around but also to start thinking about an individual's relationship to others in society.

Workers, Bosses and Politicians works as a giant team version of rock, paper, scissors. Split everyone into two groups. Each group goes to opposite sides of the playing area (maybe 15 metres wide, an average hall size would work perfectly) and a line is demarcated in the middle between the two groups.

Each group together decides which of the three options they want to be: workers, bosses or politicians. Each type has a particular action and either beats or loses against the other types.

**Play the game twice.** The first time use the following:

Workers can beat bosses by striking (Action: Raising arms and shouting ‘No Ifs, No Buts, No Public Sector Cuts!’)

Bosses can beat the government by moving their company to a tax haven (Action: Singing “We’re all going on a tax evasion holiday”)  
Politicians can beat workers by using taxes for their own purposes (Action: Make silly faces at the other group)

When it is clear one group has won, the losers must try and get back to their ‘base’ at their end of the hall and the winning group must try and tag them before they get there.

**Play the game again.** This time use the following:

The politicians can beat the bosses by raising taxes (Action: Sing “Money money money” and make actions to do with money)  
The bosses can beat the workers by not paying them any money  
The workers can beat the government by striking

It’s up to each group whether they want to have a discussion after this game about how they felt playing different roles, or they may want to simply move on and use it purely as a themed energiser activity.

## Introductory Activity – Brief discussion



### Ask in a group:

- ▲ Name some trade unions
- ▲ Do you know anyone in a trade union?
- ▲ What is a trade union?
- ▲ What is a strike?
- ▲ Why do people strike?

## Game – simulation/role play

### Split people into 5 groups:

- ▲ The government
- ▲ An employer
- ▲ ACAS
- ▲ A union
- ▲ Workers

The purpose of this game is to simulate how and why people may choose to go on strike and to demonstrate the complexities at work.



### The Scenario:

The government has run out of money and cannot afford to raise minimum wage. A group of cleaners, paid at the minimum wage are struggling to cope. Because inflation is so high, a pay freeze (no rising in wages) is effectively a pay cut. The workers are not happy. The cleaners work for Woodcraft Inc. a small timber merchant who cannot afford to raise their wages due to the government timber subsidies being cut. The cleaners look to the National Union of Cleaners (NUC) for help...

Each of the following scenarios is then to be given to each group:

### The Government:

You have little money and the economy is failing. Raising the minimum wage would mean increasing costs, something which you cannot do. Subsidies for a British timber market do not seem the most efficient option when cheaper timber can be found from abroad. You realise there is pressure from both employers and workers on both these issues but will press ahead with the plans.

### The Employer:

You are struggling due to government cuts. You feel you cannot raise the wages of the cleaners. You have moved your company to the Cayman Islands to dodge the tax rises.

### The National Union of Cleaners:

You must act on the behalf of the employees in their struggle for better wages. You must engage with the employer to try and raise wages. You

Did you know Woodcraft Folk's use of green & red is not random? Red is historically associated with the political struggle for equality and a fairer society. Green is associated with an understanding of and a respect for the environment.



are deeply frustrated that Woodcraft Inc. has recently moved to the Cayman Islands to avoid paying taxes. You must also campaign on behalf of the workers against the government who you believe should be doing more to help the economy. You may want to ballot your members for strikes, other industrial action or call a national demonstration.

### The Cleaners:

You are struggling to cope with the poor wages you are working on and feel you are being treated unjustly. You have called on the NUC to help out and must approach your union to make sure they can act on your behalf to get you to improve wages. If the time comes, you are prepared to go on strike, but understand that every day you strike, you lose a days pay and things are already tough financially.

### ACAS:

The Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) acts as a mediator in times of disputes between employers and unions. Your job is to try and come to a solution that does not require industrial action. You must try and use negotiation to get a result that everyone is happy with.

### The Simulation:

The simulation can be fairly free in its structure. It may be easiest to place each group in separate geographical locations. It is up to each group who they approach, when and what methods they use. There may be a time where you need to push the game to have an outcome – maybe tell the NUC to give a time limit e.g. ACAS, you have five minutes more negotiation time or the NUC will go on strike.

The game should finish when it comes to a natural conclusion. The most natural of conclusions would be that everyone is happy. It may also conclude with a stalemate with the cleaners on strike and the employer/government not giving in. Either is fine.

### Discussion:

The discussion can be tailored to the needs of the group and on the outcome of the simulation but here are some themes you might like to think about:

- ⤴ Would I go on strike?
- ⤴ Do strikes work?
- ⤴ Is it right that in campaigning for something that I gain, I impact others?
- ⤴ How did I feel playing the role I did in the simulation?
- ⤴ Should everyone have the right to strike?
- ⤴ Are each player in the simulation as self-interested as the simulation suggests?





## Trade Union Songs

If you have time, you may like to check out Bread and Roses, by Ken Loach; a film about workers in New York. But for starters, here are some songs you might like to sing with your group. Or why not take them to the picket line and let all those on strike, join in!

Found an old flag,  
a union banner,  
grey with age,  
heavy with dust,  
something written in red all around it,  
it was battered and torn and the stick was bust.

Took that banner,  
patched it, painted it,  
held it up to the clear sunlight;  
showed a worker struggling with a golden serpent,  
underneath it; 'Workers of the World Unite'.

Why was that banner faded and forgotten,  
were all those battles fought in vane?  
It's certain that worker will strangle that serpent,  
when the old banner flies again.....  
**WHEN THE OLD BANNER FLIES AGAIN!**

Did you know many of the songs in the Woodcraft Folk song book come from protests and trade unions? Even "Link Your Hands Together" is the first verse of a longer protest song that finishes with:  
"Let us march together,  
With firm step and strong,  
As out from the darknes  
We all go along"





## The Right to Strike – Fact sheet

- More than 750,000 public sector workers, lecturers and teachers are expected to strike on the 30<sup>th</sup> June 2011
- They are angry that the government wants to raise the amount that they must pay out of their wages into their pension – the money they get after they retire
- The retirement age is also set to rise to 66
- The strike is expected to lead to lots of schools, colleges, universities, courts, ports and other places of work to close for the day
- Lots of protest actions are expected to take place alongside the strikes in solidarity.
- The European Court of Human Rights has previously ruled that the right to strike is a **human right**
- Under **Article 23 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights** it is also a human right to be a part of a trade union
- Strikes have been a tool used by workers to fight for a number of issues:
  - fairer wages
  - safer and healthier working conditions
  - fairer pension plans
  - job security
- To go on strike, a worker gives up their pay for every day they strike. Long strikes, such as the miners' strike have huge impacts on working communities.





**Woodcraft Folk**

Education for Social Change since 1925

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