

Before reading the article...

What is your favourite fast food restaurant? Why?

Have you ever worked in fast food? Was it a positive or negative experience?

How much is the minimum wage in your home country? Is it enough to live on?

In your home country, is working at a fast food joint considered a good job?

Global fast food uprising with coordinated strike in 33 countries

Fast-food workers are planning a global strike for better pay and working conditions, with actions set to take place in 150 U.S. cities and 32 other countries in a **bid to exert** pressure on multinational companies.

Strikes are planned for May 15 across five continents in countries including Morocco, Japan, India, Belgium, Germany, Brazil, Argentina and New Zealand, where workers will stage a protest at the McDonald's headquarters in Auckland. Other strikes will target Burger King, Wendy's and KFC.

The actions were announced Wednesday in New York, at a meeting during which fast-food workers and union leaders detailed how they intended to expand a movement that began with a **walkout** in November 2012. On that occasion, some 200 workers went on strike in New York City, demanding a pay increase to \$15 per hour and the right to unionize without **retaliation**.

Since then, thousands have followed, organizing protests in more than 100 cities across the U.S., where workers' demand to earn a 'living' wage has become a national **rallying cry**.

"It's amazing that our fight for \$15 has inspired workers around the world," said Ashley Cathey, a McDonald's employee in Memphis, Tenn. "The highly-profitable fast-food industry needs to know we won't stop fighting until our voices are heard," she added.

In the U.S., more than two-thirds of minimum-wage workers are women, and many single mothers struggle to take care of their families on \$7.25 per hour or less, according to the National Women's Law Center.

In March, McDonald's agreed to pay \$500,000 to workers who filed a lawsuit against the company alleging **wage theft**. A nationwide survey found 90 percent of fast-food workers reported money was taken from their wages illegally.

The International Union of Food, Agricultural, Hotel, Restaurant, Catering, Tobacco and Allied Workers' Associations (IUF) said U.S. fast-food workers inspired workers internationally to join them "in a fight for higher pay and better rights on the job." The IUF represents 12 million workers in 126 countries.

In Denmark, one McDonald's employee said she planned to protest in solidarity with workers in the U.S.

"In Denmark, McDonald's pays me \$21 an hour and respects our union, so I was surprised when I heard workers in the U.S. had to fight so hard for just \$15 and better rights," Louise Rantzau said in a statement.

In a notable success for the movement to increase pay, Seattle Mayor Ed Mur-

ray announced a plan last week to increase the city's minimum wage to \$15 per hour, the highest in the country, in response to unions' growing calls to close the **income gap**.

McDonald's has taken notice of the growing **unrest**. In their latest annual report, they have warned **shareholders** of the threat of protests and declining **morale** among their workforce. Market analysts have adjusted share prices accordingly.

Vocab Match

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1) Bid _____ | a) an idea that leads to action |
| 2) Exert _____ | b) attitude, usually about work |
| 3) Walkout _____ | c) the disparity between the rich and the poor |
| 4) Retaliation _____ | d) negative consequences; punishment |
| 5) Rallying cry _____ | e) attempt |
| 6) Wage theft _____ | f) people who own stock in a company |
| 7) Income gap _____ | g) a strike |
| 8) Shareholders _____ | h) money illegally taken from workers' paychecks |
| 9) Morale _____ | i) forcefully apply |
| 10) Unrest _____ | j) Discontent; resistance |

Comprehension questions

Respond to the following questions in complete sentences:

- 1) In which city is McDonald's headquartered?
- 2) In which city did the Fight for 15 campaign begin? When?
- 3) What percentage of American fast food workers are women?
- 4) What percentage of American fast food workers report illegal wage deductions?
- 5) What is the total membership of the IUF?
- 6) How much do Danish McDonald's workers get paid?
- 7) Which US city has announced it will soon have the country's highest minimum wage?
- 8) How has McDonald's responded to the growing unrest within their workforce?

Discussion Questions

- 1) What are the wages like for fast food workers in your country? Do they have a union?
- 2) In your opinion, what is a fair wage for fast food workers?
- 3) Have you ever been on strike?
- 4) Are you a fast food worker? Would you join these strikes if they were being organised in your town?
- 5) What type of arguments do you think companies like McDonald's use to argue against the strikes?

ANSWER KEY

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1) Bid __e__ | a) an idea that leads to action |
| 2) Exert __i__ | b) attitude, usually about work |
| 3) Walkout __g__ | c) the disparity between the rich and the poor |
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| 9) Morale __b__ | i) forcefully apply |
| 10) Unrest __j__ | j) Discontent; resistance |

NOTE, #8: students often do not understand "stock" in this context.

Respond to the following questions in complete sentences:

- 1) In which city is McDonald's headquartered?
Auckland, New Zealand
- 2) In which city did the Fight for 15 campaign begin? When?
New York City, November 2012
- 3) What percentage of American fast food workers are women?
2/3
- 4) What percentage of American fast food workers report illegal wage deductions?
90%
- 5) What is the total membership of the IUF?
12 million
- 6) How much do Danish McDonald's workers get paid?
\$21 per hour
- 7) Which US city has announced it will soon have the country's highest minimum wage?
Seattle
- 8) How has McDonald's responded to the growing unrest within their workforce?
Warned shareholders to expect disruption and lower share prices