

How did the women's rights movement shape modern Britain?

How did women seek legal equality in 1960s and 1970s Britain?

Dagenham Strike Activity Worksheet

Enquiry Question

To what extent was the Dagenham Strike of 1968 a success for women's rights?

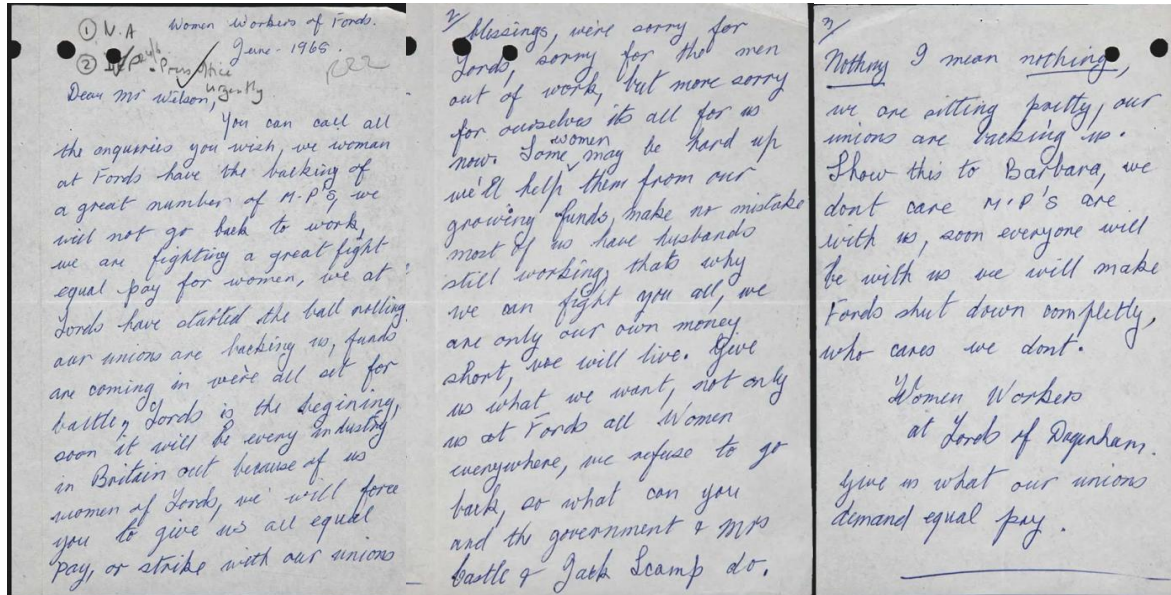
Evidence #1: BBC Archive 1968: Dagenham women's strike



What do the women say they are striking about?

Why do the women believe that their labour is skilled?

Evidence #2: Letter to Prime Minister Harold Wilson



Transcript:

Women Workers of Fords

June 1968

Dear Mr. Wilson,

You can call all the enquiries you wish. We women at Fords have the backing of a great number of M.P.'s. We will not go back to work. We are fighting a great fight equal pay for women. We at Ford's have started the ball rolling. Our unions are backing us, funds are coming in. We're all set for battle.

Ford's is the beginning. Soon it will be every industry in Britain out because of us women of Fords. We will force you to give us all equal pay, or strike with our union's blessings. We're sorry for Fords, sorry for the men out of work, but more sorry for ourselves. It's all for us now. Some women may be hard up - we'll help them from our growing funds. Make no mistake, most of us have husbands still working. That's why we can fight you all. We are only our own money short; we will live.

Give us what we want. Not only us at Fords - all women everywhere. We refuse to go back. So, what can you and the government & Mrs Castle & Jack Scamp do (*Note 1*)? Nothing, I mean nothing.

We are sitting pretty; our unions are backing us. Show this to Barbara, we don't care (*Note 2*). M.P's are with us. Soon everyone will be with us. We will make Fords shut down completely. Who cares? We don't.

Women Workers at Fords of Dagenham.

Give us what our unions demand - equal pay.

Note 1 – this refers to Mrs. Barbara Castle, the Employment Minister who intervened in the strike, and Jack Scamp, who was leading the inquiry into the labour dispute.

Note 2 – The 'Barbara' is again Barbara Castle, intervening in the case for the Prime Minister.

Why do the women say they can keep striking indefinitely ("that's why we can fight you all")?

Initially, the women were striking over being classed as unskilled workers. How has their motivation changed, according to the letter?

Evidence #3: Fax to PM Harold Wilson

01/28
TO PRIME MINISTER FROM ROGER

AS A RESULT OF TODAY'S MEETINGS AT THE DEPARTMENT OF EMPLOYMENT AND PRODUCTIVITY THE WOMEN'S STRIKE COMMITTEE FROM FORDS AND ~~THE~~ NATIONAL AND LOCAL UNION OFFICIALS WILL RECOMMEND TO THE WOMEN OUT ON STRIKE TO RETURN TO WORK FIRST THING ON MONDAY. THE MEETING WILL BE AT DAGENHAM EMPLOYMENT EXCHANGE ON SUNDAY AT 11 A.M.

THE WOMEN HAVE MADE THIS DECISION ON THE BASIS THAT THEY NOW RECOGNISE THAT THE COURT OF INQUIRY WILL LOOK FULLY INTO THEIR PROBLEMS AND ALSO THAT THE GENERAL NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE AT FORDS WILL MEET ON MONDAY TO LOOK AT THE QUESTION OF DIFFERENTIALS. THE UNDERSTANDING IS THAT THE WOMEN'S RATE WILL BE INCREASED FROM 85% TO 90-92% OF THE MEN'S RATE. THIS IS A SECRET PLEDGE WHICH HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE WOMEN'S STRIKE COMMITTEE TODAY, BUT HAS OF COURSE TO BE RATIFIED BY THE NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE ON WHICH ARE REPRESENTED ALL TRADES AND GRADES AT FORDS .

END OF MESSAGE
28.6.68

Why did the women decide to end their strike?

How did their wage change?

Did the women achieve their goal of equal pay?

Evidence #4: Two Dagenham workers reflect on their strike

How do the women explain their motivations for striking in the present-day?

How much longer did the Dagenham women have to wait for their work to be classified as skilled labour?

Historical Enquiry Response

To what extent was the Dagenham Strike of 1968 a success for women's rights?

Please respond in 1-2 paragraphs, citing evidence from the notes and evidence above. Be prepared to share your group's response.

