

I. The Dagenham sewing machinists' strike : the true story ... (14 marks)

Photo 1



Women machinists at the Ford Motor Company plant in Dagenham took strike action on 7 June 1968 for equal pay. The women won a pay increase to 92% of men's wages.

Credit:

Pat Mantle TUC Collection, London Metropolitan University

Photo 2



In November 1984, women sewing machinists at the Ford Motor Company plants in Dagenham and Halewood again took industrial action against the grading system. After six weeks on strike and a decision in their favour by an independent arbitration panel, the company agreed to regrade the women.

socialistreview.org.uk

Text 1

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.

<http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu> .

Text 2

The Dagenham strike ended after Secretary of State for Employment Barbara Castle met with the women and took up their cause to get them back to work. The women were awarded a pay increase, but the re-grading issue was not resolved until after another strike years later, in 1984, when they were finally classified as skilled workers.

Working women throughout the UK benefited from the Dagenham women's strike, which was a precursor to the UK's Equal Pay Act of 1970. The law makes it illegal to have separate pay scales for men and women based on their sex.

www.about.com Women's History

help box

flagship factory: usine phare

boy floor-sweepers: jeune balayeur

walked off: débrayèrent

standstill: stoppage

unfurled: déployée

1. Describe the women's jobs at the Ford motor company at Dagenham in the 60s. (text 1 + Movie : « Made in Dagenham ») (3 marks)
2. In text 1 pick out the two reasons explaining the women's anger in June 1968. What did they decide to do? Was it only a skill issue (photo 1)? (3 marks)
3. What were the effects of the women's action in the Ford plant? (Text 1) (1.5 marks)
4. Quote any barriers and supports to their action. (Text 1) (3 marks)
5. How did the Dagenham action end up in 1968? (Text 1 + photo 1) (2 marks)
6. Why was the level skill issue so long to reach? (Text 2 + photo 2) (1.5 marks)

II. Wage discrimination (6 marks)

Document 1



<http://www.geelongadvertiser.com.au/news/geelong/gender-pay-gap/>

Document 2

When Jill Abramson was fired from her post as executive editor of the *New York Times* last Wednesday, the world took notice. The *New Yorker* [reported](#) on tensions between Abramson and the paper's owner, which may have been heightened in part by an argument over her pay relative to that of her male predecessor. Whether Abramson's pay did or didn't have anything to do with her dismissal from the *Times*, one thing is certain: there is a gender wage gap. Among full-time workers, women earn [77%](#) of what men earn. Even after accounting for the fact that women often work in different occupations and industries than men, as well as differences in work experience, union status, education and race, [41%](#) of that gap is still unexplained. When social scientists control for every employment factor that could possibly explain the disparity, women still earn 91% of what men earn for doing the same job. Female-dominated occupations tend to pay less, often much less, than male-dominated occupations. Women made great progress in the 1970s and 1980s in moving into careers traditionally dominated by men, but since the mid-1990s that progress has largely [stalled](#).

[Anthony P. Carnevale and Nicole Smith](#), May 19, 2014, <http://time.com/105292/gender-wage-gap/>

Help box:

Heightened: increased

Union status: union refers to trade union

Stalled: stopped

1. What is meant by 'glass ceiling' (document1) and 'gender wage gap' (document 2)? (2 marks)
2. From the two documents, pick out and explain the relevant elements showing the continuing wage discrimination between men and women. (4 marks)

I. The Dagenham sewing machinists' strike : the true story ... (14 marks)

1. Describe the women's jobs at the Ford motor company at Dagenham in the 60S.
(text 1 + Movie: « Made in Dagenham ») (3 marks)

Nearly 200 women worked at the Ford motor company in the 60S. Each of them **sewed** pieces of fabric for cover seats: they were **specialized** producing one piece of fabric. Because of their job women were classified as « **unskilled workers** ». In fact, **specialization of labour** reduces the workers' qualification: instead of doing the entire work, as craftsmen, they have to repeat one of the tasks all the time.

In the 60s women machinists worked in **unpleasant conditions**. They toiled in a **massive**/ a huge room gathering all the workers and the machineries at work were very **noisy**. In addition, the **hot** conditions forced women to undress.

2. Pick out in text 1 the two reasons explaining the women's angry in June 1968. What did they decide to do? Was it only a skill issue? (photo 1) (3 marks)

In June 1968, female machinists were very upset because of:

- first of all, they were **downgraded as unskilled** workers whereas men remained skilled workers doing the same job;
- secondly unskilled men (for instance a « teenage boy floor-sweepers ») earned more than unskilled women.

As a result, decided to start an **industrial action**: they stopped working and they took **strike** action on 7 June 1968 (photo 1).

At the beginning of their action, women claimed that management should recognize their skills : sewing a piece one by one without any **template** is not an unskilled work. Later, the skill issue was becoming an equal pay issue (photo 1): men and women doing the same job should have the same pay.

3. What were the effects of the women's action in the Ford plant? (Text 1) (1.5 marks)

The women 'machinists were the **only providers** of cover seats to Ford company. Consequently, the women 's strike stopped **the whole production** of Ford cars: a « complete standstill ». Furthermore, the stoppage of the production **should cost** « over \$8 million » involving a **threat of redundancy** (lay off) in Ford factory (text 1).

4. Quote any barriers and supports to their action. (Text 1) (3 marks)

The barriers to their action:

- the Ford management has refused to negotiate with the women;
- the media has spread a negative image displaying their banner unfurled ' We want sex '.

The support to their action:

- the trade union has provided a support to women machinists at Ford plant even though some shop stewards have had a conservative attitude;
- women in another Ford factory in England had joined women workers at Dagenham.
- some women's husbands had encouraged their wives but not all of them.

5. How the Dagenham action ended up in 1968? (Photo 1 +Text 2) (2 marks)

The women's strike ended up in June 1968 after meeting the Secretary of State for employment, Barbara Castle (Text 1). At this time, the women machinists obtained a **wage rise** to 92 % of men's wages (photo 2). Hence, the **pay gap** was diminishing.

Furthermore, the Dagenham women's strike was the first step to the **UK's Equal Pay Act of 1970**: it was becoming **illegal** to separate pay scales for men and women.

6. Why was the level skill issue a long way to reach it? Photo 2 + Text 2) (1.5 marks)

In 1968 women machinists did not obtain a re grading skill level even if they won an increase pay. In 1984, they took a new industrial action claiming a change in the grading system at Ford company. After 6 weeks, the management has agreed to **re-grade** the women, (photo2), to reclassify them as **skilled workers** (Text 2). Therefore, it was a long way to resolve the grading issue having taken **16 years**.

II. Wage discrimination (6 marks)

1. What is meant by 'glass ceiling' (document1) and 'gender wage gap' (document 2)? (2 marks)

Glass ceiling means that minorities or women cannot rise to occupy top jobs. Furthermore, it refers to unseen and unbreakable barriers that keep minorities or women from rising to the upper rungs of the corporate ladder, regardless of their qualifications or achievements.

Gender wage gap represents the difference between the women's wages and the men's wages.

2. From the two documents, pick out and explain the relevant elements showing the continuing wage discrimination between men and women (4 marks)

According to the scientists, gender pay gap represents roughly 9 % ('women still earn 91% of what men earn for doing the same job between men and women') even if some factors of disparity such as 'work experience, unions status education and race' (Doct 2) are removed. Thus, this gender pay gap illustrates wage discrimination.

A lot of factors could explain wage discrimination which still actually exists in democratic countries which state equality between everyone regardless of their race, their sex or their social origin.

First of all, sociologists have explained wage discrimination by the glass ceiling. Women would not be able to get top jobs. Some invisible barriers prevent women from occupying the higher corporate jobs. Not because of their natural ability to only do tasks linked to the domestic chores, as the cartoon shows in document 1. The picture reports this stereotype: according to the men's view, women should not break glass ceiling (i.e. not becoming their partners) but they would be involved in just cleaning it! On the contrary of this one-sided exaggerated picture, it has been explained that wage discrimination comes from the process of gender socialization which is socially constructed.

Secondly, when a sector is considered as a female preserve, the skills and qualification it requires are underestimated, which explains the lower wages of women compared to men's ones. (Doct 2: Female-dominated occupations tend to pay less, often much less, than male-dominated occupations')

