

STRIKING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Some around Greater Lafayette gather to highlight issues, others find it impossible to leave work

EMMA EA AMBROSE

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On a blustery Wednesday, women around Greater Lafayette gathered in support of women's rights and to emphasize the importance of women in paid and unpaid labor.

The event was part of the International Women's Strike, a movement encouraging women to strike from work, walk out or take action in other ways that highlight their contributions.

At Riehle Plaza in downtown Lafayette, women shouted into a megaphone their reasons for turning out, straining over the wind and sounds of construction to be heard.

"For reproductive rights."

"Equal pay for equal work."

"Because I'm sick of being called a girl at work."

Women came together at Purdue University and the Hanna Center for an 11 a.m. walkout to recite a similar litany and reaffirm their commitment to equal rights for all.

At places of business across town a different list was taking shape, all the reasons women still at work couldn't strike or even walk out on their job.

Charity Mendoza, the manager at The Pickle said she just heard about the strike this morning. Although she wanted to participate, the protocol for taking off work for such an event wasn't clear.

"I don't know the rules. Do you give your employee notice or just walk out?" Mendoza said. "Striking from unpaid labor, that's also impossible for me. There is always something that needs to be done."

Ellen Germann, a cooperative member of Artist's Own, said she couldn't strike because she couldn't close the store, but she felt very strongly about women's rights issues, especially equal pay for equal work.

Germann began work in the 1960s as the first female software engineer at her company.



PHOTOS BY EMMA EA AMBROSE/JOURNAL & COURIER

Approx. 40 women gathered at Riehle Plaza on Wednesday to participate in the local Women's Strike, part of the larger

Around 40 women gathered at Riehle Plaza on Wednesday to participate in the local Women’s Strike, part of the larger International Women’s Strike and Day Without Women actions.

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Charity Mendoza, manager at The Pickle, said she couldn't participate in the strike for a number of reasons.

“I’ve worked all my life, often times in fields where men are dominant. I was very aware of the discrepancies in pay,” she said.

Many of the women participating in the strike said they were able to do so because they work from home, have flexible work schedules or stay at home to care for their children.

“I brought my work with me today,” Marlo Goings said, gesturing to her stroller. She added that even though she wasn’t walking out on a job she is avoiding spending money or participating in any kind of commerce.

Goings wanted those women who couldn't attend to know she was demonstrating for them.

This sentiment rippled throughout the entire day, from the rallies at walk out locations to activities back at the Hanna Center where strike participants congregated to discuss women's issues, watch films and be with each other.

According to organizers Megha Anwer and Melissa Gruver, the day was also about reclaiming certain words and concepts, especially the term "strike."

Purdue labor history professor Nancy Gabin said this event echoed past women's rights protests, in particular the Women's Strike for Equality, which took place on August 26, 1970.

"One of the slogans was don't iron while the strike is hot," Gabin said. "Women demonstrated in a number of ways locally and there were a lot of demonstrations, which may or may not have been strike actions."

Although Gabin added she suspected Wednesday's event was in the same vein as this historic protest, within the context of labor history the action wasn't a traditional strike.

"A strike to me means there is a labor history component to it," she said. "I think of it more as workers seeking the address of grievances, making certain demands and leaving en masse. It's different than this event."

Anwer said they are comfortable with their unconventional use of the word strike. The idea, she said, is to reintroduce the word into general parlance so people cease to feel that it is a "dirty word."

"People in power don't want us to be able to mobilize and strike," Anwer said. "They make us hate the weapons of our own liberation. Today is about recovering strike and being able to say the word."

In that sense, the event was a success. The word was on everyone's lips and social media feeds, plastered on signs at strike locations and chanted.

And for participants like Brianna Secody, Wednesday's demonstration was only the beginning of what she perceives as a lengthy, uphill and not always linear battle for women's equality.

Secody grew up on the Navajo Reservation in Arizona, where she said children were taught to stay out of politics.

"You are taught politics don't matter because history has shown no matter what we do the policies and people involved are never going to benefit us," she said.

It took Secody a long time to challenge that message. She added she protests now not just for herself but to show her nieces and nephews, still living on the reservation, that their voices matter.

“I want them to see that I stood up for what was right,” Secody said. “We’re all being told to shut up. We’re all being told to sit back down and it’s scary because I’m seeing people sit down. I’m seeing people shut up.”

Call J&C reporter Emma Ea Ambrose at 765-431-1192. Follow her on Twitter: @emma_ea_ambrose.

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BRIANNA SECODY

Strike participant



Posters from the strike taped up at the Hanna Center strike location.

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