



Coalition of Labor Union Women

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Working Women Applaud Certification of Wal-Mart Discrimination Suit

WASHINGTON, DC—Working women across the U.S. received a huge boost in their efforts to fight discrimination in the workplace when a federal District Court judge in California certified a class action suit charging Wal-Mart Stores, Inc. with discriminating against its women employees in pay and promotion opportunities. Wal-Mart is the largest private sector employer in the U.S. and in the world. As many as 1.6 million current and former women Wal-Mart workers could be party to the suit that could amount to billions of dollars in back pay — potentially the largest back pay award in U.S. history.

“The judge’s decision to allow this case to move forward sends a strong message to Wal-Mart that abuse of women workers will not be tolerated,” asserted Gloria T. Johnson, president of the Coalition of Labor Union Women (CLUW), an AFL-CIO-supported group that represents hundreds of thousands of unionized women workers throughout North America. “Because Wal-Mart is the largest employer in the country, its discriminatory practices and low pay scale are dragging down wages and benefits for all working women in America. Wal-Mart must be held accountable to the same legal standards that all employers are and not be permitted to reap ever-increasing profits by robbing its women workers and their families.”

In 2001, six women stood up to challenge pay and promotion practices at Wal-Mart stores across the country. In issuing his decision, U. S. District Court Judge Martin Jenkins found that the plaintiffs’ attorneys “present largely uncontested descriptive statistics which show that women working in Wal-Mart stores are paid less than men in every region, that pay disparities exist in most job categories, that the salary gap widens over time even for men and women hired into the same jobs at the same time, that women take longer to enter into management positions, and that the higher one looks in the organization, the lower the percentage of women.”

Johnson described Wal-Mart’s management practices “sexism, plain and simple.”

She continued, “Wal-Mart thought they could take advantage of women. They made a corporate decision that women’s work was worth less than men’s, and paid them less because they thought women wouldn’t stand up and challenge them. They grossly underestimate the collective strength of women when they know they are being treated unfairly.”

Johnson said, "This is about women consumers as well. Working women care about fairness and equal treatment. If women learn that their shopping dollars are going to support this sort of illegal and discriminatory behavior, they'll think twice about buying from Wal-Mart."

"While winning this suit will correct a major problem for working women in the short-term," Johnson concluded, "the only way for women to secure fair wages, equal opportunity for promotions, job security, and pensions in the long run is having a union contract. The abuse that Wal-Mart is charged with inflicting on its women employees could never happen if they had a collective bargaining agreement. CLUW activists all over the country are eager to work with Wal-Mart's women to show them first-hand the benefits of being a working woman with a union card."

The Coalition of Labor Union Women, formed in 1974, is the nation's only membership organization for union women. CLUW has more than 80 chapters in North America with members from 60 unions. Its four primary goals are organizing unorganized workers; promoting affirmative action in the workplace; supporting legislation and political action on issues of concern to working women and their families; and encouraging and increasing women's active participation in their unions.