

Review

Made in Dagenham

It is always a surprise when either Hollywood or Britain's film industry makes a sympathetic movie about workers who go on strike. Made in Dagenham is getting a lot of publicity with its story of the Fords women machinists' strike of 1968. LEAH MAUGHAN reviews the film, which is now on general release.

MADE IN Dagenham brings to the screen a story of struggle without resorting to the depressiveness of some previous British films such as *Brassed Off* or the saccharine comedy of *The Full Monty*. It emphasises the strike's importance and the heroism of the women workers, though the film has received mixed reviews.

The machinists complained of the film 'sexing up' the dispute. The film obviously needs to make a visual reference to the women's working conditions but having the actors strip to their underwear to work sends the message that the women didn't take their work seriously.

This point is refuted by the strikers after a laid-off worker complains that work is: "Different for the women, they don't have a family to feed, it's all just a bit of fun for you".

This accusation could not be further from the truth. Other scenes show the machinists bravely working on, wearing macks with umbrellas above their workplaces, as the shed roof leaks during their shift.

This was not due to some outburst of Dunkirk spirit but actually happened at Fords where the machinists were then too scared to stop work in case of victimisation.

Bob Hoskins' character, playing the plant trade union convenor, attempts to dispel the myth that women don't really need the money. He describes the hardships of his single mother attempting to make ends meet whilst earning half the wages of her male counterparts.

However, serious financial discomfort is only felt once production is completely stopped and the men are sent home. The film makers attempted to high-

light the dual exploitation of women, in the workplace and home, showing their role as carers both for the young and elderly. Whilst the women's husbands are initially supportive, they begin to complain about the lack of home comforts as the real strikers' husbands did during the three-week strike.

The film ignores the support the women received from other union members at Fords in an attempt to create the atmosphere of one woman battling for what is right. Unlike in the strike, the women don't discuss the strike's tactics - what decisions are taken by vote are made on gut feeling and anger, not through any real debate.

Even the involvement of Rita, the main character in the film and leader of the strike and the machinists, comes from being handpicked by Albert Passingham (the convenor) rather than being voted for by the members.

Barbara Castle

AS THE then Labour minister Barbara Castle, Miranda Richardson reprises her role as Queenie in *Blackadder* to snipe and scream her way through the film attacking her comedy assistants. Castle is not portrayed as a particularly sympathetic character.

While she appears to sympathise with the Fords women, her role as a government minister is to get them back to work, only brokering concessions after it becomes clear the women will not be returning to work without them!

The real life Castle's later attacks on the trade unions would herald the beginning of the anti-trade union laws that still hamstringing the

workers' movement in Britain to this day.

This film makes for enjoyable viewing though it does not try to make any real comment on the workers' movement. The women are portrayed as inspiring which they certainly were and still are! Their struggle, however, is not linked to that of other women in the workplace.

The film makers instead attempt to establish a relationship between Rita and Lisa Hopkins, the middle class wife of the Fords Dagenham public relations officer, who seems to spend her days shopping and haranguing her son's school, all the while bemoaning the fact that her history degree from Cambridge is going to waste.

The film focuses on the individuals not the struggle. It attempts to highlight the women's struggle as for only sexual equality, ignoring the need for workplace equality and the fact that parity pay still has not been reached. In fact the pay gap between men and women is again on the rise, reaching 22% in 2009.

This was underlined by the film's final remarks that Fords is still one of the best places to work in the world, a proclamation met by laughs and jeers in the East London cinema where I saw the film.

Made in Dagenham is likely to be pegged as another *Full Monty* or *Billy Elliot*, but the fact that the struggle of ordinary East London women has been immortalised in film is an achievement in itself.

As I left work on Friday to see the film, one of the (low paid) women I work with commented: "You never know, the things we do might change the world."



Stills from Made in Dagenham.

Campaigning Socialist Students win support

Nottingham

SOcialist Students made a great impact on Nottingham Trent University's freshers' fair. In three hours, around 200 signatures were collected in support of our campaign against the government's planned cuts to education and raising of tuition fees.

The level of support for socialist ideas is clearly growing amongst young people.

With 150,000 students failing to win a place at university this year, the reality of government cuts has already begun to hit home for many 18 and 19 year-olds.

The only other political group represented was the Labour Party who appeared unable to engage with the vast majority of students. No wonder - when tuition fees were introduced by Labour and the Browne Review was started in the last months of the Labour government!

Despite being the only stall campaigning on behalf of students and workers, the students' union was keen to silence us for the crime of not going through the 'proper channels' for booking our stall. We were told we either had to pay £1,000 for the privilege of being there or leave!

They called security, who marched us past several stalls trying to sell in-



Young people are increasingly looking towards socialist ideas.

photo Naomi Byron

urance to students, stalls advertising nightclubs and the Pole Dancing Society stall.

We pointed out that when the government's cuts put their jobs at risk we will be the only society campaigning on their behalf. Having been ejected, we continued to campaign outside.

This came a week after covering the University of Nottingham fresh-

ers' fair, where we also received a lot of interest.

Jethro Waldron

Northampton

AT NORTHAMPTON university freshers' fair, Northampton Socialist Students had a very successful stall. Students

talked of their fear of the cap on tuition fees being lifted and how this blatantly favoured the more established universities and more well-off students. Many were justifiably concerned about the gaping class divide this would create in our education system.

Most could also see through the smokescreen of ideas such as a 'graduate tax' to shift the huge debt

placed on students from one place to another. They welcomed the idea of putting more pressure on the National Union of Students (NUS) to mobilise against this and fight for free education and a living wage for all students.

A number of people joined Socialist Students and many more signed our tuition fees petition and wanted information about meetings.

Jack Clarke

Keele

KEELE Socialist Students had to wait for a stall to become available at the freshers' fair on 27 September but it was well worth the wait! 17 students joined in just two hours. One said: "I'm really pleased to find you. I was beginning to think that there weren't any socialists at Keele!"

Staffordshire

FOURTEEN STUDENTS signed up to join Socialist Students at Staffordshire University. On seeing our stall, people said that Socialist Students was just what they were looking for. Many said they would come to the anti-cuts activity we organised on 29 September.