



House of Commons
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Why should women be paid less than men for the same job?

Today, I am bringing a Ten Minute Rule Bill on Equal Pay to Parliament. The Bill asks for implementation of Section 78 of the 2010 Equalities Act, which would place a duty on companies with over 250 employees to publish their figures on the pay gap between the men and women working for them.

It has been almost 50 years since the women of T&G Ford Dagenham went on strike for equal pay and almost 45 years since the equal pay act was introduced. It should be the case that for many years, women have received the same pay as men, but sadly and quite shockingly, it isn't.

Today's motion to Parliament would rectify a section of the Equalities Act that has so far been inactive. Section 78 requires large companies to publish figures on the gender pay gap, but it is currently enforced solely through a voluntary mechanism. Since the implementation of the Act, only five companies have opted in to this voluntary arrangement. Five. That isn't even 0.1 per cent of the total number of large businesses in the UK.

By now, equal pay should be standard for women everywhere, rather than a campaign that we're still fighting. Companies across the UK, as well as many successive Governments, have pledged to deliver on giving women equal pay. We do the same work, so it goes without saying that we should get the same pay.

Women in Britain still earn on average only 81p for every pound earned by men. That's over £200,000 we've lost in a lifetime. You could buy a house for that.

It isn't just women that we're short-changing: it's families too. Why should children be worse off because their Mum gets less pay than their Dad? Why should a family be deprived of the extra clothes, shoes, meals or even holidays that a lifetime's worth of being underpaid brings?

The last Labour Government did close the pay gap by a third, but progress is too slow. We have already waited a generation, and we shouldn't have to wait another. This is why tomorrow's motion calls for large companies to publish their figures on

the pay gap is so important. It is time we took action. It is time we named and shamed. Equal pay won't happen on its own: almost 50 years of waiting since the women of Ford Dagenham marched for women's pay shows that.

Asking companies to publish their figures on the pay gap isn't just about jumpstarting them into action. It's about giving women the evidence they need to challenge decisions on pay. Women should feel empowered to speak out and challenge where necessary, but we cannot do that without the facts being made available to us.

This is about giving women equal pay compared to those in the same job as them, but it's also about giving women equal pay regardless of their situation. Women shouldn't be penalised for wanting to work part-time. They shouldn't be penalised for having just returned from a year of maternity leave. They shouldn't be penalised for having family commitments. They shouldn't be penalised as a consequence of their gender in any way.

The workplace is changing, but it isn't changing quickly enough. Women should feel empowered to achieve the things they aspire to, but the first step in empowering women is giving them the pay they deserve, and are entitled to. Asking large companies to publish their figures on the pay gap is a strong step towards achieving exactly that.