

VOICES OF '74 – STRIKE (B)

STRIKE: PART 3 AND PART 4

TEACHER OVERVIEW

The UWC strike occurred over fourteen days in May 1974. The testimonies reveal insights into who was leading the strike, the different community reactions to the strike and reference the devastating Dublin and Monaghan bombs of the same month. Testimonies look back on the UWC strike as a time of community solidarity and celebration, while others detail intimidation and the despair that marked the failure of the Power Sharing Executive.

These activities use the testimonies to evaluate who was leading the strike, give students the opportunity to investigate key moments in the strike, such as Wilson's infamous 'spongers' speech, while also allowing students to reflect on the positive and negative reactions to the strike.

KEY INQUIRY QUESTIONS

- Who led the UWC strike?
- Why did the devastating Dublin and Monaghan bombs not have a decisive impact on what was happening in the North?
- Why did the Back to Work campaign fail?
- What impact did Wilson's 'spongers' speech have on the development of the UWC strike?
- How did people feel during the UWC strike?


PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

- Students will have completed the earlier sections on leading up to May 1974, and will have looked at the Strike One and Strike Two material.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

1. Students should be able to determine who led the UWC strike.
2. Students should independently assess the different opinions on the UWC strike and understand that it was viewed both positively and negatively by different sections of the community.
3. Students should be able to utilise the videos and the transcripts to answer historical questions.

CONTENT

 Video Clips: [Strike: Part 3](#) and [Strike: Part 4](#).

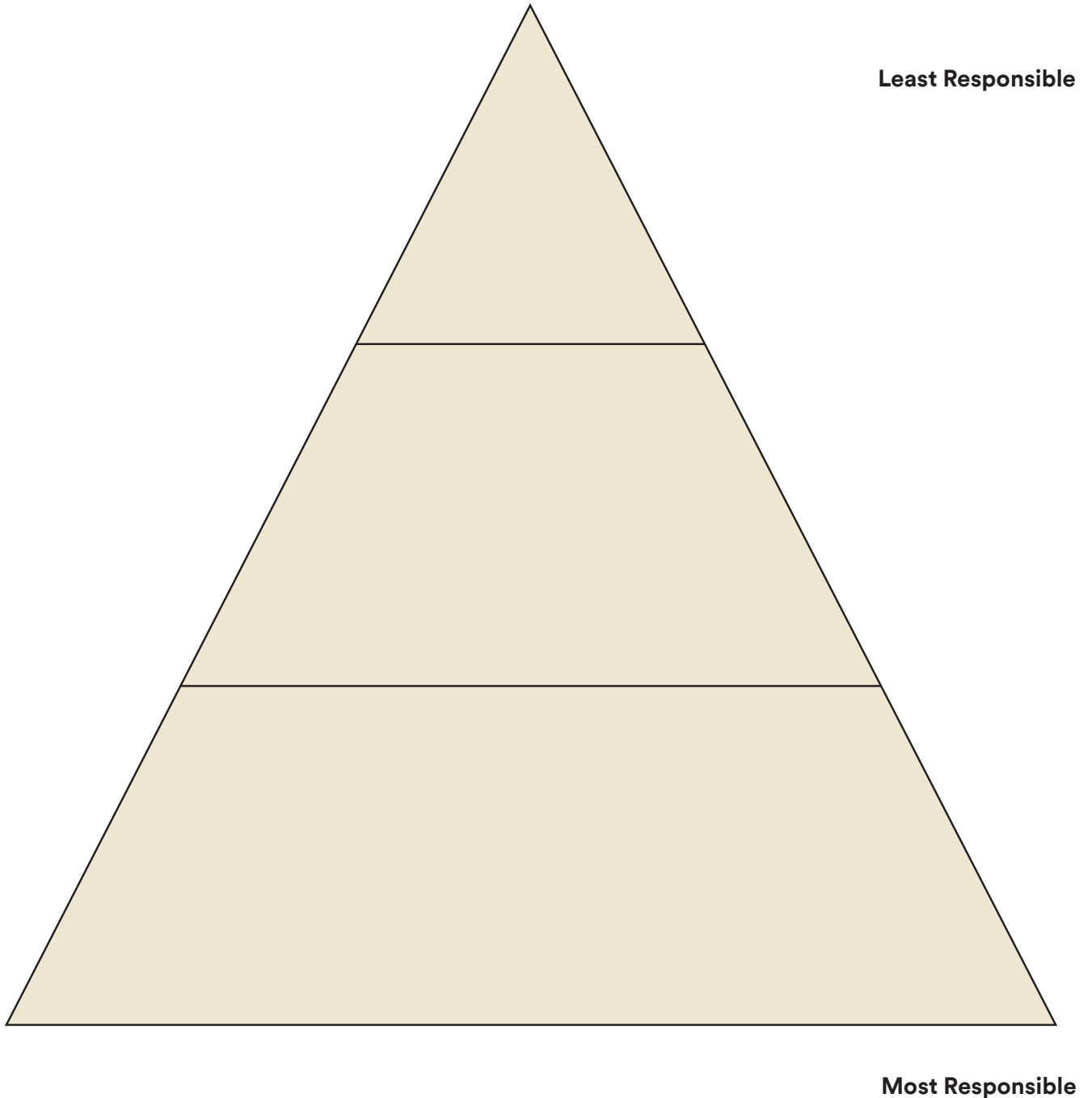
Students are encouraged to watch each of the videos in their entirety, and this is noted in the resource.

ACTIVITY 1 - PYRAMID



- Listen to each testimony in [Strike: Part 3](#) carefully.
- List down who you think is responsible from what you hear.
- Place them in the Pyramid of Responsibility – Most Responsible to Least Responsible

Who was most responsible for the Strikes?



PYRAMID OF RESPONSIBILITY

ACTIVITY 2 - WRITING

- After investigating who was responsible for the UWC strike, students answer the following: Who was most responsible for the UWC strike? Students should use their Pyramid of Responsibility to help them answer the question. Why did they place them in this order?

Explain who was responsible for the UWC strike.

ACTIVITY 3 - DISCUSS

STUDENT OBJECTIVE

- Students have a discussion on how the UWC coordinated the Strike Action in 1974.
- Students create a list of the communication methods they think might have been used.

How was the strike action coordinated?



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ACTIVITY 4 – PAIRED WORK



In pairs, students should consider [Strike: Part 3](#) and write a brief answer to the following question.

Explain why Unionist politicians, workers, and paramilitaries attempted to work together on the UWC strike.



Politicians



Workers



Paramilitaries

Was it a successful collaboration?

³[File:Ian Paisley 1970.png - Wikimedia Commons](#)

⁴[File:The Right to Strike.jpg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

⁵[File:Flag of the Ulster Defence Association.svg - Wikimedia Commons](#)

ACTIVITY 5: SOURCE WORK



Students should answer the following source question on [Strike: Part 3](#).

- How useful is this video for a historian studying who was responsible for taking control of the UWC strike in May 1974?
- Students should use a quote from each of the testimonies and then decide which testimony that they think is the most useful. (**Transcripts provided below**)

- Which source do you think provides the most useful evidence?

TRANSCRIPT OF TESTIMONIES FROM STRIKE: PART 3



Please note that some of the extracts below are taken from the extended versions available online ([Strike iii](#)).

Mike Nesbitt

So in terms of who was organising and controlling the strike, you've got three groups, you've got the workers, you've got the politicians, and you have got the paramilitaries. So if you're looking at it as a pyramid, which I think mightn't be a bad analogy, let me say this, it wasn't the workers and it wasn't the politicians who were at the peak.

Don Anderson

And several days in, I mean, actually quite a few days in. At the beginning of the strike, Paisley, was in North America conveniently, and he came back and strode into the Hawthornden, Hawthornden Road or Drive, headquarters and he saw the top chair and went towards it. Glen Barr said, out, I'm in charge. You're Johnny come lately. And the, that was the politicians being pushed aside because they, many around that table thought it was the failure of politicians that had brought about this situation and they really didn't want them round the table and they were not given any position of great authority.

Henry Patterson

But the core of it was clearly the industrial shop steward element and the paramilitary element. But the core of it, I mean, the core of it that gave it legitimacy was, was shop stewards, people with, if you like, credibility in workplaces and I think you're much more aware of that sort of element than the LAW thing the only name that came to mind and only person who seemed to do any talking. Maybe I'm wrong about my recollection of it was Billy Hull.

Kenny McFarlane

Well, I would say I would say, look, when you look back at it, it was it started off with the workers and started with the UDA and stuff like who wouldn't have been what the organization it is now, but it was a working class revolution I suppose as someone said, But what happened is what always happens in all things in Northern Ireland, is the politicians came in and says, Right, you have done enough, we'll take over. And it was about them maintaining power and you know the story of it.

ACTIVITY 6 - THE DUBLIN/MONAGHAN BOMBS



Students rewatch the end of *Strike: Part 3*, focussing on the section dealing with the Dublin/Monaghan Bombing. Please note that some of the extracts below are taken from the extended versions available online (*Strike iii*).



Nelson McCausland

That you were seeing on the news reports of both shootings and bombings, yes. And the Monaghan attacks and so on that were carried out at that time probably would have made a much greater impact if it hadn't been sorry, it would have made a much greater impact on us if it hadn't been for the fact that you've been living with that for years. The fact that things were now being extended into the Republic but it didn't make the impact possibly on us that it might in other circumstances, because of the fact that you were so used to it.

Mervyn Gibson

Vaguely, well, I'll be truthful. Probably the feeling was we've been getting that for four years now. Now that was wrong, there is no doubt about it, innocent people were killed. No question, Protestants were killed in the bomb. So what do you call it, but there there was a sense at the time. Yes, it was wrong. But that's what we have been experiencing. It didn't impact the strike or didn't seem to support it in any way. [...] And there is I think there is an element of by that point, there was, unbelievably, there had become a numbness to, a numbness, yes, kind of yes a normalisation of things that are.

Dawn Purvis

I just remember some of the comments in the street and they were horrific, you know, from women. And I know that there was wee tots killed in the, in the bomb. And I remember some of the women in the street were talking about, I didn't know what had happened, but again I was hearing the gossip from the women in the street and they were talking about the bombs. And it was eventually our side goes out and gets a win. And I didn't know. Again I didn't know what they were talking about. [...] So I went in and said to mum, what's a win for our lads? And here she was. Who said that? And I told her who had said it and she went, that's a disgrace, don't you be, don't you be listening to that.

Students read the extracts above on the Dublin/Monaghan bombings and reflect on the following questions:

- Is there anything shocking or surprising about what you are reading?
- What do these extracts tell you about life in Northern Ireland during the 1970s?
- How do you feel about what these sources are relating?

- Some people relate that they feel that the Dublin/Monaghan bombings are a forgotten part of the Troubles conflict. Using the sources, why do you think this is?
- How are the Dublin/Monaghan bombings commemorated today?

STUDENT REFLECTIONS

STRIKE: PART 3 PLENARY – ‘WHAT IF’?

What if:

- You were a teacher in 1974. Would you support the strike?
- You were a factory worker in 1974. Would you support the strike?
- You were a doctor in 1974. Would you support the strike?
- You were a student in 1974. Would you support the strike?
- Have some fun with the what ifs...
- *What if the Army had of taken control and disarmed the roadblocks and the UDA?*

What if you were a teacher in 1974.
Would you support the strike?

What if you were a doctor in 1974.
Would you support the strike?

What if you were a soldier working in Belfast
in 1974. Would you support the strike?

What if you were a factory in 1974.
Would you support the strike?

What if you were a student in 1974.
Would you support the strike?

What if the Army had taken control and
disarmed the roadblocks and went head-to-
head VS the UDA.

Create your own WHAT IFS!

Explain **WHY** for each one you choose

STRIKE: PART 4

▶ For the next set of activities, students should watch *Strike: Part 4*.

CONTEXT

As the strike moved into its second week, it became clear that the Executive was on borrowed time. Two particular events would confirm that the Sunningdale experiment had run out of road. The first was a failed attempt to force a return to work on 21 May. There then followed Prime Minister Harold Wilson's ill-fated and infamous 'spongers' speech on 25 May. The Executive was eventually forced to resign on 28 May with, as our testimonies demonstrate, a mixture of reactions.

KEY QUESTION:

- How did the UWC Strike affect the Institutions?

LESSON OBJECTIVES

1. Did the Trade Unions misread/misinterpret the UWC Strikes?
2. Explain why Harold Wilson's speech united Unionists during the strike?
3. Examine a range of reactions to the end of the UWC strike.
4. Students may wish to use a Cornell Note Taking Diagram when watching *Strike: Part 4*.

CORNELL NOTES

Name _____ Date _____
Topic _____ Subject _____

Main Ideas	Notes
Summary	

Students can take notes as they watch the clips and read the sources.

Students then fill in the main ideas section in bullet points, before synthesising their ideas in two sentences in the summary section.

ACTIVITY 7 – SEQUENCING

▶ Watch *Strike: Part 4* and sequence the events using sources.

1. Match the date to the event.
2. Place these events in order using the information from the sources.

25th May 1974

28th May 1974

PM infamous
'sponger'
speech

Planned 'return
to work' for the
Northern Ireland
workers

Executive
resigns

21th May 1974

21st May 1974

25th May 1974

28th May 1974

ACTIVITY 8 – SOURCE ANALYSIS



Consider *Strike: Part 4* and the extracts below and respond to the questions that follow. Please note that some of the extracts below are taken from the extended versions available online (*Strike iv*).

THE BACK TO WORK CAMPAIGN

Boyd Black

Len Murray was it [...] and a few, maybe a few others? I can't remember if there are others, and led this big back to work march thinking that there was all this popular support, that the strikers were only were intimidating people and people, people given the chance to get back to work, would come out in their droves. But they didn't. And they'd something like 150 or 200 people and it, and showed themselves to be completely out of touch with what was happening at grassroots.

Chris McGimpsey

I mean, like I mean, like trade union leaders came over from London to say, we're going to lead the workers to work because the workers are socialists and they want to work and they don't want any of this nonsense. And they turned up, you know, and about 200 people showed. And they said, well, that's, that's entirely down to intimidation, they'd expected five thousand and they got 200. Nobody intimidated 4800 people you know, people just didn't support it, support the concept of breaking the strike and so on.

Henry Patterson

And the organisation of that back to work march was a, it was just, it was going nowhere, you know, because you had Billy Blease, great guy, nice guy, friend of my dad's in the Northern Ireland Committee but then you had Andy Barr in the CP and Jimmy Graham, people who organised it. They had credibility as trade Unionists. But they didn't have credibility on an issue that is political. And so the CP did its best to de-legitimise, get the strike off - was to bring Len Murray over and how many people did they get on it, a couple of hundred. It was a joke and just strengthened the campaign.

- What reaction did the Trade Union leaders receive when they attempted to resolve the strike?
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- Using one word – describe the reaction
-

- Using quotations from the sources, why do you think the Back to Work campaign received this reaction?
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-
-
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Consider *Strike: Part 4* and the extracts below and respond to the questions that follow. Please note that some of the extracts below are taken from the extended versions available online ([Strike iv](#)).

THE “SPONGERS” SPEECH

Don Anderson

When Faulkner, at the last minute got the text of what Wilson was going to say I think he buried his face in his hands. When he called the strikers and those who supported them, spongers on the British exchequer. Well people actually they pulled off bits of sponge and were wearing badges on their lapels. This was an insult from the Westminster government. Who do these people think they are, said Wilson - unelected and there were those who said, look, in the end the British government would end up with no friends in Northern Ireland. The Nationalists already were no friends of the Westminster government, and Wilson was actually well on the way to making no friends among the loyalists and Protestants.

Danny Morrison

I think, I think I laughed. There was always a wee tiny percentage of hope that he would act on it. You know, this wasn't a labour dispute. This wasn't a strike aimed at bringing democracy. It was a strike aimed at bringing democracy down, you know, qualified terms within the six county state. And, you know, he gave the impression that he was going to, you know, act against them and act decisively and he was a wimp. In end of the day, he was a wimp.

Mervyn Gibson

It was my most vivid memory of the strike, I have to say. The spongers, calling the Unionist people spongers. We were the people of the Somme, we were the people that were loyal to the Crown more than anybody else. And he dared to call us spongers. And I think that if anything cemented the strike and brought it to a conclusion was that because that the people the more resolute to see this through, if they needed more resolution to see it through or more backbone or whatever to see it through.

Paul Arthur

It's hard to find a worse form of words. And I remember at the time listening to the speech because I was expecting great things. And once I heard that expression, I thought, this is absolute disaster, you know, just as internment and Bloody Sunday was a recruiting sergeant for the IRA, this was doing exactly the same on the other side.

What did Harold Wilson mean by 'spongers'?

Use the extracts to explain the Strikers' reaction to Wilson's speech? Use a quotation from each source.

TASK 9 - THE END OF THE STRIKE

THE POWER SHARING EXECUTIVE FALLS

Students watch the following video clip:

 [RTÉ Archives | Politics | End of power-sharing in Northern Ireland](#)

Students read the sources below and draw a simple emotion beside what each author thought about the end of the strike.



SOURCE ONE

Jim Gibney

Yeah, Well, I think what was well, what when the strike was over, I think people kind of breathed a sigh of relief that that it hadn't led to anything inside the prison, you know, that the fear that was there at the time something could have come out of this, that that that was kind of like a relief, you know, that it was over. So, you know, life goes on inside the prison type of thing, you know what I mean. And politically would it have been perceived as a relief as well, because Sunningdale was killed off.

SOURCE TWO

Dawn Purvis

Oh, it was like a 12th of July. So it was I mean, the streamers were out, the flags were out. People found food from wherever they had hidden it, you know, there was street parties galore. The barricades were coming down. You know, everybody just, there was a whole sense of relief. It was like the war is over. That's what it felt like.

SOURCE THREE

Anne Devlin

but at the same time, I just remember the terrible, terrible despair when, when it ended, it was so extraordinary. It was so sad because the republicans were just sitting in the wings, basically in Andersonstown waiting and this, this, this chance had gone. And the, and the thing is, it was gone for a very long time.

SOURCE FOUR

Helen Crickard

It felt like they were dancing on your grave. You know, it really felt like, after what we'd been through and the level of fear and the intimidation, all of a sudden everybody's very joyful that we're not moving forward, that we're going to stay in the same, same status quo.

SOURCE FIVE

Mike Nesbitt

The famous day when all the tractors basically blockaded the Prince of Wales Avenue, that iconic mile from the from the gates of the Newtownards road up to up to parliament buildings was to me frightening because you wonder what what are these people capable of? And then what's, what's the consequence? Ok so we have brought down our government? What is next? Why? Why do these people want direct rule when their Prime Minister has just called you a sponger? So why, why do you want to give them more authority over how we are governed? So there was a lot of uncertainty in my mind about what was going to happen next. But also, what was the logic of doing all this

Using one key quote from each source, explain why the different people felt this way about the end of the strike.

SOURCE ONE

SOURCE TWO

SOURCE THREE

SOURCE FOUR

SOURCE FIVE

STUDENT REFLECTION



Considering the different reactions to the strike, negative and positive, use [Strike: Part 4](#) to explain what impact the UWC Strike had on Northern Ireland.

ACTIVITY 10 - HEADLINES

Students create a newspaper heading to signify one aspect of the UWC Strike.

- Students can then write an article to tell the story of the UWC Strike and what happened.
- Students can add relevant pictures of the strike to their article.



ADDITIONAL TASK

Students could create a Timeline of the events of May 1974, detailing the high points and low points of that month. [CAIN: Events: Ulster Workers' Council Strike - Chronology](#)

⁶CAIN: Events: Ulster Workers' Council Strike - Chronology

VOICES OF '74



Nottingham Trent University

