

As one of the ringleaders of the strike, Eva Smith (E) talks to Mr Birling (B) negotiating for higher wages.

Dialogue A

- E Mr. Birling.
- B Ms. Smith. At last. I haven't seen you for a long time.
- E *(hesitantly)* Yes, Mr. Birling. I... am here...
- B Because?
- E ...because my financial situation has changed a bit.
- B That's a nice way to put it. In other words, you have run out of money.
- E Well, I can see you get to the point very quick, Mr. Birling. Yes, I actually have run out of money. And so have my mates. The thing is we have tried to be paid decent wages and...
- B Because you went on strike against my company. And not only that, you made others join you and go on strike.
- E No, not at all. What I have done was and still is the right thing to do. Look at it this way. We all want to live. That goes for you as well as for me and people like me. The thing is, corn prices have risen drastically, and so has the price of cheese, paraffin and other things one cannot do without. Things that you need every day. The wages your company has been paying were probably for price levels years ago. But not for today's market. Moreover, I did not ask anybody to go on strike. I did not even make big speeches. I simply...
- B Yes you did. I'm a businessman. I know about the market. One or two pence won't make a lot of a difference. Just learn to economize, that's all. I am...
- E But that's the point, you see...
- B No, Ms. Smith, now it's my turn. I am paying you good money. Our wages are as good as any others in the business. And I am a reasonable man. I would not want workers of mine to starve to death, would I? And don't you start to talk about exploitation. But if you think this company is not paying enough, feel free to look somewhere else. After all, it's a free market and it's a free country. In fact, this is what I am asking you to do. Go and look somewhere else.
- E But sir...
- B Quiet now. Look, after all the mess you have made here. getting people to go on strike, what do you expect? *(shaking his head)* I need workers who work, not some girls trying to destroy the fabric of this society with socialist fantasies.
- E You don't seem to understand, I just want to help...
- B I understand very well, and you are no good to anyone. You're wasting my time. Go and ask somewhere else. Off you go now.
- E *(desperately)* But Mr. Birling!
- B No, Ms. Smith. I am done with you. Get out, girl, or I'll call the dogs.

Dialogue B

- B Now, Miss Smith, what's the matter?
- E Well, the matter is that we, the others and me, are working damn hard and...
- B *(interrupting)* Yes, you are. And that is how it should be. Incidentally, that's the reason why I don't just sack you all and hire (replace you by) other workers. Mind you, there are a lot of them out there.
- E A lot of what?
- B People who want to do your job, you know.
- E Uhm... Yes... See, we are really working very hard and I just wanted to ask if you...
- B If I what...?
- E Would pay us more money. To be exact: Twenty-five shillings a week, to all of us.
- B Hmm... In fact, that wouldn't be a problem.
- E *(hopeful)*: Really?
- B Yes, if money grew on trees. You see, I run a business and I am investing a lot in it, and ungrateful people like you benefit from it. I have a family and a decent (living) standard of living to support. And I have lots of other problems, you know.
- E Mister Sir. That is... not fair.
- B Well, that's life for you.
- E If this is your last word, you leave us no choice. We will go on strike.
- B It's a free country. Have a try. Or just go and find work elsewhere. Not my problem. I bet you will crawl back to me after two weeks at most and beg me to get your job back – at the same old wages, of course.
- Eva Smith leaves (the room) without a word.*
- Two weeks later:*
- B *(to all workers)* Well, well, well. Nice to see you all again. As I see, your great strike is over. Did you run out of money? What a pity. But mercifully Mr Birling is giving you your jobs back. Except for... you Miss Smith. Here's what they call "the sack" to put your stuff in.
- E *(close to tears)*: But... Mister Birling. I... that is...
- B As I told you before... That's life. Love it or leave it.