



Global Nonviolent Action Database

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Ford female employees win strike for equal pay, Dagenham, England, 1968

7 June

1968

to: 29 June

1968

Country: England

Location City/State/Province: *Dagenham, East London*

Location Description: *Auto-industrial town*

Goals:

Women of the Ford Factory in Dagenham, East London wanted to receive equal pay as men for their work.

Methods

Methods in 1st segment:

- 103. Craft strike

Methods in 2nd segment:

- 103. Craft strike

Methods in 3rd segment:

- 103. Craft strike

Methods in 4th segment:

- 103. Craft strike

Methods in 5th segment:

- 103. Craft strike

Methods in 6th segment:

- 103. Craft strike

Additional methods (Timing Unknown):

- 008. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
- 038. Marches
- 105. Establishment strike

Notes on Methods:

Neither strike method exactly fits this action, because all workers in the establishment did not participate.

Classifications

Classification:

Change

Cluster:

Economic Justice

Human Rights

Group characterization:

- Auto-Industrial Workers
- Women

Leaders, partners, allies, elites

Leaders:

Rose Baland, Eileen Pullen, Vera Sime, Gwen Davis, and Shelia Douglass

Partners:

Barbara Castle- employment secretary

Some husbands of the female workers

External allies:

Frederick Blake- former transport union official

Bernie Passingham- union representative

195 women at another Ford Factory in England

Industrial Unions (vocal support)

Involvement of social elites:

Not known

Joining/exiting order of social groups

Groups in 1st Segment:

Groups in 2nd Segment:

Groups in 3rd Segment:

- Auto-Industrial Unions

Groups in 4th Segment:

Groups in 5th Segment:

Groups in 6th Segment:

- Barbara Castle

Segment Length: Approximately 4 days

Opponent, Opponent Responses, and Violence

Opponents:

Ford Managing Director- Sir William Batty

Nonviolent responses of opponent:

None known

Campaigner violence:

None known

Repressive Violence:

None known

Success Outcome

Success in achieving specific demands/goals:

5 points out of 6 points

Survival:

1 point out of 1 points

Growth:

3 points out of 3 points

Notes on outcomes:

The women received 92% of what the men in Dagenham were currently earning in 1968, and by 1984 they received 100% of what the men were earning. At the time of the strike, 92% was considered an enormous success, even if it was not total equality.

In Dagenham, East London, 54,813 men, and only 187 women worked in Ford's flagship factory. The women there were classified as "unskilled workers," though male employees performing the same or similar jobs were classified as "skilled workers." As a result the men were on a higher pay scale than the women. Female employees of the factory were deeply upset when they learned this fact, and even more enraged when they discovered that teenage boy floor-sweepers were paid higher wages than they were.

Five women leaders, Rose Boland, Eileen Pullen, Vera Sime, Gwen Davis, and Sheila Douglass, organized a strike to demand equal pay for women performing the same jobs as men. On 7 June 1968, all 187 women employees working in the factory laid down their tools and began a strike to earn equality.

The women in Dagenham Factory were sewing machinists, responsible for the car seats in the majority of Ford cars built in the area. Without the car seats, cars could not be produced. Rapidly, the effects of the strike were seen, as car production ceased within the first week. The factory was forced to come to a complete standstill, eventually costing the company over \$8 million, and risking 40,000 Ford jobs throughout the nation. Still, Ford refused to negotiate with the women. Superiors informed managing director, Sir William Batty, to "do his worst," in response to the protestors.

The women continued in their strike, as they promised not to stop until they received equal pay. They marched multiple times to Westminster as they waved banners outside of Parliament that screamed "We Want Sex Equality." The media did not support the women. At one point in their protests, a reporter took a picture of this banner, partially unfurled, reading, "We Want Sex," and published it, making this the image of the movement in the eyes of many in England.

Despite their negative image in the media, the women received support from multiple industrial unions across the country, as well as 195 women at another Ford factory in England who walked off their jobs to show their unity. Some of the husbands of the women, who also worked in the factory, gave their support. Other husbands spoke out in opposition of their wives' actions.

Frederick Blake, former transport union official, and Bernie Passingham, union representative at the Ford Factory, both supported the women, but it was Barbara Castle—Secretary of State for Trade and Industry for the Labour Government—who worked out an agreement that Ford would accept.

On 29 June 1968, Barbara Castle met with a group of eight women participating in the strike, representatives of the collective whole, to discuss their demands. She did not allow any male union officers or male Ford executives to attend the meeting. At the end of the meeting the women agreed to return to work if their wages were raised to be 92% of what the men were paid.

Some women were unhappy that their exact demands were not met, but returned to work anyway. The women in the Ford Factory received full equality in 1984, when their wages were raised to 100% of what male machinists were paid.

Barbara Castle used the case as a platform to introduce the 1968 Prices and Income Bill, which began a time-table for the “phased introduction of equal pay.” The strike also allowed for the expedience of the passing of the Equal Pay Act of 1970, which made it “illegal to have different pay scales for men and women.”

The strike is still considered a landmark case in the fight for women's equality in Great Britain. While it was eventually successful in the Dagenham Ford factory, as of 2010, women still earned approximately 16.4 cents less than men on average outside of the Dagenham Ford factory.

Research Notes

Influences:

The strike was a key factor in passing the Equal Pay Act of 1970, which made it illegal to have different pay scales due to gender.

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Additional Notes:

In 2010, a film was released about the campaign, called Made in Dagenham.

Name of researcher, and date dd/mm/yyyy:

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