

# If you're underpaid and in danger...

You can be sure that it's Westinghouse

Ripple (Red)

1970

Workers at the Detroit area Westinghouse heavy electrical repair shop have gone on strike. The shop, located near the Trumbull exit of John C. Lodge expressway, employs about 70 workers, most of them white males. The union there is the U.E. or the United Electrical Workers local 957.

U.E. national representative John Toth explains the background of the strike as follows: since September 1969, Westinghouse has been stalling the union in talks over the local supplementary agreement to the national contract between Westinghouse and the U.E. The company has been bullshitting around, saying that the union doesn't represent the majority of the employees.

This is exactly what Westinghouse and other large electrical corporations have said ever since the late '40s, when they started a vicious red-baiting campaign against the U.E. At that time the U.E. was one of the most powerful and progressive American unions. It represented all organized electrical workers in the industry.

After being railroaded out of the CIO, slandered by the House Un-American Activities Committee and harassed by liberals such as Humphrey and Kennedy, the U.E. declined in strength and the corporations managed to split electrical workers into many different unions.

U.E. union officials calculate that the resulting disunity has cost the individual electrical worker well over \$2 per hour in wages. This, of course, means increased profits to management.

Last fall, however, the splintered electrical labor movement pulled together somewhat, as 14 of the electrical workers' unions formed a coalition in order to wage the militant struggle that came down during the U.E. strike.

The situation in the Trumbull Ave. plant is typical of a lot of shops around Detroit. As the cost of living rises and workers demand higher wages, management uses the same divide and conquer techniques, playing different plants and departments off against one another. Many of the U.E. local's demands, including those dealing with seniority and job bidding, are designed to combat this.

For instance, at Westinghouse, workers are making an average of 20 cents an hour less than workers at G.E. Union wage demands are based on that figure. Management prefers to compare wage scales to other smaller, non-unionized shops around the city.

Talking to the guys around the union hall it became apparent that underlying a lot of the dissatisfaction of the workers is their feeling that working conditions have become intolerable. Much of the work is done in other plants around Detroit. As Detroit workers know, many of these plants are unsafe. The U.E. local is demanding that Westinghouse workers receive hazardous-duty pay for some of the outside jobs they are forced to work on.

In addition, management seems to go out of its way to attack the dignity of the worker in petty ways.

A few examples: management refused to allow workers to play the radio. They refuse to give workers change in order to operate the vending machines. They refused to allow workers to continue brewing their

own coffee in the plant. They even said that they were going to “change the country club atmosphere in the shop.”

Guys in the plant have changed the “country club” atmosphere in the shop by walking out. They are together. Solidarity is high. All unions are respecting the picket lines. The workers have stated that they welcome support from students and young people on the lines. The 24-hour picket line is located at the corner of Stanley and Trumbull.

# fifth Estate

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