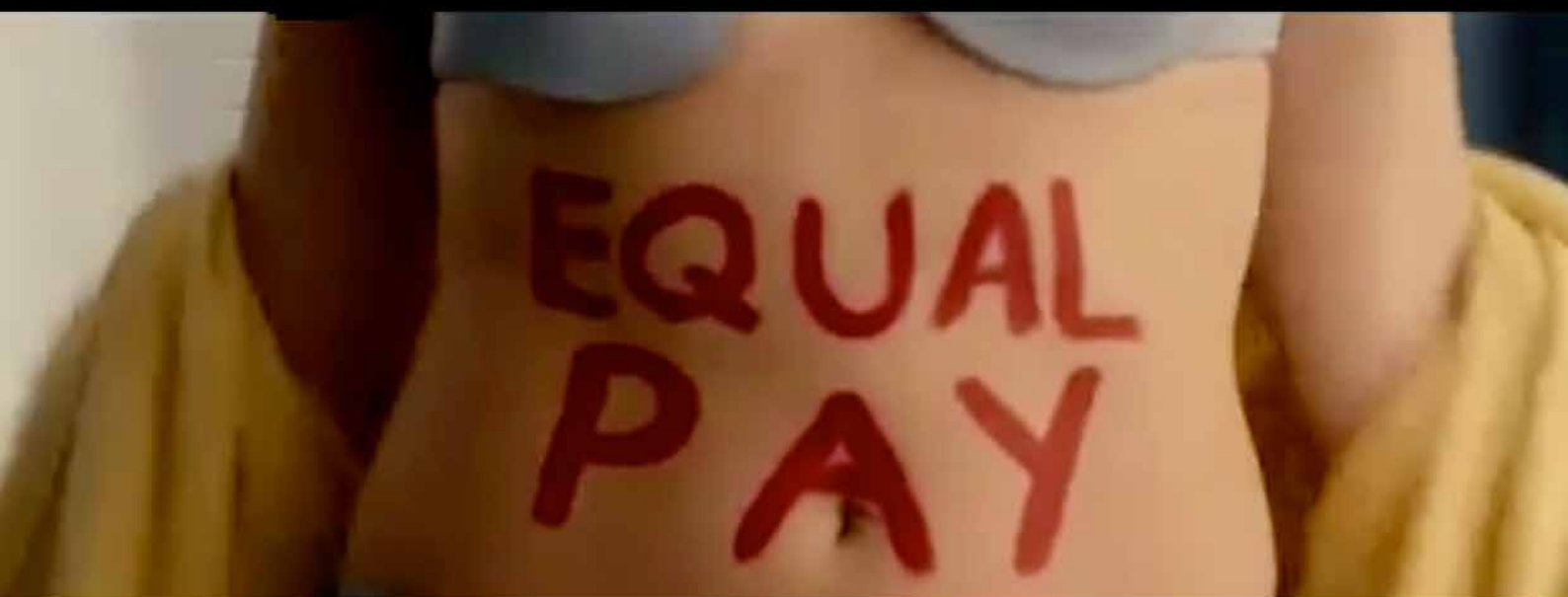




MADE IN
DAGENHAM



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(UK, 2010, d. Nigel Cole)

The title probably says a lot for British filmgoers, but most of world audiences will ask 'where is Dagenham?'. This enjoyable film will go a long way to answering the question.

It is a film about industrial action in 1968. And, Dagenham is a suburb of London.

Interesting to wonder why this story was greenlit for the screen at the time of the global financial meltdown and released in October 2010, a period when the newly elected British government introduced austerity measures to bring down the budget deficit. Has this kind of working-class film and its appeal to some idealism, as well as pragmatism in the workplace, a role to play in 21st century financial and industrial crises? And how does it play to other cultures, especially western countries, where strike action and industrial demands have a long history? And what of other countries, especially in Asia, with the sweat shop conditions



that are far worse than those that the women of Dagenham fought against in the 1960s.

Made in Dagenham is the story of the strike by the women who worked, 187 of them compared to the thousands of men, making coverings for the car seats in Ford's London factory.

In many ways, the film is quite conventional in its story of the factory, the episodes with the women, their inexperience of industrial unrest, the cavalier attitudes of the capitalist bosses, the arrogance of the American company heads, the stalwart action of the women (characters in themselves), the repercussions on families, the animosity of many of the men who objected to equal pay for women, the background of the Labour government and of minister, Barbara Castle, the emotions, the urgency, the victory. And many of the plot developments are signalled in advance, familiar scenes of husband clashing with wife or inept ministerial assistants who get their comeuppance.

That said, the film is still highly entertaining, except for those who see communists under the bed and social improvement as the first step towards a socialist state. Perhaps Americans who are suspicious of National Health benefits, Medicare or medical insurance as a surrender to the proletariat won't warm to the film. Actually, billionaire company directors may not like it much either!

The Dagenham strike led to demands for equal pay for women (which the US Ford representative (Richard Schiff) assures his listeners the company could never afford (and threatens Barbara Castle with withdrawing manufacture from the UK). This equality in pay was achieved by legislation in 1970.

The women are those familiar from so many working class films of the past, Thora Hird, Irene Handl, Dora Bryan.... But, the solid cast bring them to life. Sally Hawkins won acclaim and awards for her exuberant performance in Mike Leigh's *Happy Go Lucky*. She brings the same zest to her role here as Rita O'Grady, wife and mother, who found a voice and was able to lead the striking women. She makes this kind of unexpected leader both credible and sympathetic while not ignoring the nervousness, the possible cost to her family, and affirming the decency and honesty that she brought to the campaign.

Geraldine James is moving as the shop steward with a war-damaged husband (Roger Lloyd Pack different from his role in *The Vicar of Dibley*). Rosamund Pike is the well-to-do wife of a Ford executive (Rupert Graves) who treats her as a trophy wife and servant. Miranda Richardson obviously relishes the political bumptiousness of Barbara Castle. Most of the men are given less attention. Daniel Mays is Ed O'Grady who comes to terms with what his wife is doing. Bob Hoskins is the union man who supports the women while Kenneth Cranham is convincing as the quite self-serving union official. Harold Wilson (John Sessions) does not come off too well as a less than assertive, more pragmatic than hoped for PM.

This is a film that reminds its audiences of the dignity of women, the rights of women, women's equality. Many audiences and reviewers will be making comparisons with director Nigel Cole's other entertaining film about women, *Calender Girls*.
