

Darjeeling tea pickers continue strike

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THE ARTICLE

Darjeeling tea pickers continue strike

BNE: Talks aimed at ending a strike by tea workers in India's West Bengal state have broken down. Striking tea pickers and leaf sorters from 346 plantations downed tools to demand increased wages and improved working conditions. Union leaders are pushing to increase the daily minimum wage and are balking at suggestions from management officials of productivity related pay. Plantation bosses have stated the doubling of the daily wage to two dollars would be economically unfeasible. Union spokesperson Prabhat Manir said: "Rectifying this impasse is crucial for the future of Darjeeling tea. The current dollar-a-day pay deal amounts to slave labor. It's like squeezing blood from a stone."

The talks broke down after six days of impassioned debate. Tea workers have vowed to continue their strike indefinitely. Minoo Aprabash, a veteran 58-year-old tea picker, defiantly warned her bosses she had little to lose. She said: "We work for a pittance. We work our fingers to the bone to line the wallets of the owners. It's time we got a fair deal." She rebuffed the 46 Rupees a day currently on offer. Her union has requested the intervention of the West Bengal government to resolve the issue by setting and enforcing a minimum wage structure. State mediation may be necessary to end the bitter and sour relations between the two parties, which have deteriorated over the past 28 months.

WARM-UPS

1. A DOLLAR A DAY: Tea plantation workers who pick the world famous Darjeeling tea get paid a dollar a day. In pairs / groups, talk about the morality of paying someone one dollar for up to 12 hours of work a day. What is the minimum hourly rate you'd work for? Have you ever done "slave labor"? What can you buy with one dollar in your country?

2. QUICK ROLE PLAY: Students A are the bosses of a tea company. You think tea is the greatest drink on Earth. Students B are bosses of a coffee company. You think coffee is the greatest drink on Earth. In pairs, role play a discussion between the tea company bosses and the coffee company bosses. Which is the best drink?

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Pay talks / strikes / tea workers / plantations / increased wages / working conditions / slave labor / working your fingers to the bone / a dollar a day

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. TEA: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "tea". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

5. TEA ROLES: In pairs / groups, discuss the following topics related to tea:

- a. The importance of tea to me.
- b. The part tea plays in my life.
- c. The history of tea in my country.
- d. Tea and health.
- e. Teas around the world.
- f. Tea-drinking habits.
- g. Tea or coffee?
- h. English tea, milk tea, iced tea....

Change partners and share what you talked about.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- | | |
|--|-------|
| a. Tea plantation workers across India are on strike. | T / F |
| b. Union leaders are demanding a system of productivity related pay. | T / F |
| c. Plantation owners say doubling wages to \$2 a day is impossible. | T / F |
| d. Many tea workers have cut their hands after squeezing stones. | T / F |
| e. Workers say they will continue their strike for as long as necessary. | T / F |
| f. One worker said she has no bones left on her fingers. | T / F |
| g. Unions have requested the intervention of the local government. | T / F |
| h. The tea is becoming bitter and sour while the workers strike. | T / F |

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| a. talks | arbitration |
| b. downed tools | turned down |
| c. balking | stalemate |
| d. unfeasible | fervent |
| e. impasse | stopped working |
| f. impassioned | peanuts |
| g. a pittance | degenerated |
| h. rebuffed | negotiations |
| i. mediation | hesitating |
| j. deteriorated | impractical |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| a. Talks aimed at | at suggestions |
| b. downed | to the bone |
| c. balking | from a stone |
| d. productivity | down |
| e. It's like squeezing blood | tools |
| f. talks broke | related pay |
| g. work for | relations |
| h. work our fingers | a pittance |
| i. State | ending a strike |
| j. bitter and sour | mediation may be necessary |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

GAP FILL: Put the words in the column on the right into the correct spaces.

Darjeeling tea pickers continue strike

BNE: Talks _____ at ending a strike by tea workers in India's West Bengal state have broken down. Striking tea pickers and leaf sorters from 346 plantations _____ tools to demand increased wages and improved working conditions. Union leaders are _____ to increase the daily minimum wage and are _____ at suggestions from management officials of productivity _____ pay. Plantation bosses have stated the doubling of the daily wage to two dollars would be economically _____. Union spokesperson Prabhat Manir said: "Rectifying this _____ is crucial for the future of Darjeeling tea. The current dollar-a-day pay deal amounts to slave labor. It's like _____ blood from a stone."

The talks broke down after six days of _____ debate. Tea workers have vowed to continue their strike _____. Minoo Aprabash, a veteran 58-year-old tea picker, _____ warned her bosses she had little to lose. She said: "We work for a pittance. We work our fingers to the bone to _____ the wallets of the owners. It's time we got a fair deal." She _____ the 46 Rupees a day currently on offer. Her union has requested the intervention of the West Bengal government to resolve the issue by setting and _____ a minimum wage structure. State _____ may be necessary to end the bitter and sour relations between the two parties, which have _____ over the past 28 months.

impasse
pushing
unfeasible
aimed
balking
squeezing
related
downed
defiantly
deteriorated
enforcing
impassioned
mediation
indefinitely
line
rebuffed

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words **'tea'** and **'strike'**.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. GAP FILL: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the gap fill. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT TEA SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about tea.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- broken
- tools
- balking
- doubling
- impasse
- stone
- impassioned
- veteran
- pittance
- rebuffed
- structure
- sour

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. What was your initial reaction to this headline?
- b. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- c. Do you like Darjeeling tea?
- d. What is your favorite kind of tea?
- e. Are you predominantly a tea or coffee drinker?
- f. Is tea an important cultural asset in your country?
- g. What do you think of tea plantation bosses paying their workers a dollar a day?
- h. Do you think there should be a world boycott of goods from companies that pay such low wages?
- i. Have you ever gone or would you ever go on strike?
- j. Have you ever asked someone for something and felt it was like squeezing blood from a stone?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What did you think about what you read?
- c. What is your image of Indian tea plantations?
- d. Have you ever worked for a pittance or a near pittance?
- e. Have you ever felt you worked your fingers to the bone?
- f. What do you think life is like in India on a dollar a day?
- g. What do you think of the tea plantation bosses?
- h. For how long do you think the tea plantation workers should strike?
- i. What kind of slave labor exists in your country?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What question would you like to ask about this topic?
- b. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- c. Was there a question you didn't like?
- d. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- e. What did you like talking about?
- f. Do you want to know how anyone else answered the questions?
- g. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

ROLE PLAY: This role play is to discuss how to settle the impasse between tea plantation workers and owners. Team up with classmates who have been assigned the same role as you. Develop your roles and discuss ideas and “strategies” before the role play begins.

Introduce yourself to the other role players before the role play begins.

Role A – Tea plantation worker

A dollar a day is totally ridiculous. You work 12 hours a day. You are treated like a slave. You have a family. The boss drives a Mercedes. Company profits were the highest ever last year. You will strike forever if you have to.

Think of other reasons with your “team” why your wages should be doubled.

Role B – Tea plantation boss

No industry ever doubles its workers’ wages. If these workers don’t want to work, there are other people who will work. The workers should protect the international name of Darjeeling. Money from profits is spent on R & D and international marketing. Workers are ungrateful.

Think of other reasons with your “team” why wages cannot be doubled.

Role C – Local government mediator

You have a lot of tea plantation shares. A long strike will hurt your pocket. Your sisters and cousins work 12 hours a day in the plantations. You want them to have more money. A long strike would damage the reputation of Darjeeling tea. You hate the tea plantation boss, who is very rich.

With your “team”, decide what you should do.

Role D – Tea drinker

You are outraged that plantation workers receive just one dollar a day. You hate greedy company owners. You will organize an international boycott of Darjeeling tea if wages are not doubled. You think management should receive a pay cut to allow workers a pay raise.

Think of other reasons with your “team” why wages should be doubled.

Change roles and repeat the role play. Comment in groups about the differences between the two role plays.

In pairs / groups, discuss whether you really believe in what you said while you were in your roles.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

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BNE: Talks aimed at _____ by tea workers in India's West Bengal state have broken down. Striking tea pickers and leaf sorters from 346 plantations _____ to demand increased wages and improved working conditions. Union leaders are pushing to increase the daily minimum wage and are _____ suggestions from management officials of productivity related pay. Plantation bosses have stated the _____ the daily wage to two dollars would be economically unfeasible. Union spokesperson Prabhat Manir said: "Rectifying this _____ is crucial for the future of Darjeeling tea. The current dollar-a-day pay deal amounts to slave labor. It's like _____ blood from a stone."

The talks broke down after six days of _____ debate. Tea workers have vowed to continue their strike indefinitely. Minoo Aprabash, a _____ 58-year-old tea picker, defiantly warned her bosses she had _____. She said: "We work for a _____. We work our fingers to the bone to _____ the wallets of the owners. It's time we got a fair deal." She rebuffed the 46 Rupees a day currently on offer. Her union has requested the _____ of the West Bengal government to resolve the issue by setting and _____ a minimum wage structure. State mediation may be necessary to end the bitter and sour relations between the two parties, which have _____ over the past 28 months.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on Darjeeling tea. Share your findings with your class in the next lesson.

3. TEA: Make a poster on teas from around the world. Include cultural traditions from different countries. Show your poster to your classmates in your next lesson and explain what you found out.

4. LETTER: Write a letter to the head of the Darjeeling tea plantation management. Explain what you think of the impasse between workers and management. Give advice on what you think should be done to resolve the strike. Read your letter to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

a. F b. F c. T d. F e. T f. F g. T h. F

SYNONYM MATCH:

a. talks	negotiations
b. downed tools	stopped working
c. balking	hesitating
d. unfeasible	impractical
e. impasse	stalemate
f. impassioned	fervent
g. a pittance	peanuts
h. rebuffed	turned down
i. mediation	arbitration
j. deteriorated	degenerated

PHRASE MATCH:

a. Talks aimed at	ending a strike
b. downed	tools
c. balking	at suggestions
d. productivity	related pay
e. It's like squeezing blood	from a stone
f. talks broke	down
g. work for	a pittance
h. work our fingers	to the bone
i. State	mediation may be necessary
j. bitter and sour	relations

GAP FILL:

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The talks broke down after six days of **impassioned** debate. Tea workers have vowed to continue their strike **indefinitely**. Minoo Aprabash, a veteran 58-year-old tea picker, **defiantly** warned her bosses she had little to lose. She said: "We work for a pittance. We work our fingers to the bone to **line** the wallets of the owners. It's time we got a fair deal." She **rebuffed** the 46 Rupees a day currently on offer. Her union has requested the intervention of the West Bengal government to resolve the issue by setting and **enforcing** a minimum wage structure. State **mediation** may be necessary to end the bitter and sour relations between the two parties, which have **deteriorated** over the past 28 months.