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**ESL Podcast 880 – Forming a Union**

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**GLOSSARY**

**flyer** – a piece of paper with words and/or images, usually on just one side, used to share information or get interest in something

\* Let's print up some flyers about our store's sale and distribute them to people walking by on the street.

**labor union** – an organization whose members are people who work in the same business or industry, and who tries to get better work conditions and better pay for those people

\* The labor union is demanding better health insurance for its members.

**management** – the executives and/or directors of a company; the people who have the power to make decisions about how a company is run and that affect the other people who work there

\* Management has decided to increase the number of vacation days for all employees this year.

**to demand** – to ask for something and insist on having it

\* We'll never get more pay unless we demand it.

**higher pay** – more money paid for one's work; a larger amount of money received in exchange for one's work

\* The new job has higher pay, but it requires working longer hours with a lot more stress.

**work conditions** – one's surroundings and the environment in which one works, including the place, the equipment, and one's co-workers

\* This is such a noisy factory! We could improve work conditions by giving the employees ear plugs.

**a say in** – influence in making a decision; some ability to participate in a process and have one's opinion be important

\* Everyone in the family – even the young children – has a say in choosing which charities to contribute to at the end of each year.

**hiring and firing procedures** – the rules an organization follows when bringing new employees into the company and telling current employees that they will lose their job

\* The company's hiring and firing procedures require keeping extensive documentation of candidates' qualifications and employees' performance.



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**to band together** – to work together with other people as part of a team for some particular purpose

\* The teachers are banding together to try to make the school safer for students and for themselves.

**bargaining power** – a measure of the strength that one has in negotiating something; a measure of one's ability to control the outcome of a negotiation

\* We have more bargaining power, because we aren't in a hurry to reach an agreement, but the other side has very limited time.

**job security** – a measure of how likely one is to keep one's job; the stability of one's employment

\* State government jobs don't pay very well, but they offer great job stability.

**to agitate** – to argue for what one wants, often with other people, especially for social change

\* Several environmentalists in front of city hall are agitating for greater restrictions on new oil pipeline development.

**collective bargaining** – negotiations done by a group of workers joined together as one unit

\* If the collective bargaining doesn't get the union members what they want, they will go on strike.

**rank and file** – ordinary employees or members; not leaders or managers

\* Executives get up to eight weeks of vacation each year, but the rank and file get only two weeks.

**at long last** – finally; after a long period of waiting for something

\* Winston has been trying to get his book published for years, and at long last, he has found a publisher who is interested in his work.

**in or out** – a phrase used to ask someone if he or she wants to participate or become involved in something

\* This is a fantastic investment opportunity, but the minimum amount is \$2,000. Are you in or out?

**he who hesitates is lost** – a phrase referring to a person who waits too long while deciding whether to do something, so that the opportunity is no longer available

\* Nancy took a long time thinking about whether she wanted to buy the used car and then lost the chance to buy it. He who hesitates is lost.



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**to look before (one) leaps** – to take time to think about something carefully before one decides to do it or to begin participating in something  
\* Jennel always looks before she leaps and never agrees to do anything without knowing all of the details.

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### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Jimmy mean when he says, “All of us need to band together”?
  - a) All of the employees need to work together.
  - b) All of the employees need to start a musical band.
  - c) All of the employees need to sign a new contract.
2. What is job security?
  - a) A job that pays enough to pay for one’s expenses.
  - b) A job that has security guards in the office.
  - c) A job that one will be able to keep for a long time.

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### WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

#### **flyer**

The word “flyer,” in this podcast, means a piece of paper with words and/or images used to share information or gain interest in something: “Here’s a flyer about the grand opening for the new grocery store.” A “flyer” or “flier” is someone who travels in an airplane: “Flyers always complain about not having enough room for their legs.” A “frequent flyer program” is an airline program that rewards people who travel a lot by giving them points that they can exchange for products or discounts: “Laurel only travels on Acme Airlines, because she’s trying to get elite status in their frequent flyer program.” Finally, a “high flier” is someone who is very successful and wealthy: “Eugenia is a high flier in the investment world.”

#### **at long last**

In this podcast, the phrase “at long last” means finally, or after a long period of waiting for something: “At long last, Donald asked Francine to marry him. They’ve been dating for 12 years!” A “last call” is the last time when customers can order a drink before a bar closes for the evening: “The last call here is at 1:30 a.m.” A “last-ditch effort” is a final attempt to do something at the last minute: “The politicians are making a last-ditch effort to reach an agreement.” Finally, the phrase “the last straw” describes something that makes one very angry after many other things have already made a person angry: “Justine is often late, but when she was late for our wedding, it was the last straw!”



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**CULTURE NOTE**

**The AFL-CIO**

The American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) is a national organization representing 56 national and international unions. Combined, they represent more than 11 million workers. From 1955, when the organization was founded, until 2005, the AFL-CIO represented nearly all of the “organized workers” (employees participating in a union) in the United States. However, in 2005, some large unions “broke away from” (separated from) the organization, creating a “rival” (competing) organization called the Change to Win Federation.

The AFL-CIO tries to help people who want to join unions, so that they can improve their working conditions through collective bargaining. The organization also provides training opportunities for people who want to improve their job skills and possibly “change careers” (begin working in a different field or industry).

The AFL-CIO provides a lot of information to people about important issues. They try to “keep workers informed” (make sure people have accurate, updated information) about workers’ rights, health care, retirement savings, “cost of living” (typical expenses in a particular area), and more.

The organization has often worked with civil rights organizations and the women’s movement to fight against “employment discrimination” (when jobs are given to people based on their skin color or gender). The organization’s website includes a section where people who believe they have been victims of discrimination can read about their rights under different circumstances, such as if they become pregnant or if they “get hurt on the job” (become injured while working). The website then provides instructions about what they should do if they believe an employer has “violated” (gone against; broken the rules regarding) their rights.

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Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – a; 2 – c



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**COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT**

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 880: Forming a Union.

This is as a Second Language Podcast episode 880. I'm your host Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Our website is ESLPod.com. Go there and become a member of ESL Podcast.

This episode is a dialog between Norma and Jimmy about forming a labor union at their job. Let's get started.

[start of dialog]

Norma: What is this?

Jimmy: It's a flyer for a meeting I've called to talk about forming a labor union here.

Norma: Here? Do you think the management will let us?

Jimmy: They can't stop us. We're working longer and longer hours and we need to demand higher pay. We also need better work conditions and a say in hiring and firing procedures. All of us need to band together to have better bargaining power.

Norma: I don't know. I want to be better paid and to have job security like everybody else, but I'm afraid of what will happen when we start agitating.

Jimmy: I'll tell you what will happen: The management will finally hear what we have to say. With collective bargaining, the rank and file will get what we deserve, at long last. Are you in or out?

Norma: I'll have to think about it.

Jimmy: He who hesitates is lost.

Norma: Yes, but I was always taught to look before I leap.

[end of dialog]



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Our dialog begins with Norma asking Jimmy, “What is this?” Jimmy says “It’s a flyer for a meeting.” A “flyer” (flyer) here means a piece of paper that has some text on it, some words on it, perhaps also some images on it. Usually a flyer is one side of a piece of paper that contains information about a meeting or some event that you want people to know about, and perhaps to come to.

Jimmy says “It’s a flyer for a meeting I’ve called” – meaning I have decided to organize – “to talk about forming a labor union here.” A “labor (labor) union” is an organization of workers, of employees, who get together and decide that they are going to negotiate with their employer, the company that pays their salaries, together as one big group. The idea here of course, is that they will have more power, more ability to get what they want in terms of pay and working conditions and so forth. Labor unions have been around for many years. In the United States, they are not as popular as they are in some other countries. They are not as popular now as they were even 40, 50 years ago here in the United States.

Norma says “Here? Do you think the management will let us?” “The management” refers to the directors of the company, the bosses, the people who make the decisions, people who would not be considered part of the union. The union, in this case, would be for the workers who don’t make as much money perhaps, and don’t have the same power as the management has. Norma is asking if Jimmy thinks the management will “let us.” That is, will allow us, will permit us to do this.

Jimmy says “They can’t stop us.” “To stop someone” means to prevent them from doing something. Jimmy says “They can’t stop us,” they cannot stop us. “We’re working longer and longer hours” – longer hours are more hours – “and we need to demand higher pay.” “To demand something” is to ask for it but in a very forceful way, to insist on it. “You must give me more money.” That’s a demand. The demand here is for higher pay. “Pay” is the money that you get in your salary, you get from your employer, for the work you do. “Higher pay” would be more money.

We all, of course, want higher pay. I want higher pay. In fact, if I don’t get paid more, Center for Educational Development, I’m leaving this job. Forget it! I’m out of here. Oh, wait a minute. I actually need this job. So, let’s continue.

Jimmy continues by saying “We also need better work conditions and a say in hiring and firing procedures.” “Work conditions” refers to the environment or the situation where you work - is it a safe place to work, for example. Jimmy says the employees need better work conditions and a say in hiring and firing procedures.



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“To have a say (say) in something” means to have an influence on something, an influence in making a decision. Your children don't have a say in where you're going to eat for dinner tonight. You just say “Children, we're going to go to this restaurant and you don't have a say in it.” You don't get to decide – at least, that is the way it was in my family when we went to a restaurant, which wasn't very often.

Jimmy says that the employees should have a say in hiring and firing procedures. “To hire” (hire) means to give someone a job. “To fire” (fire) here means to cause someone to lose their job. You're saying, “You can no longer work here.” You get rid of an employee. That's “to fire.” So Jimmy wants the employees to have a say in hiring and firing procedures. “Procedures” are the rules or the steps that you follow to do something. Jimmy goes on to say, “All of us need to band together to have better bargaining power.” “To band (band) together” means to work together. “Bargaining power” is how much power, how much strength, if you will, you have in negotiating with someone else. If you have a bunch of employees, a lot of employees, who get together and say, “We're not going to work anymore until you give us more money,” the company may not have a lot of options. They may need you to work right away or they'll lose a lot of money. So they say, “Okay, all right. We'll give you more money. We'll give you a higher salary.” That would be an example of “bargaining power.” The employees, by banding together, have more bargaining power, more negotiating power.

Norma says “I don't know. I want to be better paid and to have job security like everybody else but I'm afraid of what will happen when we start agitating.” “Job security” is knowing that you are going to have a job next week, that you're not going to be fired. Nowadays, it's very difficult to get a lot of job security in many companies. Job security is something Norma wants but she's afraid of what will happen when we – that is, Jimmy, Norma and the other employees – start agitating. “To agitate” (agitate) means to start causing problems or to start arguing for what you want, to start protesting, to let people know that you want some sort of change in society or in this particular situation.

Jimmy says, “I'll tell you what will happen. The management will finally hear what we have to say.” The management will hear our message. “With collective bargaining, the rank and file will get what we deserve, at long last.” “Collective bargaining” is the situation I mentioned earlier, where everyone gets together and you negotiate with the employer as a group. The boss doesn't talk to one person and then another person and then another person and negotiate or come to an agreement on their salary individually. The boss has to negotiate with the entire group, as one unit, if you will. That's collective bargaining.



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“Collective” is an adjective meaning altogether as a group. “The rank (rank) and file (file)” refers to the ordinary employees or ordinary members of an organization, not the leaders, not the people in charge, not the management, in this case. “At long last” means finally after a long period of waiting. Jimmy is saying that with collective bargaining the rank and file “will get what we deserve, at long last.” Then he asks Norma, “Are you in or out?” That expression, “in or out,” is used to ask someone whether they’re going to participate or not. “Are you going to join us or not?” Norma says, “I’ll have to think about it.”

Jimmy uses an old expression in response. He says, “He who hesitates is lost.” “To hesitate” means to wait before making a decision, to go, “Oh, well, I’m not sure,” and you think about it for a while before you decide yes or no. “To be lost” means that you will lose the opportunity, that if you wait too long, the idea is, you won’t be able to take advantage of the opportunity. So, if you’re at a party and you see a beautiful girl in the room and you are thinking about going over and talking to her, if you hesitate too long, if you wait too long, some other gentlemen will walk up and talk to her and you will lose the opportunity. “He who hesitates is lost.”

Norma says, “Yes, but I was always taught to look before I leap.” Norma responds with another old saying, “to look before you leap” (leap). “To leap” means to jump, especially if you’re jumping off a high place onto a lower place. “To look before you leap” means to make sure you know where you’re going. If you jump off of a very high place, you could hurt yourself. So, you need to look before you leap to make sure it’s a good decision. This is sort of the opposite of the other expression, “He who hesitates is lost.” “To look before you leap” means to consider something carefully, to consider your decisions carefully before making them.

Now let’s listen to the dialog this time, at a normal speed.

[start of dialog]

Norma: What is this?

Jimmy: It’s a flyer for a meeting I’ve called to talk about forming a labor union here.

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Jimmy: They can’t stop us. We’re working longer and longer hours and we need to demand higher pay. We also need better work conditions and a say in hiring



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and firing procedures. All of us need to band together to have better bargaining power.

Norma: I don't know. I want to be better paid and to have job security like everybody else, but I'm afraid of what will happen when we start agitating.

Jimmy: I'll tell you what will happen: The management will finally hear what we have to say. With collective bargaining, the rank and file will get what we deserve, at long last. Are you in or out?

Norma: I'll have to think about it.

Jimmy: He who hesitates is lost.

Norma: Yes, but I was always taught to look before I leap.

[end of dialog]

At long last, we come to the point in the podcast episode where we thank our wonderful scriptwriter, Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you, Lucy.

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thank you for listening. Come back and listen to us again right here on ESL Podcast.

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