Women Against Westinghouse

Cindy Felong

1970

Women's News Co-op — Jenny is a woman on strike. She, along with another woman and about 70 men are striking against the Westinghouse electrical repair shop located on Trumbull.

The main issue of the strike centers around the fact that a new shop is being built downriver in Trenton and the manager is only giving a verbal promise that all the employees will be transferred there.

But Jenny is also protesting the fact that she has worked in that shop for 28 years and is getting paid two pay grades less than men doing comparable work.

When the rumor first got out last winter that the plant was moving, management assured the employees that it would be at least two years until they actually moved.

The strike began about three weeks ago when the employees found out that the new plant would be completed by December 1st. The employees demanded a written promise that they would all be transferred, but Mr. Smith, the manager, refused to sign anything.

Some of the men have over 30 years seniority and have only two or three years to go before they retire. The strikers suspect that Westinghouse would like to lay off some of those people in order not to have to pay full retirement benefits.

Even though they have a verbal promise that the company will take them all to the Trenton facility, the strikers say they will remain out until it's in writing.

"Years ago a verbal agreement was acceptable, but people today are not as sincere. If the strike is going to have to last for six months, it will," said one striker.

There are other issues to which the bargaining agent, the United Electrical Workers (UE), is negotiating with the Westinghouse management.

Included with demands around wages and working conditions is the demand that the two women receive pay equal to men doing the same work.

Teresia Tristani (Jenny to her friends) is classified Class-six and has been for years teaching men how to rewind stators for motors up to 300 horsepower. The men go on to be classified eight or nine but Jenny has remained at six.

She says she's always told "you're a good worker" but it doesn't show up in her paycheck.

Over the past years she's had to take on more responsibility.

"I've got to keep things together. I set the machine and get the job out and I even have to make sure the customer gets it. Seems like nobody cares anymore about getting the job done."

Jenny is one of five or six women who have worked at the Westinghouse plant during the past few years. Except for one other woman who still works there (and has 24 years seniority), all were laid off and never called back. One woman had six years seniority and two or three others had over 12 years. Their jobs were taken over by men.

When questioned about why she recieves less pay than men, the other woman (who prefers her name not be used) replied: "They have never told me it was because I was a woman, but it's my feeling it's because I'm a woman."

Women in various male-dominated fields are getting together to demand an end to sex discrimination. It's part of a conspiracy to end sexism in all forms. Watch out, Westinghouse!

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Sidebar

Why Women Complain

Double Standard: Men's wages Much Higher, National Averages of Annual Wages for full-time, Year round Workers, 1968.

Professional & Technical Workers (Includes Doctors, Lawyers, Science, Draftsmen, etc.)

Men: $10,151

Women: $6,691

Non-Farm Managers, Officials and Proprietors (includes Office Managers, Local, State and Federal Government Officials; Business Owners, etc.)

Men: $10,340

Women: $5,635

Clerical Workers (Includes Bookkeepers, File Clerks, Stenos, etc.)

Men: $7,351

Women: $4,789

Operatives

(Mostly Factory Workers)

Men: $6,738

Women: $3,991

Service Workers (Excludes Private Household Workers; includes Laundry Workers, Barbers, Beauty Operators, etc.)

Men: $6,058

Women: $3,332

Salesworkers

Men: $8,549

Women: $3,461

Source: Women's Bureau

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Fifth Estate #111, August 6–19, 1970

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