



New Internationalist

The people, the ideas, the action in the fight for global justice

Challenge to Walmart

New Internationalist Easier English

Ready Lesson: Intermediate /

Upper Intermediate

Focus: Developing reading skills;
vocabulary; developing discussion skills;
essay writing skills

Speaking

Discussion questions:

- Have you ever worked in a supermarket? Would you like to? Why/Why not?
- Why do people join trade unions?
- Why do some big companies not like trade unions?
- Can you think of any examples from your country of companies which have tried to ban trade unions?
- What do you know about the civil rights movement in the US in the 1960s?

Reading

Read the article below and find out what the following things refer to:

OUR Walmart

Black Friday

47 states

June 2013

Freedom Riders

100 people

Challenge to Walmart

Walmart is the biggest private-sector employer in the world and the biggest company in the US, but the workers are not happy. Workers started a group called “OUR Walmart” two years ago say they will protest on Black Friday (the day after Thanksgiving and the busiest shopping day of the year). They will demand a living wage, healthcare that is cheap enough to pay for, regular work plans and no more attacks on their members.

“OUR Walmart” wants to be more successful than last year. Then, on Black Friday, 500 workers left their job and demonstrated with 30,000 others in 47 states. They stopped anyone getting through the road to a Walmart store in Los Angeles for two hours before they were arrested. 1,000 supporters were watching. This type of dramatic action has been shared in traditional and social media. So the workers all across the US are now connected and feel brave enough to fight their employer.

There were more protest actions through the year. In June, 100 workers went on strike for 2 weeks and went on bus journeys across the US. It was like the “Freedom Riders” of the civil rights movement.

Walmart is famous for not working well with the unions. They punished 50 strikers and illegally fired another 20. But “OUR Walmart” did not stop. On 5 September, they organised more protests, and more than 100 people were arrested.

It is very difficult for the workers. Walmart does not allow trades unions. They closed down stores that had union certification elections. So activists are not looking for legal recognition or collective bargaining rights. One organizer explained: ‘We are taking action now rather than waiting for the law to do something.’

As a result, Walmart has changed to allow a structure where people work together more. And a strong community has grown up. They are fighting for more group power – this might show the future of the labour movement in the US.

<http://newint.org/sections/agenda/2013/11/01/challenge-to-walmart/>

Vocabulary

1. A wage which is enough to live on

2. A synonym for *protested*

3. To protest by stopping work

4. A synonym for *dismissed* or *sacked*

5. When a company accepts the existence of a trade union

6. When workers negotiate together as a group

Debating

- Take five minutes and think about your own opinions. What do *you* think about people's rights to join trade unions? Do you think that workers should have more rights or fewer?
- Feel free to take notes to help you remember what you want to say, but remember – you are not writing an essay!
- Now, find one or two people who disagree with you, sit down with them and try to change their minds – you only have ten minutes to do so!
- Finally, report your discussion to the rest of the class.

Homework – writing

Read the original: <http://newint.org/sections/agenda/2013/11/01/challenge-to-walmart/>

- Then plan and write an essay in response to the following question:

Many people believe that workers should have more rights in the workplace. What do you think? Use examples from your own knowledge and experience.

- Remember to include an introduction and a conclusion, and to write in clear paragraphs.