

# EQUAL PAY ACT 1970 50TH ANNIVERSARY



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# What was the Equal Pay Act 1970?

The Equal Pay Act 1970 was an Act of the Parliament in the UK that prohibited women being given less favourable treatment than men in terms of pay and conditions of employment. This included wages, holiday allowance, pension rights and bonuses.

The Act was brought forward by the Labour government & was influenced by the Equal Pay Act of 1963 that had been ratified in the USA. The legislation paved the way for the UK's entry to the EU.

Why did it influence membership to the EU? Well, each member state needed to conform with Article 119 of the Treaty of Rome. Article 119 states that 'each Member State shall ensure that the principle of equal pay for male and female workers for equal work or work of equal value is applied.'

The Equal Pay Act 1970 came into force on 29 December 1975.

The Equal Pay Act has since been repealed, but its overall directive was replicated in the Equality Act 2010.



Ford Dagenham sewing machinists, 1968 (c) Trinity Mirror / Mirrorpix / Alamy

## Why is the Equal Pay Act 1970 relevant to East London history?

Well, it was a workers strike in Dagenham that was seen as a trigger for the introduction of the legislation. The strike was instigated by Rose Boland, Eileen Pullen, Vera Sime, Gwen Davis, and Sheila Douglass and began on 7 June 1968.

Machinists at Ford Motor Company Limited's Dagenham plant in London walked out, followed later by the machinists at Ford's Halewood Body & Assembly plant. The women made car seat covers, and as a result of their walk out and production stopping, the strike eventually led to halting all car production.

Why did they walk out? Well the women found out that their jobs and skill set were categorised lower in pay grade and skill level than their male counterparts, meaning they were paid 15% less.

Although it was common practice at the time for women to be paid significantly less than men (simply due to their sex), the women of Dagenham were outraged and decided to fight back.

The strike ended when the government intervened after three weeks of industrial action, and the women had their pay immediately raised, although to a level that was still 8% lower than their male counterparts. Full equal pay didn't arrive so easily, as the women fought right up to 1984 in order to have their salary matched.

MP Shirley Summerskill spoke in the late 1960s of the machinists playing a "very significant part in the history of the struggle for equal pay".

The story of the machinists was immortalised in the 2010 film, 'Made In Dagenham'.

# What is the legacy of the Equal Pay Act 1970?

The 1970 Equal Pay Act led to women being able to prosecute and hold their employers accountable for unfair wages and working conditions if they could prove their male colleagues did exactly the same role and had exactly the same skillset. In order to bring action against an employer, the employee had to prove:

- 1) That the work done by the claimant is the same, or broadly the same, as the other employee.
- 2) That the work done by the claimant is of equal value (in terms of effort, skill, decision and similar demands) to that of the other employee.
- 3) That the work done by the claimant is rated the same as that of the other employee.

Once the employee established that they are employed on 'equal work' with their colleague, they were entitled to 'equal pay' unless the employer proves that the difference in pay is genuinely due to a material factor which is not the difference in gender.

This was a huge step forward in equality in the workplace, however the implementation of it and its wider impact on society hasn't been as fully successful.

The UK gender pay gap remains between 15-17% in 2020, meaning that women are still being paid 15-17% less than their male counterparts in several sectors.

# Workers rights today in the UK

Despite the progress over the last 50 years in bringing working and pay equality forward, there is still a lack of consistency in how women workers are paid for the same work completed by their male colleagues.

This year, the campaigning women's rights charity the Fawcett Society published new data which highlighted why equal pay law in the UK does not actually make for equal pay.

Their data showed that a large proportion of people are still unaware of women's right to equal pay for work of equal value or that women have a right to discuss salaries if they suspect they are experiencing pay discrimination. For example:

- Four in ten people (40%) do not know that women have a right to equal pay for work of equal value.
- Only one-third of people (36%) know women have a legal right to ask male colleagues about their salary if they suspect pay discrimination.

From these findings, the Fawcett Society has launched a new Bill which would modernise the law on equal pay.

The proposals would give women who suspect they are not getting equal pay a 'Right to Know' what a male comparator is paid. This would give women the opportunity to resolve equal pay issues without having to go to court.

The bill would also:

- extend gender pay gap reporting to companies with 100 employees or more and introduce gender pay gap reporting by ethnicity
- require employers to publish action plans highlighting how they will tackle gender pay gaps and require employers to tell employees about their right to equal pay from the beginning of their contract

2020



# Activities

P	A	I	F	R	I	G	H	T	S	N	T	R	D
A	A	O	R	M	W	C	O	R	H	M	I	S	R
U	A	Y	I	G	I	M	Y	E	N	O	M	N	O
G	N	I	W	E	S	S	A	O	Y	N	R	R	F
I	Y	I	N	T	O	H	Y	H	G	U	A	E	E
Q	M	R	C	A	I	T	U	H	N	Q	Y	I	R
H	M	S	P	D	I	S	E	S	O	E	Q	Y	T
O	H	R	E	L	M	A	U	T	T	O	G	T	N
M	I	M	A	C	H	I	N	I	S	T	S	A	H
A	N	U	C	I	A	R	G	N	T	O	P	Q	D
A	Q	Y	Y	C	R	A	C	R	O	T	O	M	C
E	O	U	I	I	A	L	W	R	A	M	M	A	M
L	A	N	T	A	Y	E	D	C	A	G	A	I	S
R	T	R	U	O	B	A	L	C	Y	T	H	N	L

## WORDSEARCH!

Can you find all of these words relating to the 50th anniversary of the Equal Pay Act 1970 in our wordsearch grid?

- Motorcar
- Labour
- Sewing
- Rights
- Ford
- Equality
- Machnists
- Money
- Pay
- Dagenham

## QUICK FIRE QUIZ!

Have you read through all of the fun facts in this pack? If so, you should be able to answer the following questions, or why not quiz your friends or family?  
(Answers at the bottom of the page)

- 1) In what year did a strike take place in the East London that led to parliament reforming equal pay rights in 1970?
- 2) Which company did the striking workers work for?
- 3) What job did the workers do?
- 4) What was the percentage pay difference between male and female colleagues at this particular place of work pre-strike?

**In 1968 Sally went on strike because she thought it was unfair that women were paid less than men for the same sort of work.**

**She stood up for what she believed in and helped to change other people's minds.**

**What would you like to change about the world?**

**Write it on Sally's sign!**

