

Manchester & Salford FILM SOCIETY

Made in Dagenham

Nigel Cole UK 2010 113m

Players: Sally Hawkins, Bob Hoskins, Andrea Riseborough



[THE STRIKE AT DAGENHAM CHANGED HISTORY, IN ENGLAND AND AMERICA](#), at Ford and many other manufacturers and elsewhere in the developed world. It's one reason so many jobs are outsourced to places where labor unions and equal pay do not find favor.

The struggle is far from over. Only last week, a Republican filibuster in the U.S. Senate prevented passage of the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would have added teeth to measures for equal pay. You don't see many GOP ads saying it's against equal pay, but it is. So are corporations, and there may be a connection, but it's harder to say now that corporate political contributions can be secret.

But back to Dagenham. Although Albert set the ball rolling, Rita quickly found tons of support, some of it in unlikely places. One backer of the strike was the government's Labour minister, Barbara Castle) A "fiery redhead" (why are all redheads "fiery"?), she defied the pipe-puffing Wilson, who didn't want to alienate Ford.

She explained her reason: "Harold, you are wrong." Probably the movie's best scene is when Castle receives O'Grady and her co-workers in her office and astonishes them by

giving her support. Her decision put the Labour Party on the spot.

Another ally is much more unlikely. She is Lisa Hopkins (Rosamund Pike), who is married to a top executive at Ford . She received a first-class education, could have had a career but now finds herself playing the role of a well-trained and tamed corporate wife. Her husband, Peter assumes that of course she opposes the striking women. Not so fast there, Pete.

Nick Caro's 2005 film "North Country" starred Charlize Theron in a similar story about a woman who won the first American sexual harassment lawsuit. That was in 1984. Some men are slow to figure these things out. The unexpected thing about "Made in Dagenham" is how entertaining it is. That's largely due to director Nigel Cole's choice of Sally Hawkins for his lead. In Mike Leigh's "Happy Go Lucky" (2009) and again here, she shows an effortless lightness of being. If she has a limitation, it may be that she's constitutionally ill-adapted for playing a bad person.

Roger Ebert – *Chicago Sun Times*

NIGEL COLE DIRECTED 'CALENDAR GIRLS', AND THIS IS A SIMILARLY RAUCOUS but polite, women-out-of-water tale about the female machinists who went on strike at Ford Dagenham in the late 1960s and whose dispute was a milestone on the way to the Equal Pay Act of 1970. The film's original 'oo-er missus' title was 'We Want Sex', a gag about a slogan on a half-unfurled protest banner, which gives some idea of the populist approach of the filmmakers in remembering this key moment in our labour history.

You might worry where all this populism is heading: it's not exactly 'Carry On Cortina', but when an early scene give us a room full of workers stripping down to their bras to combat the heat, and Bob Hoskins enters the shopfloor covering his eyes in mock shame, you half expect to see Bernard Bresslaw pinching Hattie Jacques's bottom. But don't be put off. Mostly, the film sticks with the story at its heart, moulding and tempering it with comedy and the odd heartbreak. It's about as political as the women it portrays, who became activists almost by accident alongside their everyday lives. Billy Ivory's script is compassionate, a little overloaded with sub-plots and not always subtle, but often moving and good on the detail of professional and family camaraderie and their flip sides: antagonism and resentment.



The main thrust of the film is the gradual, reluctant politicisation of Rita O'Grady), a fictional composite of various women. Her fellow workers decide that Rita, a quiet woman, married to fellow Ford worker Eddie (Daniel Mays) and mother of two kids, should represent them with their bosses. Events take over, and the next thing we know Rita is addressing the TUC and marching on Parliament. Somehow this convinces, and it's down to Hawkins, who is excellent at conveying Rita's growing confidence and new awareness of her cause. She is the film's anchor. Her performance is serious but fun, see-sawing between boldness and trepidation.

'Made in Dagenham' balances a broad tone with a keen eye for domestic and workplace politics. Its attention

span is limited as it wanders off down romantic, comic or tragic byways, some of them, such as the story of Connie (Geraldine James) and her depressed husband, George (Roger Lloyd-Pack), more successful than others – such as an awkward scene involving aspiring model Sandra and a David Bailey-like snapper. Politically it's light, but its mission is honest. It highlights an important episode in a style that you imagine would appeal to the same women it honours.

Dave Calhoun – *Time Out London*

[ON A COUPLE OF OCCASIONS, MADE IN DAGENHAM TOUCHES UPON ISSUES](#) that, if expanded, might have provided a more dramatically compelling tapestry. There is an assertion that the concept of equal pay for women is an attack on the male masculinity - his ability to be the "breadwinner" and to "provide for his family." In fact, that belief is a primary reason why 100% parity has not yet been achieved even in the United States. This is later reinforced when a man who has lost his wages because of the temporary closure of the factory blames Rita for his being unable to pay his bills. Strangely, however, William Ivory's script does not pursue these instances - they are presented as anecdotes rather than the underpinnings of a more complete story.

Made in Dagenham's '60s setting is developed in the way that '60s settings often are - with plenty of nostalgia. The fashions and hairdos are what one would expect based on news footage and photographs and the soundtrack is littered with era-appropriate songs. However, it's the attitudes of the characters more than anything else that establishes the time period in which events transpire.



I wish I could be more favorable in my appraisal of the movie but, despite a tremendous performance by Hawkins, I was never engaged by the struggle of these women. Their fight may have been historical in its impact, but there's little sense that the personal stakes are high. If Rita had lost her bid to achieve equality, life would have pretty much gone on as always for her. The struggle for an ideal devoid of immediate and powerful personal consequences rarely makes for an engaging drama. *Made in Dagenham* is a useful lesson in history and a reminder that we yet have a distance to travel to attain the goal, but the narrative is dry, safe, and predictable and, as a result, not fully satisfying.

James | Berardinelli – *Reel Views*

[MADE IN DAGENHAM IS DIRECTED BY NIGEL COLE FROM A SCRIPT BY BILLY IVORY](#), who cut his teeth writing episodes of *Minder*. It's uncomplicated fare, overly spiced with 60s cliches, right down to the louche fashion photographer who lies on his back to snap his pics. But the film is also robust, amiable and so warm-hearted you'd be a churl to take against it. Hawkins gives a winning performance as the working-class sparrow who grows slowly in stature. Rosamund Pike is superb as the tragic trophy wife who finds her Cambridge history degree is the perfect qualification for her new career passing the cheese-board around at dinner parties. Together, these women form the heart and soul of *Made in Dagenham*. They ensure that this comedy is travelling forward, not back.

The 1968 Ford motor strike lasted three weeks and laid the ground for the Equal Pay Act of 1970. That's because revolutionaries, as Cole's film reminds us, come in all shapes and sizes. Some are gilded poster-boys,

some are Marxist militants, and some are lowly seamstresses, supposed sitcom fodder, hunched over their Singer sewing machines, expecting an honest day's wage for an honest day's work.

They stand their ground and get the job done. With the occasional tea break thrown in for good measure.

Xan Brooks - *the Guardian*

ON ONE LEVEL – THE TYPICAL BRIT-FLICK LEVEL – THIS IS A CHARMING, if twee, dramedy – taking a sweet and slightly eccentric look at a seminal period of British history. Director Nigel Cole's own *Calendar Girls* will give you a flavour – and there's a sense in which this is a female Full Monty, although without the – well – full monty.

A very strong ensemble cast helps Cole deliver a skilful blend of kitchen-sink drama, nostalgic comedy and socio-political commentary, without it feeling too preachy. It's a feelgood film about union unrest.

That said, you might find yourself cracking under the weight of clichés, from the immovably old-fashioned bosses and the self-interested union leaders to the husband whose initial enthusiasm transforms first into frustration and then back to admiration. There's even a completely incongruous moment of tragedy that fails to rally further support for the cause, assuming that's why it's there.

A key problem with this is that the plot itself seems too clunky, convenient and obvious to feel truly dramatic and genuinely emotional. This might seem odd, given that it is based on real events. But that's just it – it's based on real events, but it's not

actually real events. If Sally Hawkins's Rita O'Grady doesn't seem real, that's because she never actually existed – she's an amalgam of several of the leading women among the strikers. At the end of the film, we actually hear from some of the real-life strikers and wonder whether it might have been more convincing to follow their stories.

It's one of those rare "real life" stories where the "if it happened in a movie, you wouldn't believe it" joke actually stands up.

The interesting corollary to that, of course, is that despite the film ending with everyone patting themselves on the back at the passing of the Equal Pay Act, many women are still paid less than their male counterparts

Jason Korsner - *UK Screen*



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