



Strategy #11 – Change through Strikes Listening Guide

A strike is a demonstration in which people refuse to work or to attend school as a means of protest. Strikes are often organized around specific concerns or complaints against a government or employer and are intended to exert economic pressure for demands to be met. These are the voices of people who sought to promote change through strikes. Please review the quotations and answer the questions below.

	Alfred Bondos, Poland	Jaime Armando Rodriguez Torres, Colombia	Cindy Nzaliwani, South Africa
Why did people decide to strike?			
Who participated in the strike?			
What actions were taken against the strikers?			

For further discussion:

In what ways were these experiences similar?

In what ways were these experiences different?

Why is unity so important to the outcome of a strike?

Change through Strikes Quotations

Alfred Bondos, Poland

It was like a vicious circle. This tension led to a bad atmosphere at work. My coworkers and I noticed that life was unjust. Even people weren't paid the same for the same work. We had to show that we didn't agree with such a big injustice. We decided to leave our workplace and shout "We don't want to work!" The protest lasted from the 8th to the 11th of June. That was a real solidarity movement. There was no division into workers or white-collar workers. Our protest was successful. We stood arm in arm. We shouted our demands but we stayed in the factory not to tease the militia. We just avoided being beaten up. Due to our actions, the authorities signed our demands. It happened for the first time in the Polish post war period. It was an incredible feeling. We started to believe that we could change something. Our victory influenced actions of workers in Silesia and the coastland...

We were together and against the martial law. A lot of our leaders had been arrested but I managed to escape. I had taken part in the organization of the strike. I was responsible for the contact between the workers and the committee through the radio. We weren't safe, as army helicopters had arrived. We were aware of what was happening in the country, but we were determined. Motorized reserves of the Citizens' Militia [Polish state police] stormed the factory. Motorized reserves of the Citizens' Militia used bats and tear gas to drive us away. We were holding hands in order to stay inside instead of fighting. That was the foundation of Solidarity. I stayed on the radio and I tried to protect workers, asked the militia not to hurt workers. I reminded the workers about peaceful resistance. We avoided bloodshed.

Background: Solidarity began as a trade union in 1980 and drove a national civil resistance movement that eventually forced the country's first free elections since Communist rule in 1990.

Jaime Armando Rodriguez Torres, Colombia

Well, those were very, very heartfelt events built by all of us. And when I say all of us, I mean it was built upon a civic nature. I mean, everyone was equal, everyone was involved with no exclusions. Almost all of these strikes were done starting from a council meeting setting, like in the era of Greek democracy if you may. Ours was a time and place where all the people knew everyone, and in the town center we gathered to discuss ideas such as how to lower the electric bills, and this became an idea that we could all agree on. Then after that, what we did was to demand of the government. The government did not accept a general strike, so we planned a strike, the strike was a beautiful thing, and it was very interactive and very effective. By effective, I mean that no one went to work during the day, and that transportation was stopped, and that people did creative things. The largest strike was on May 23, 1980. People were told not to come out of their houses. That is to say, the government told them not to come out of their houses. The government said that no one could go out on the street, but people came out anyway. They did not only go out to the

streets but the priest sounded the bells of the churches, and the people flew flags from the balconies, and ladies were shooting off fireworks, and they made noise with pots all day. This civic strike turned into a big party and we eventually gained what we were asking for. Always, the strikes had very strong support from the populace. It was deeply felt and very democratic because it was the entire population that took the decision, and also, of course, the civic strikes ended in victories.

Cindy Nzaliwani, South Africa

Yes. There's one incident that happened. It's a massacre in a way in 1976. I was young at the time. I was very small because I was only started school. As the years grow up, as the years go on I know I was reading in the papers and that there are so many students that died in 1976 because of the government that I was telling you that was bad. So, like I'm Black. I can't learn all my studies in Afrikaans [a language derived from Dutch colonialists]. I had to get my language somewhere and it has to be a different language. So they wanted the students, the Black students to learn in Afrikaans, each and every study; from math, Afrikaans, whatever. There is going to be Afrikaans. So the students said "No way, we can't take that! If it's gonna be like that then we are going to go on strike!" Then all the children came out on the road; they were striking. And the government I was telling you about, the previous government, the Apartheid government, they shoot the children. Not that they were warning them, like they were warning us with rubber bullets. They were shooting them to death and there's this particular student, Hector Pieterse, that died that day. And yeah, we still like remember those children because they were standing for their right. They had to stand up because they can't learn in Afrikaans.