

## **No more peanuts: Winning equal pay**

*This is the story of tenacious women who have fought for the value of their work to be recognised. Their victories have led to thousands of women receiving increases in pay. The TUC equal pay oral history archive records the voices of women and their unions who established the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.*

*Their daughters and granddaughters owe them a debt and we owe it to them to keep fighting. Fighting to end a shocking statistic that for every one pound a man earns, a woman only earns 83 pence.*

*In 1984 five women cleaners at the Royal Victoria Hospital, Belfast lodged a claim for equal value with groundsmen and porters.*

(Person 1) Rosaleen Davidson, Hospital Cleaner

Everybody's jobs important and I didn't see why women shouldn't be paid, you know, equal pay for work of equal value and that was one of the biggest stumbling blocks at the beginning. Having to make men understand that we weren't trying to put their jobs down or belittle their jobs but we just needed people to understand, you know, equality.

*Sewing machinists at Ford's Dagenham Plant, who before 1967 were classed as unskilled workers, went on strike in 1968 and 1984, demanding Grade C status in recognition of their skills.*

(Person 2) Maureen Jackson, Ford sewing machinist

The women started talking amongst themselves and saying well this is not on. We can sort of turn our hands to anything but the men can't which seemed very unfair to us. So I think that was the start of us digging our heels in.

(Person 3) Geraldine Dear, Ford sewing machinist

Us women was doing qualified jobs and they just didn't want to pay us the money that we should have had. We should have deserved.

*Julie Hayward, a cook at the Cammell Laird Shipyard, was the first person to lodge a claim under the 1984 equal value amendment to the Equal Pay Act.*

(Person 4) Julie Hayward, Cook

So I went to the union guy about it and he said to me that it sounds wrong. You go and ask the management and he asked the manager and they said no it's classed as a labourer and he argued and said no. Well, why did you send us to college then?

*The first of around 1200 equal value claims by speech and language therapists were lodged in 1985. Their comparators were clinical psychologists and/or clinical pharmacists.*

(Person 5) Margaret Evesham, Speech and Language Therapist

I can remember one medical officer saying the reason he thought that there were lots of speech therapists was that because they were all so marriageable, they were all intelligent and

attractive and marriageable and that's why they were leaving, not because they were not getting paid.

*In the late 1980's, dinner ladies in North Yorkshire had their jobs evaluated as equal to those of highway workers and gardeners. But following compulsory competitive tendering in 1991, the dinner ladies had their wages cut to less than men on the same grades.*

(Person 6) Dorothy Ratcliffe, School Dinner Lady

They actually just came in one day and said your terms and conditions are changing. You're going to be 3 pounds an hour and that will be it and there was nothing, everything was taken away.

(Person 7) Susan Crosby, School Dinner Lady

You know you didn't have to be a staunch unionist or anything like that. They were treating you unfairly you know you've worked here all these years. That was the one thing that kept coming across all the time. It was unfair.

*Unfairly. That is how all these women, hospital cleaners, sewing machinists, dinner ladies, speech therapists and a qualified cook were being treated. They argued their skills were undervalued. With the support of their unions they stood up and were counted. They took on long struggles to win recognition for the value of their work.*

(Person 1) Rosaleen Davidson

You see, nobody understood really what was happening. It was a whole new world for them too. Trying to get through, you know, the idea of equality on all levels. But Sally, I remember the first time we went to court you were sick. Sally you were weren't you?

(Person 8) Sally Devlin, Hospital Cleaner

I was. I was indeed.

(Person 1)

Every morning before she left the house, just nerves.

(Person 8)

You just psyche yourself up so much about going, you know, as Mary said, like you know, management just thought, you shouldn't be doing this you shouldn't be here. We found that when they passed that they were sort of, but then as time went on I think they got used to us going to court, we got used to going to court and I think we all wanted everyone to be an end to it. It was like yesterday's news for a while, you know.

(Person 3)

The management just sat back and thought they're going to walk in from there, they're going to walk back from the canteen and they're going to start work and they were so shocked.

(Person 7)

And this chap was only a young fellow and he had written something on the lines of well these women only come out for pin money, for pocket money and he was sat directly in front of me as

I was reading this in the tribunal and I thought I could smack you. How dare you insult the ladies who were working and that from then on that was what got me fired because I thought, you know, for a man his age and somebody in their sixties I could of understood but for a lad his age I thought you're just talking rubbish. How dare you do this them all.

(Person 9) Rita Spotswood, Hospital Cleaner

If you thought you started something and every time you got so far and you thought you were going to win you were knocked back and it made you more determined to go on to get there. It was like putting a hurdle in front of you and you were going to jump it and get to the next one.

*With no men doing jobs that were the same or broadly similar these women relied on male trade unionists to be comparators so that equal value could be established.*

(Person 10) Tom Foster, Road worker and comparator

That man's working out in snow. You can't compare him say with a school meals worker or a woman working in a kitchen. Yes you can. Because ok one may be cold but the other one may be very hot, working flat out in such a short time to produce a full meal for not just one child but hundreds of children in the bigger schools.

(Person 4)

When he came to Cammell Laird to follow me round for a couple of days he had this manager with him who kept saying oh no this and oh no that and I think you do this and you do that and well he thinks that and when the guy went out ... in the shipyard. He had to follow my compatriot round and things. The blokes were saying cos the manager was saying oh look they're up. The painters are up a big ladder and they're painting and the painters were saying we could climb that ladder like we will get an extra ten bob.

(Person 1)

Me and you worked within the union and we were always good union members and when they sat at meetings and had it explained to them that we weren't trying to put them down in any way and we explained exactly what it meant, what we were trying to do, these two boys came forward and we were very grateful to them. Francie and Gerard they were hilarious and they were very honest about their work. Very honest. Just as the women were honest about theirs.

(Person 11) Professor Pam Enderby, Speech and Language Therapist

My psychologist friend, a great chap who shared details about what they were doing and what they were paid and there was that much friendship that you knew jolly well that you were not actually being recompensed in the same way.

I think, now you will probably correct me, I think it was something like £7000.

(Person 12)

You were on £11,000 per annum and your comparator was on £17.80 something like that.

(Person 11)

and he never bought the drinks. It was enough to make you go to court really that.

*The skills involved in women's jobs were not recognised.*

(Person 13) Dora Challingsworth, Ford Sewing Machinist

When we had to go round and look at the work and what we did I mean you had about 40 pieces on some backs of cushions like the set. You had 40 different individual pieces and you had to know exactly where they went. I mean if you put your left and your right whatever bit if you did you wasn't a machinist you wouldn't know where they had gone – where it went.

(Person 14) Bernie Passingham, TGWU Ford Convenor

The change of design from just a few they just put it in front of a machinist. The machinist had never seen it before, opens it up and puts all the bits and pieces together to make a sleeve.

*Support from many different sources helped the women. All these cases were financially backed by the womens trade union. Local and national union officials were crucial as were experts, lawyers and the equal opportunities commission.*

(Person 15) Sheila Wild, Equal Opportunities Commission – Speech Therapists case

That's where having trade union support is so very very important. They did an excellent job of bringing those women together in the first place and an excellent job of never losing them throughout the entire 15 years. And I think from starting off from a position where it was a cause for a small group of women it became a cause for the entire profession and that is down to the union that was not down to the EOC. We could not possibly have done that.

(Person 4)

I was on the picket line with the guys and because I was involved in the picket line with the guys and things at one point we were doing a case and Cammell Laird said that if we don't go to work they are going to say that I am bringing it into disrepute so we had a meeting outside the gates again – there was something like 2000 guys, you know cos we were all at different gates and they explained, everybody explained that what I was doing on the whole vote and everybody voted that I would go back in so it was quite embarrassing actually. One day I think just there was about 3 or 4000 of them wait outside the gates and they all moved to one side and just clapped me in. You'll do more good in work... Your fight is far more important for us.

(Person 3)

We had the police from Dagenham police station come along and make sure. They used to come down just to make sure we was right. They used to come down didn't they? You could stay if you want Pam.

(Person 16)

But you have to bring us a bottle of whisky down there now and again to keep us warm. There was one particular policeman who would always come down but they looked after us.

(Person 3)

Pam was single and I think this one particular policeman fancied her actually. (laughter).

*Cheers, Cheers, Cheers.*

*With the help of their unions these women after long years of struggle won recognition for the value of their work.*

(Person 1)

I was very proud of the rest of the women because you didn't even have to ask them. I just looked round and everybody said, "No". That was it, unanimous decision, "No". That wasn't the idea behind it. It was not just to get money for five women. It was to get it for everybody. It was to get justice for everybody.

(Person 4)

That's what you pay your union dues for. That's what you pay things for, for those people to fight your cases for you to do things and that's where the collective power or people being together can make things happen. I think that's one of the importance of the unions is that collectively people can make change.

(Person 17) Ray Gray, Unison Officer

Right across the country it was like similar cases. These two did that. These two that did that. We have got to get it together. You've got to get a kick out of that. If you changed legislation you stopped employers from cutting pay to the contracts you stopped them from using market forces as an argument to cut your pay. They did that!

Various people (Susan Crosby and Dorothy Ratcliffe)

With your help With your help. With support. Without the union behind us. That's right. That's right. People wouldn't have known. Join the union. If there is any problems that's the only way you're going to get this thing sorted. (laughter)

*The women in this film won important legal victories that have helped us all.*

*But 37 years after the introduction of the Equal pay Act, women are still paid less than men.*

*Trade unions continue to fight this injustice.*