



Women Chainmakers’ Strike Timeline Activity

Date	Event
1906	Anti-sweating League pressure group was set up to highlight the plight of the lowest paid workers and started work to establish a minimum wage.
March 1910	A minimum wage was agreed by the Chainmakers’ Association – this doubled the wages of the women chainmakers.
August 1910	Employers should have introduced the minimum wage by this date. Some did so, but other employers produced contracts which women signed, not fully understanding that they gave up their rights to the pay increase as many women could not read. Some employers also stock piled (held onto) chain so that they had plenty of reserves when the new wages came into force.
August 21st	400 women attended a meeting held by National Federation of Women Workers and led by Mary Macarthur. They agreed to lay down their tools and strike if the new rate wasn’t paid.
August 23rd	National Federation of Women Workers (NFWW) demanded that the new agreed minimum wage be paid immediately. The employers refused and collected back from the women the metal rods that they needed to make chain.
August 1910	Despite having no money, the women chainmakers went on strike. Charles and Thomas Sitch and Julia Varley from the NFWW and The Chainmakers’ and Strikers’ Association (CSA) supported the strikers. Mary Macarthur travelled the country gathering support and raising money so the women could receive strike pay.
August 27th	The first strike pay was paid.

Date	Event
September 1st	The Times newspaper ran a story supporting the women chainmakers’ strike. 648 women were on strike. Patience Round – a 79 year old chain maker told the newspaper “These are wonderful times. I never thought that I should live to assert the rights of women.”
September 1910	Pathé news made a (silent) film about the women chainmakers’ strike. People didn’t have television – the news was only shown in ‘picture houses’ (cinemas).
September 3rd	Number of strikers rose to 800.
September 6th	Another employer agreed to pay the minimum wage – 120 women returned to work.
October 3rd	The women lead another procession through Cradley Heath to a strike meeting.
October 22nd	The final employers agreed to pay the minimum wage and the strike ended.
1910 – 1920	The membership of the NFWW grew from 2,000 to 20,000 women.
1911	The remaining money from the strike pay was used to build a Workers’ Institute, in use for education, meetings, trade union offices and an advice centre.

Cut along the dotted lines, jumble and give the information to pupils. Ask them to pair up each date with the corresponding event and then to arrange themselves/the information in a timeline.

Discuss...
What else would they add and where?
Which events are the most significant?
Why?

