

Starter

What stands out to you about these job advertisements?



Image courtesy of the *Basingstoke Gazette*

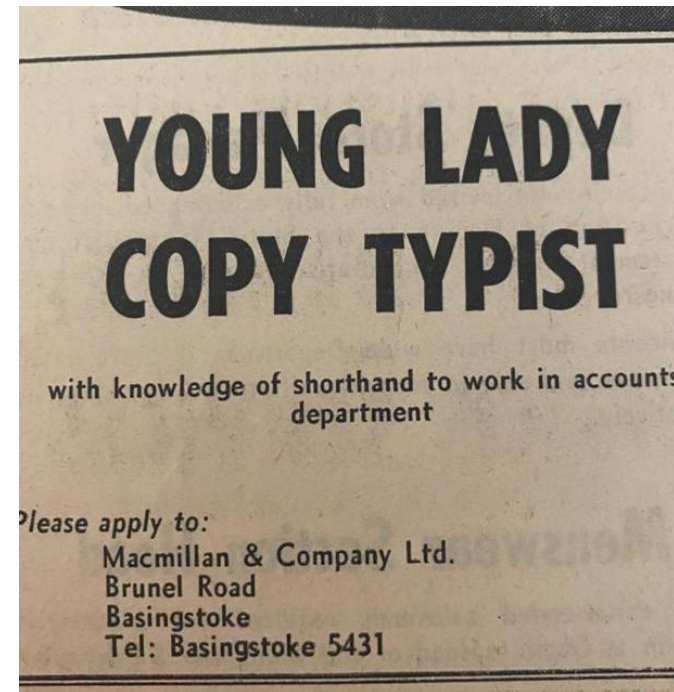


Image courtesy of the *Basingstoke Gazette*

Enquiry Question:
**How did the women's rights
movement shape modern
Britain?**

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



The Dagenham Strike of 1968

- On 7 June 1968, 187 women went on strike from their jobs as sewing machinists at the Ford Factory in Dagenham, England, where they made seat covers for Ford car seats
- The strike would come to represent broader frustration with how men and women were paid differently at the time



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

① U.A. Women Workers of Fords.
② ~~U.A.~~ ^{U.A.} ~~Provisional~~ ^{Provisional} June - 1968. (122)
Dear Mr Wilson, ^{urgently}
You can call all
the enquiries you wish, we woman
at Fords have the backing of
a great number of M.P.s, we
will not go back to work,
we are fighting
equal pay for us
Fords have started
our unions are
are coming in we
battling Fords is
soon it will be
in Britain out
women of Fords,
you do give us
pay, or strike with our unions



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

Dagenham Activity: Instructions

1. Watch the first piece of evidence with the class. Discuss your responses on the two handout questions:
 - a. What do the women say they are striking about?
 - b. Why do the women believe that their labour is skilled?
2. Write down your notes for the first piece of evidence based on the discussion.
3. In a small group, review Evidence #2 and discuss the the handout questions with your group. Write down your notes for the second piece of evidence on the handout.
4. After each discussion, you may be asked to share your responses with the class.
5. Repeat this process for Evidence #3 and Evidence #4.
6. After you have finished discussing all the evidence with your small group, work independently to write a 1-2 paragraph response to the historical enquiry question: **to what extent was the Dagenham strike a success for women's rights?**

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



- While watching the video, reflect on the handout questions:
 - What do the women say they are striking about?
 - Why do the women believe that their labour is skilled?
- Fill in your notes based on the classwide discussion (3 minutes)
- Your notes should cite evidence from the video

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/videos/cqlwpp9pe4go>

Evidence #2: Letter to PM Harold Wilson, June 1968

① V.A. Women Workers of Fords.
② 11/11/68 June 1968.
Dear Mr Wilson, Genlly
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 Fords have started the ball rolling our unions are backing us, funds are coming in we're all out for battle, Fords 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 unions

2 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 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.

2/ Nothing I mean nothing, we are sitting pretty, our unions are backing us. Show this to Barbara, we don't care 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.

- Read the letter with your small group, keeping in mind the handout questions:
 - Why do the women say they can continue striking indefinitely?
 - Initially, the women were striking over being classed as unskilled workers. How has their motivation changed, according to the letter?
- Complete your notes in your small group, citing evidence from the letter
- Be prepared to share out your answers with the class

Evidence #3: Fax to PM Harold Wilson, 28 June 1968

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END OF MESSAGE

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- Read the fax with your small group, keeping in mind the handout questions:
 - Why did the women decide to end their strike?
 - How did their wage change?
 - Did the women achieve their goal of equal pay?
- Complete your notes in your small group, citing evidence from the fax
- Be prepared to share out your answers with the class

Evidence #4: Stylist Magazine, “The women of Dagenham are the original pay gap pioneers” (2018)



**MEET THE ORIGINAL
PAY GAP PIONEERS**

- As you watch the video with the class, recall the handout questions:
 - How do the women explain their motivations for striking?
 - How much longer did the Dagenham women have to wait for their work to be classified as skilled labour?
- Complete your notes in your small group, citing evidence from the video
- Be prepared to share out your answers with the class

Independent Writing Exercise:

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

① W.A. Women Workers of Fords.
② W.P. Press Office June - 1968. 1022
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 until we are fighting a equal pay for women. Fords have started to our unions are backing, are coming in we're a battle, Fords is the soon it will be over in Britain out because women of Fords, we you to give us a pay, or strike with our unions



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The impact of legislation

Equal Pay Act 1970	Sex Discrimination Act 1975
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduced by Labour Employment Minister Barbara Castle • Made it the law that men and women must be paid the same for doing the same work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Made it illegal to discriminate against someone based on their gender • For example, the job adverts at the beginning of the lesson became illegal because they only allowed one gender to apply

- Both of these Acts set up the Equal Opportunities Commission (now known as the Equality and Human Rights Commission).
- This gave everyone in Britain the opportunity to bring a discrimination or equal pay claim to an independent tribunal (panel of judges).

The ongoing fight for equal pay

- The fight for equal pay is still ongoing in the UK. In 2024, women were still being paid 91p for every £1 a man earned
- Although these laws set a legal standard for how people should be treated in the workplace, they did not change the culture of Britain overnight.
- Women still faced discrimination and harassment because of their gender.

**IT'S
TIME
FOR
EQUAL
PAY
FOR
EQUAL
WORK**

Summary – Discussion

- How did the Equal Pay Act 1970 and Sex Discrimination Act 1975 make the workplace more equal?
- What kinds of inequalities remained?

