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THE BRITISH WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT: A STONE'S THROW FROM THE VOTE

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THE BRITISH WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT:
A STONE'S THROW FROM THE VOTE

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The British women's suffrage movement is among the most important social movements of the twentieth century because it questioned the fundamental definition of citizenship. In the late nineteenth century, citizenship in Great Britain was increasingly defined by the vote. As women took on greater responsibilities within society and gained more legal rights independent of male relatives, they clamored for full citizenship—they wanted the vote. Beginning with the first women's petition to Parliament in 1867 and ending in the destruction of World War I, British women fought for their right to vote as citizens of Britain. Through their struggle, women overcame many strong objections to their admission as full citizens, including the argument that they were not deserving of the vote because they could not fight for their country. World War I proved that women were essential to Britain's defense. Without their contributions in many capacities to the war effort, particularly the manufacture of munitions, Britain's efforts on the battlefield would have been significantly altered. At the end of the struggle, women proved they could fight for their citizenship both at home and abroad. World War I provided women the opportunity to prove to both the country and government the strength of their argument- that women deserved the right to vote.

The women's demand for the vote challenged the government's authority at a time in which British society was rapidly changing. This continuous demand was one of the fundamental challenges facing the British government at the turn of the century and was one of the major crises troubling the social fabric of the country in the years leading up to World War I. The challenges posed by women's suffrage indicated a fundamental change in the political and social structure of modern Britain.

BACKGROUND AND EARLY SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

British feminism and the roots of the suffragette movement are generally traced to the late eighteenth century. In 1792 Mary Wollstonecraft wrote her famous essay “A Vindication of the Rights of Women.”¹ This document is considered the beginning of British feminism despite its failure to mention women’s suffrage, a topic relatively unheard of at the time of the document’s publication. Only a quarter of a century later in 1825, William Thompson proposed female enfranchisement in his book entitled *An appeal of one half the human race, Women, against the pretensions of the other half, Men, to retain them in political, and thence in civil and domestic slavery: in reply to a paragraph of Mr. Mill’s celebrated Article on Government* and is credited as the first proponent of women’s suffrage in England.² In his book Thompson argued for women’s suffrage because of their lack of adequate political representation through their husbands.³ While Thompson’s book did not have the revolutionary effect on women for which he hoped, it set the stage for the British women’s suffrage movement of the early twentieth century.

The debate over women’s suffrage in 1832 moved from the literary world to the political arena of Parliament. The Reform Bill of that year, while enlarging the franchise to include men of lesser valued property, did not extend the franchise to include women; however, it was determined that there was no specific court case that excluded women from voting in areas outside those new constituencies created by that Reform Bill.⁴

¹ Sophia A. Van Wingerden, *The Women’s Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1866-1928* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, Inc., 1999), 2.

² Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle* (London, Faber and Faber, Ltd., 1957), 27.

³ *Ibid*, 28.

⁴ *Ibid*, 32.

Hoping to take advantage of this technicality in the law, the Radical politician Orator Hunt proposed a bill allowing unmarried women fulfilling certain property requirements to vote; this proposal was particularly momentous in that it was the first time women's suffrage was brought up for debate before the House of Commons.⁵ Women's enfranchisement was also brought up before the House of Lords in 1851 with little success once again.⁶ Both of these appeals to Parliament were on behalf of individual women or isolated women's organizations; it was not until 1866 that a substantial group of women made an organized appeal to Parliament.

On June 6, 1866, Elizabeth Garrett and Emily Davies presented John Stuart Mill with the "Ladies' Petition" which contained 1,499 signatures and asked for the enfranchisement of women fulfilling certain property requirements; on June 7 Mill presented the petition to the House of Commons.⁷ A year later Mill later offered an amendment to the 1867 franchise bill that would have extended the vote to women; Mill's amendment was based on the argument that the term "man" should be interpreted broadly to include all of mankind-- a semantic technicality that would become common in the fight for woman's suffrage.⁸ Despite this organized effort, the Reform Bill of 1867 did not extend the franchise to women; in fact, Mill's amendment was defeated soundly in the House of Commons with a strong majority of 194 votes against and a minority of 73 in favor of the amendment.⁹

Women faced several obstacles to their enfranchisement at this point in British history. Many of the more conservative politicians were horrified at the thought of

⁵ Wingerden, 2; Fulford, 33.

⁶ Wingerden, 2.

⁷ *Ibid*, 2.

⁸ Fulford, 57-58.

⁹ *Ibid*, 60.

women making speeches at public meetings to promote their cause. They found such behavior, as well as voting at public polls, to be unseemly activities for well mannered women of the Victorian era; this same mentality contributed to the idea that only women of low social standing were interested in suffrage.¹⁰ Another reason many politicians protested the enfranchisement of women was a fear of varying influences on the women's vote, particularly the influence of Catholic priests over their female parishioners' votes.¹¹ Finally, some politicians protested women's enfranchisement simply because they believed in men's superiority to women.¹²

At the same time the debate over the Reform Bill of 1867 was taking place in Parliament in January, Lydia Becker formed the Manchester Women's Suffrage Committee, the first women's suffrage organization in England; this organization became permanent in August 1867.¹³ At the same time, the National Society of Women's Suffrage was formed in London to provide a sense of unity to the various regional organizations dedicated to women's suffrage.¹⁴ In 1870, Becker began publishing the *Women's Suffrage Journal*, which served primarily as a collection of parliamentary speeches made on behalf of women's suffrage and kept a record of those politicians who favored women's right to vote.¹⁵ Despite the increasing activity of the women's suffrage movement in the late 1860s and early 1870s, it would come to a virtual standstill over the next thirty-five years. The weakness of the women's suffrage movement at this time was particularly evident when the Reform Bill of 1884 extended the franchise to mostly

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 73 & 89.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 88.

¹² *Ibid*, 89.

¹³ *Ibid*, 55 & 61

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 61.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 79.

illiterate male agricultural workers but not women.¹⁶

The revival of the women's suffrage movement in the last decade of the nineteenth century can largely be credited to the rise of the labor movement in an increasingly industrialized Britain. As early as the 1860s, women laborers organized in the Women's Trades Union League to promote women's general interests in labor. While these early women's labor organizations had no connection to the women's suffrage movement, Esther Roper and Eva Gore-Booth are credited with uniting the power of the women's labor movement to the women's suffrage movement by blaming the economic disparities between male and female laborers on women's inability to vote.¹⁷ By the turn of the century, Roper and Gore-Booth were able to present petitions to Parliament signed by approximately 67,000 female textile workers in support of women's franchise.¹⁸ This initial connection between labor and the women's suffrage movement would have a dramatic impact on the history of women's franchise as later demonstrated by Sylvia Pankhurst's close associations with the Labour Party and the founding of the East London Federation of Suffragettes, a suffragette organization composed primarily of working class women.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 92.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 104.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 104.

THE WSPU AND ITS FORMATIVE YEARS: 1903-1906

The watershed event of the woman's suffrage movement in Britain occurred on October 19, 1903 with the formation of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) by Emmeline Pankhurst.¹⁹ The Pankhurst family had a long tradition of political involvement in their hometown of Manchester and was well connected in the newly formed Labour Party.²⁰ In fact, Emmeline Pankhurst had been elected to serve on the National Executive Council of the Independent Labour Party in 1897.²¹ Following the death of her husband Richard in 1898, Emmeline Pankhurst took a paid position as the Registrar of Births and Deaths in which she was exposed to many of the problems that plagued women including overlarge families and dominating relationships with fathers and husbands.²² The women's problems to which Emmeline Pankhurst was exposed to in her line of work, combined with the Labour Party's unwillingness to support women's suffrage, inspired her to found the WSPU.²³ Pankhurst founded the WSPU with the intention that it would hold no particular political affiliation but would run in a similar manner to that of the Labour Party.²⁴ Emmeline Pankhurst shared her quest for women's suffrage with her two eldest daughters Christabel and Sylvia, both excellent examples of the emerging idea of modern, independent women.²⁵ The Pankhurst women were soon joined by Theresa Billington and Annie Kenney, who would later become prominent figures in the suffrage movement.²⁶

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 114.

²⁰ Jane Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," *Votes for Women* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 110.

²¹ *Ibid*, 110.

²² *Ibid*, 110.

²³ *Ibid*, 111.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 114.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 115.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 119-120.

The idea of women's enfranchisement was once again taken up for debate in Parliament in 1904. While the bill proposing limited female enfranchisement received a majority of votes in the House of Commons (including favorable votes from such famous politicians as David Lloyd George and Winston Churchill), the majority was not strong enough to pass a Second Reading of the bill.²⁷ On May 12, 1905, a bill to remove masculine wording in voting requirements was "talked out" by opponents of women's suffrage, a parliamentary tactic that prevented the bill from even being debated.²⁸ In reaction to this unfavorable outcome, Emmeline Pankhurst along with approximately 300 other suffragists gathered in a protest meeting in the Strangers' Lobby in Parliament while Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, considered to be one of the oldest living suffragists, made a speech to the gathered women.²⁹ Police ordered the women to disperse and recorded the names of the participants but made no arrests.³⁰ With this small protest meeting on May 12, 1905, the first seeds of militancy were formed.³¹

The women's suffrage movement took an increasingly active role in the British political world beginning with the campaign leading up to the General Election of 1906. On October 13, 1905, Winston Churchill, a Liberal candidate, spoke to a political gathering in Manchester.³² Annie Kenney, who was present at the meeting, questioned Churchill as to whether women's suffrage would become a "government measure" if the Liberals were to win and "Will the Liberal Government, if returned, give votes to women?"³³ When Churchill remained silent in response to the question, Kenney and

²⁷ *Ibid*, 121

²⁸ *Ibid*, 112.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 112.

³⁰ Fulford, 123.

³¹ *Ibid*, 122.

³² *Ibid*, 127.

³³ *Ibid*, 127; Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 112.

Christabel Pankhurst began to heckle Churchill by shouting, “Votes for Women.”³⁴ After being removed from the meeting for disruptive behavior, they attempted to address the crowd gathered outside the meeting hall, were arrested when Christabel spat on a police officer, and then imprisoned after refusing to pay their fines.³⁵ The imprisonment of Annie Kenney and Christabel Pankhurst marked the first of many imprisonments on behalf of the women’s suffrage movement.

The dramatic events of October 13, 1905 proved to be a call to action. They convinced Emmeline Pankhurst to embrace militant tactics. Pankhurst was initially hesitant to accept the seemingly harsh consequences of militant action such as imprisonment, a fact that is rather hard to believe since she went to jail so frequently.³⁶ However, Pankhurst’s unfailing trust in her daughter’s political instinct convinced her to accept the unconventional tactics of militant protest.³⁷ These events also revealed Christabel Pankhurst to be the real mastermind of the women’s suffrage movement. In fact, it is often argued that Christabel was the main strategist behind the militant movement while Emmeline primarily served as a figurehead. Sylvia described this relationship between Christabel and Emmeline: “from the day of Christabel’s first imprisonment, their mother [Emmeline Pankhurst] proudly and openly proclaimed her eldest daughter, her favourite child, to be her leader.”³⁸ Finally, the spectacle caused by the suffragists at this political meeting brought national attention to the WSPU.³⁹ This media coverage also had the important effect of recruiting another individual who

³⁴ Fulford, 127.

³⁵ *Ibid*, 128; Purvis, “Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women,” 112.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 112.

³⁷ *Ibid*, 112.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 112-113.

³⁹ Fulford, 129.

became a key figure to the women's suffrage movement and a prominent member of the WSPU, Mrs. Flora Drummond, better known by her nickname, "The General."⁴⁰

During the same period the militancy movement was born, the traditional non-militant forms of suffrage were gaining momentum. The nonmilitant effort, known as constitutional suffrage, was best demonstrated by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) under the leadership of Mrs. Millicent Fawcett.⁴¹ The NUWSS was formed in 1897 as an umbrella organization of regional suffrage societies and was unaffiliated with any particular political party.⁴² While the constitutional suffrage societies had a substantial membership, their traditional approaches of petitioning Parliament and working with individual politicians were becoming increasingly difficult in the tumultuous political world of Britain in the first decade of the twentieth century.⁴³

In the wake of the national attention it received as a result of the events of October 1905, the WSPU held its first rally in London on February 19, 1906.⁴⁴ The meeting was planned to coordinate with the king's speech regarding the newly elected government's policy on the opening day of Parliament; when the king neglected to mention women's suffrage in his speech, Emmeline Pankhurst led a procession of women in attendance at the meeting to the House of Commons.⁴⁵ While none of the women who participated in the procession were able to meet with any members of Parliament, Pankhurst believed the event made women aware of their difficult position in

⁴⁰ Fulford, 129.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 134.

⁴² Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1928* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 24

⁴³ *Ibid*, 134-135.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 136.

⁴⁵ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 113.

society and proved that they were ready to fight for their rights.⁴⁶ Also in February 1906, Frederick and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence joined the WSPU; Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence then became treasurer of the WSPU in March 1906.⁴⁷ At about this same time, *The Daily Mail* coined the term “suffragette.”⁴⁸ This term, used to distinguish between the constitutional suffrage societies and those societies like the WSPU that embraced militancy, was intended to be derogatory.⁴⁹

The year 1906 was among the most eventful of the early suffrage movement. Following their initial success early in the year, in May 1906 both constitutional and militant suffrage societies gathered at 10 Downing Street to present a petition to then Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman.⁵⁰ As a result of Campbell-Bannerman’s seemingly favorable acceptance of the petition, the militant suffrage societies believed members of the Cabinet rather than the prime minister were to blame for the continued failure of suffrage bills in the House of Commons; this idea led to a series of attacks against Lloyd George and Asquith, both of whom were considered to be anti-suffrage Cabinet members.⁵¹ Theresa Billington made her mark in suffragette history by becoming the first suffragette to be imprisoned in the infamous Holloway Prison after being arrested for instigating a protest in front of Asquith’s home in London.⁵²

When Parliament resumed session on October 23, 1906, the suffragists were prepared for action. Approximately two hundred women gathered in the Central Hall of the House of Commons; when news that the prime minister did not intend to pursue

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 113.

⁴⁷ Fulford, 137-138.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, 139.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 139.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 140.

⁵¹ *Ibid*, 140.

⁵² *Ibid*, 142-143.

women's suffrage during the current session reached the crowd, it quickly became unruly.⁵³ After refusing to follow police orders to leave the area, a brawl broke out between the protesting women and police officers.⁵⁴ Ten women were arrested and later sentenced to two months imprisonment as a result of the brawl; interestingly, the women were not treated as political prisoners.⁵⁵ This incident added to the suffragettes' notoriety; not only did the suffragettes have the support of the constitutional suffragists, but their fame was growing all over Britain.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Ibid*, 146.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 147.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 148-149.

In the British prisons system, there are several classes of prisoners. First Division is the highest prisoner classification and is reserved for those persons considered political prisoners. First Division prisoners are traditionally given privileges not shared by prisoners in Second or Third Division including not being searched upon admission to prison, the ability to order one's food, and visitation and letter writing privileges. *Ibid*, 149; Jane Purvis, "'Deeds, Not Words' Daily life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain," *Votes for Women* (New York: Routledge, 2000)145.

⁵⁶ Fulford, 154.

SPLITS IN THE SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT AND GREAT PROCESSIONS: 1907-1908

The women's suffrage movement was soon taken up again by the constitutional suffragists at the beginning of 1907. On February 9, 1907, the "constitutional societies" led the "Mud March," nicknamed as such because of the rainy weather in which it took place.⁵⁷ This procession was the "first public open-air demonstration" of non-militant suffragists and was undoubtedly inspired by the more militant movement.⁵⁸ Led by such notable constitutional suffragists as Lady Frances Balfour, Lady Strachey, Millicent Fawcett and Dr. Edith Pechey-Phipson, the Mud March attracted roughly 3,000 participants.⁵⁹ Participants wore the standard colors of red and white indicative of women's suffrage and marched under the NUWSS banner bearing the organization's motto "The Franchise is the Keystone of our Liberty" as well as various regional suffrage organizations' banners.⁶⁰ Some forty plus organizations participated in the march, including an unofficial delegation from the WSPU led by Charlotte Despard.⁶¹ This procession was particularly noted for the wide range of classes represented in its ranks.⁶²

Not to be outdone by the traditional suffrage societies, the WSPU held a Women's Parliament on February 13.⁶³ After discussing the King's speech delivered at the opening session of Parliament, the Women's Parliament passed a resolution expressing their dissatisfaction with his failure to address women's suffrage.⁶⁴ The WSPU followed their resolution with a procession led by Charlotte Despard to the House of Commons, where the organization hoped to present a resolution to the Prime

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 156.

⁵⁸ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 74.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 75.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 75.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, 75.

⁶² *Ibid*, 75.

⁶³ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 115.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 116.

Minister.⁶⁵ However, in the midst of the march, mounted police scattered the participating women.⁶⁶ Seeing the violent end to what could have been a peaceful event, the constitutional suffrage societies began to question the prudence of the growing militancy movement.⁶⁷

In light of these large suffrage processions, Parliament did address the issue of women's suffrage. W. H. Dickinson introduced a suffrage bill that proposed the application of current voting requirements for men to women and allowed married women to vote.⁶⁸ Dickinson's bill was talked out at its Second Reading on March 8.⁶⁹ Because the suffrage was so quickly dismissed by the House of Commons, the WSPU decided to focus energy on ousting the current Liberal government, which they saw as an obstacle to the suffrage movement.⁷⁰ However, this suffragette attack on Liberals across the country put increasing strain on the already widening gap between the constitutional suffragists and the suffragettes, because the constitutional suffragists felt the Liberal Party was the only hope for success.

As their movement became more defined and increasingly active, the suffragettes began to question the internal workings of the WSPU. Several of the more socialist minded suffragettes, especially Theresa Billington-Greig, favored broader participation in decision-making and criticized the growing influence of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst within the organization.⁷¹ In response to this criticism, Emmeline Pankhurst

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 116.

⁶⁶ Fulford, 157.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 159.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 157-158.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 158.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 159.

⁷¹ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 116.

revoked the democratic constitution of the WSPU and cancelled the organization's annual convention; she justified her reasons for doing so as follows:

The W.S.P.U. is not hampered by a complexity of rules. We have no constitution and by-laws; nothing to be amended or tinkered with or quarreled over at an annual meeting. In fact, we have no annual meeting, no business sessions, no elections of officers. The W.S.P.U. is simply a suffrage army in the field. It is purely a volunteer army, and no one is obliged to remain in it.⁷²

Pankhurst's hard line attitudes caused a split in the suffragette movement. The prominent suffragettes Charlotte Despard and Theresa Billington-Greig left the WSPU and formed their own suffrage organization known as the Women's Freedom League, or WFL.⁷³ In comparison to the WSPU, the WFL selected its targets more carefully; rather than engage in blatant acts of militancy, the WFL focused on subtle forms of resistance such as tax evasion and tended to be much more popular in areas outside London.⁷⁴

In the wake of this split, the WSPU soon reorganized itself as follows: Founder and Honorary Secretary- Emmeline Pankhurst, Joint Honorary Secretary- Mabel Tuke, Organizing Secretary- Christabel Pankhurst, and Honorary Treasurer- Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence.⁷⁵ Christabel Pankhurst and the Pethick-Lawrences handled the daily demands of running the WSPU and became known as the "Triumvirate," while Emmeline Pankhurst served as a figurehead of the organization and focused her energy on speaking tours throughout the country and on campaigning for by-elections.⁷⁶ In October 1907, the

⁷² *Ibid*, 117.

⁷³ Fulford, 165-166.

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 168 & 170.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 167.

⁷⁶ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 117.

WSPU launched its own journal, *Votes for Women*, edited by Mr. Pethick-Lawrence.⁷⁷

Despite this reorganization, the WSPU was greatly weakened by the split. It did not have as much popular appeal under the leadership of the Pankhursts and the Pethick-Lawrences nor did it have much name recognition outside London.⁷⁸

At the outset of 1908, the suffrage movement had recovered from its recent organizational problems and returned to the issue at hand—obtaining the vote for women. Within the first month of the new year, the various suffrage organizations made their presence known through their attempts to get the attention of high ranking government officials.⁷⁹ On the opening day of Parliament in late January, several members of the WFL attempted to hand King Edward VII a petition when he was leaving in his coach; this was followed by a botched attempt to hand the King a petition at the state opening of the Parliament in which the King and Queen processed in full royal regalia at Westminster.⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the WSPU focused attention on the prime minister. In late January several members of the WSPU chained themselves to the railings outside the prime minister's house on Downing Street; General Drummond even managed to actually enter the house but was removed by the prime minister's personal staff.⁸¹ At about this same time, a delegation of members from the NUWSS met with then Chancellor of the Exchequer Asquith who claimed the matter of women's suffrage was an issue to be decided by a general election rather than the Cabinet.⁸²

Women's suffrage was once again brought up for debate in Parliament during

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 143.

⁷⁸ Fulford, 170.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 172.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, 173.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 174.

⁸² *Ibid*, 175.

February 1908. Henry Stranger proposed a bill for women's suffrage that was exactly like Dickinson's of the year before.⁸³ This proposal instigated several demonstrations of support among members of the WSPU including an elaborate ruse to invade the House of Commons and the dramatic arrest of Mrs. Pankhurst and her subsequent imprisonment as a Second Division prisoner, the first of her many imprisonments.⁸⁴ Her brief imprisonment seemed to inspire Emmeline Pankhurst to a new level of determination to achieve women's suffrage, indicated by a speech delivered following her release from prison:

I for one, friends, looking around on the muddles that men have made, looking round on the sweated and decrepit members of my sex, I say men have had the control of these things long enough, and no woman with any spark of womanliness in her will consent to let this state of things go on any longer.⁸⁵

The suffragettes' determination appeared to be reflected in the results of the Stranger's bill; the Second Reading of Stranger's bill held on February 28, 1908 passed with a majority of 271 and an opposition of only 92.⁸⁶

The summer of 1908 proved to be a time of great pageantry for the suffrage movement as a direct result of the suffragists' acceptance of a government challenge. Following the Second Reading of Stranger's bill in February, major anti-suffrage politicians including Arthur Balfour, Chancellor of the Exchequer Herbert Asquith, and Home Secretary Herbert Gladstone challenged women to prove that the large majority of British women desired to have the vote; in the minds of these politicians, this widespread

⁸³ *Ibid*, 175.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, 175-176.

⁸⁵ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 118.

⁸⁶ Fulford, 177-178.

desire was lacking and could serve as a convincing argument for future debates over women's suffrage.⁸⁷ Gladstone best expressed this attitude in the debate during the Second Reading of the Stranger bill: "There comes the time when political dynamics are far more important than political argument...power belongs to the masses, and through this power a government can be influenced into more effective action than a government will be likely to take under present conditions."⁸⁸ Both the constitutional suffrage societies and the WSPU accepted the government's challenge.

On June 13, 1908, the NUWSS organized a march in London in which some 13,000 women participated.⁸⁹ By holding such a large-scale demonstration, the event's organizers hoped to emphasize the broad spectrum of women who supported women's suffrage-- women who subscribed to a variety of views on suffrage, religions, and political affiliations. This march was truly an organizational feat complete with detailed railroad arrangements across the country to transport suffragists to London and an extensive advertising campaign coordinated by the Artists' Suffrage League.⁹⁰ Led by the president of the NUWSS Millicent Fawcett, the procession lived up to its advertised promise as a "glorious spectacle."⁹¹ The procession was particularly interesting for its international contingent including a party from France proudly carrying a banner of Marie Curie, an American delegation comprised of Dr. Anna Shaw and Miss Anthony (niece of the famous American suffragist Susan B. Anthony), and representatives from Russia and even South Africa.⁹² Also included in the procession were women doctors and

⁸⁷ Tickner, 79.

⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 79.

⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 80.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 81.

⁹¹ *Ibid*, 80.

⁹² *Ibid*, 82.

college graduates, professional women's organizations such as the Writers' Suffrage League and the Artists' Suffrage, and average women represented by homemakers and working women.⁹³ A small delegation from the WFL led by Charlotte Despard was the only militant organization to participate in the march.⁹⁴ Overall, the NUWSS procession was well viewed by the public for its superior organization, wide representation of the different social classes, and its sheer spectacle.⁹⁵

Not to be outdone by the suffragists, the suffragettes of the WSPU held their own march on June 21, 1908, an event known as "Woman's Sunday."⁹⁶ Once again, a mass advertising campaign (including a particularly large poster measuring ten feet by thirteen feet) was used to promote participation in this march both in London and throughout the wider country.⁹⁷ The march received additional publicity when Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst, Annie Kenny, and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence were each given a wax statue at Madame Tussaud's in London on June 16, just days before the march was to be held.⁹⁸ Like the NUWSS, the WSPU proved to be a master of organization. Frederick Pethick-Lawrence arranged for suffragettes from across the country to arrive at seven different train stations throughout the city; the women then processed through London from these different locations to converge at Hyde Park.⁹⁹ Approximately 30,000 women participated in the WSPU march.¹⁰⁰ During the march, the WSPU unveiled a new symbol of their movement- the distinctive suffragette colors.

Designed by Emmeline Pankhurst, the suffragette colors were white for purity, green for

⁹³ *Ibid*, 84.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 84.

⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 88.

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 91.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 91.

⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 93.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 91.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 94.

hope, and purple for dignity.¹⁰¹ The vast majority of the participating suffragettes wore the new symbolic colors in a uniform of white dresses and decorative accents of purple and green sashes, trimmings, and scarves.¹⁰² It was estimated that some half a million people gathered to watch the procession and speeches in Hyde Park.¹⁰³ That did not mean they all supported women's suffrage.¹⁰⁴ Rather, it was believed many of the people in this march were there for the spectacle and the excitement rather than the cause. Despite these major demonstrations of the women's suffrage movement, Asquith remarked that they had not convinced him that the vast majority of British women desired the vote.¹⁰⁵ With this government mindset, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence officially declared that the WSPU had exhausted all constitutional means of protest and would return to militancy.¹⁰⁶

In addition to their demonstration of June 21, the WSPU held another demonstration in Trafalgar Square near the end of the summer in which members passed out handbills promoting a rush on the House of Commons set for October 13.¹⁰⁷ When the day arrived, the police arrested Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst as well as General Drummond in the morning to prevent the rush from happening.¹⁰⁸ The three women were put on trial beginning on October 14 in what would later become the infamous Bow Street trial for the charge "inciting to disorder."¹⁰⁹ Emmeline Pankhurst, in particular, defended her actions and the suffrage movement in an eloquent manner: "I come here not as an ordinary law-breaker. We are here not because we are law-breakers:

¹⁰¹ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 119.

¹⁰² Tickner, 94.

¹⁰³ Fulford, 182.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁰⁵ Tickner, 98.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰⁷ Fulford, 186.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 186.

¹⁰⁹ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 119.

we are here in our effort to become law makers.”¹¹⁰ While each of the arrested women received prison sentences, none served her full term.¹¹¹

The session of Parliament at the end of 1908 continued to be plagued by disturbances from suffrage organizations. On October 28, 1908, three members of the WFL chained themselves to the grilled entrance of the Ladies’ Gallery in the House of Common while screaming “Votes for Women!”; the gates to the gallery had to be removed to stop the disturbance and remove the women.¹¹² Inspired by the attempted rushing of the House of Commons and the above incident at the Ladies’ Gallery, Lady Constance Lytton joined the WSPU in late 1908; her joining the WSPU would soon have a major impact as to how the general public viewed police treatment of the suffragettes.¹¹³

¹¹⁰ Fulford, 189-190.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 190.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 191.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 203.

THE MILITANT MOVEMENT: 1909-1912

1909 marks the beginning of the extreme militant movement. On June 24, 1909, WSPU member Marion Wallace Dunlop was arrested for stamping the following quotation from the Bill of Rights on the wall of the House of Commons, “‘It is the right of the subject to petition the King, and all commitments and prosecutions for such petitioning are illegal.’”¹¹⁴ Upon being arrested and imprisoned at Holloway Prison, Dunlop refused to eat if she were not treated as a First Division prisoner.¹¹⁵ After having her request denied, the first hunger strike of the militant suffrage movement began on July 5, 1909.¹¹⁶ Hunger strikes carried out by imprisoned suffragettes continued throughout the summer and proved to be an effective tool in obtaining early release from prison terms.¹¹⁷ However, in September 1909, Mary Leigh, another WSPU member who participated in hunger strikes, was the first prisoner to be forcibly fed in a government attempt to stop hunger strikes among the suffragette prisoners.¹¹⁸ Leigh brought her case against the government before the High Court in December 1909 where the legality of forcible feeding was asserted and her complaint declared invalid.¹¹⁹

From the moment of its inception, forcible feeding was a subject of great controversy among the suffragette community. As in the case of Mary Leigh, forcible feeding was the government’s attempt to prevent suffragette prisoners from starvation while participating in hunger strikes. The most common form of forcible feeding involved the insertion of a tube in the nostril to the stomach through which a liquid diet

¹¹⁴ Mayhall, 52.

¹¹⁵ Fulford, 204.

¹¹⁶ Fulford, 205.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 206.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid*, 206.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, 207.

was passed.¹²⁰ To add to this gruesome experience, forcible feeding was generally a violent act in which the prison staff used force to restrain the struggling suffragette.¹²¹ Forcible feeding often had horrible physical repercussions, including complications from food entering the lungs and diseases such as appendicitis.¹²² Sanitation issues were another cause of concern with forcible feeding as tubes were often used to feed multiple women and were not sanitized properly in between feedings.¹²³ While the suffragettes were outraged over the use of forcible feeding, the general public remained undisturbed by the practice, mainly as a result of the hostility the suffragettes had created by their militant actions.¹²⁴

It was also widely believed among suffragettes that women from the working class were treated more harshly than women from the middle or upper classes of British society, a point painfully proved correct by the famous ruse of Lady Constance Lytton.¹²⁵ Lady Lytton had been attracted to the suffragette movement following the famous October 1908 rushing of the House of Commons.¹²⁶ On October 9, 1909, Lady Lytton was arrested for throwing a rock at what she believed to be Lloyd George's car; she was then imprisoned and refused to eat but was released a few days later without being forcibly fed as was standard procedure in the treatment of suffragette prisoners.¹²⁷ On January 14, 1910, Lady Lytton was arrested after making an incendiary speech in front of a Liverpool prison where forcible feeding was frequently practiced; however, she was

¹²⁰ Purvis, "'Deeds, Not Words' Daily life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain," 145.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 145.

¹²² *Ibid*, 147.

¹²³ *Ibid*, 149.

¹²⁴ Fulford, 210.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 145-156.

¹²⁶ *Ibid*, 203.

¹²⁷ *Ibid*, 210.

disguised as a seamstress and gave her name as Jane Warton upon her arrest. When she refused to eat upon receiving a prison sentence, Lady Lytton was subjected to forcible feeding.¹²⁸ She was soon released as her health deteriorated under the stress of numerous forcible feedings.¹²⁹ The difference in treatment between Lady Lytton and Jane Warton clearly indicated a difference in the treatment of middle class and working class women in the suffrage movement.

It is also important to note the suffragettes' emotional reactions to forcible feeding. Many women viewed forcible feeding not only as a physical violation of their bodies but as an emotional ordeal to bear. In fact, many women reported forcible feeding as a "public violation of their bodies."¹³⁰ This sense of public violation was aggravated by a lack of privacy during the process of forcible feeding (there were often three or four people present during a forcible feeding) and the taunting of prison doctors while conducting the force-feeding.¹³¹ While the word rape was not used to describe forcible feeding, words such as outrage and violation were often used to convey the horrors of forcible feeding for the suffragette prisoner.¹³² Clearly the physical act of forcible feeding had strong emotional repercussions.

Despite the furor, efforts in Parliament to grant women the right to vote persisted. In March 1909, Geoffrey Howard introduced a bill proposing suffrage for all adult males and females.¹³³ Despite its endorsement of female suffrage, the proposed bill did not

¹²⁸ Purvis, "'Deeds, Not Words' Daily life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain," 147.

¹²⁹ Fulford, 215.

¹³⁰ Purvis, "'Deeds, Not Words' Daily life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain," 148.

¹³¹ *Ibid*, 148.

¹³² *Ibid*, 148.

¹³³ Fulford, 217.

enjoy the support of suffrage societies.¹³⁴ They believed that women should vote as a matter of principle and should not be treated as a simple addition to universal male suffrage.¹³⁵ In spite of the lack of support from the suffrage societies, the bill passed with a small majority.¹³⁶

In the election of 1909 women's suffrage was a topic debated heavily among politicians, and Prime Minister Asquith declared that women's suffrage would be part of the Liberal agenda during the next term.¹³⁷ With this Liberal promise in mind, a Conciliation Committee was formed to create a bill that would implement women's suffrage.¹³⁸ Under the impression that the government was about to give in to their demands, Emmeline Pankhurst suspended militancy on behalf of the WSPU on January 31, 1910, declaring that "only peaceful and constitutional means" would be used to promote women's suffrage.¹³⁹ The Conciliation Committee soon developed a bill that would give the vote to women meeting certain property qualifications; married women were also allowed to vote under this bill provided that they met the required property qualifications outside those of their husbands.¹⁴⁰ Following the introduction of the Conciliation Bill in the House of Commons, the WSPU held a procession to the House of Commons, a procession that included other suffrage organizations such as the WFL in a show of solidarity for the Conciliation Bill.¹⁴¹ The Conciliation Bill did pass in the House of Commons but had a significant enough minority that prevented it from reaching a

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 217.

¹³⁵ *Ibid*, 217.

¹³⁶ *Ibid*, 218.

¹³⁷ *Ibid*, 220.

¹³⁸ *Ibid*, 222.

¹³⁹ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 122.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 122.

¹⁴¹ Fulford, 224.

Second Reading.¹⁴² However, it stands out among other parliamentary attempts at women's suffrage in that the bill was debated seriously, including orations by some of the most prominent members of Parliament at the time ranging from Prime Minister Asquith to Keir Hardie, a famous Labour politician.¹⁴³

The failure of the Conciliation Bill in 1910 marked the resumption of militant tactics by the WSPU. Churchill, acting as the new Home Secretary, implemented prison reform in an effort to take the romance out of prison life for suffragettes; this action clearly showed that the newly elected government was prepared to take harsher action against the suffragettes in light of the recent failure of the Conciliation Bill.¹⁴⁴ On November 10, Emmeline Pankhurst warned the government that November 18, the day Parliament was scheduled to reconvene, would mark the WSPU's last attempt to have a women's suffrage bill pass through constitutional means; if Parliament failed to pass the Conciliation Bill, the WSPU would resume its militant tactics.¹⁴⁵ On November 18, 1910, all attempts at passing the Conciliation Bill were put to an end with the government announcement that it would no longer be up for discussion.¹⁴⁶ In response to this announcement, a WSPU deputation marched from its meeting hall to the House of Commons, where it encountered a substantial police guard. The suffragettes were manhandled by the police and accounts of police attacks of a sexual nature were frequently reported during the ensuing brawl; this infamous incident soon became known as "Black Friday" among the suffragettes.¹⁴⁷ As many as 115 women and four men were

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 228.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 229.

¹⁴⁵ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 122.

¹⁴⁶ Fulford, 230.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 230-231.

arrested during Black Friday.¹⁴⁸ Emmeline Pankhurst, in reaction to a vague statement from Asquith on November 22 that promised to address women's suffrage if his government was returned in the next general election, led another WSPU deputation to the Prime Minister's residence on Downing Street where once again a scuffle broke out between the police and suffragists.¹⁴⁹ 156 women were arrested as a result of the deputation to Downing Street.¹⁵⁰

With the militant ranks of the WSPU much depleted following the mass arrests of November 1910, Emmeline Pankhurst suspended militancy in hopes of the passage of "A Bill to Confer the Parliamentary Franchise on Women."¹⁵¹ This bill was somewhat broader in scope than the Conciliation Bill of 1910, as it would enfranchise women householders and was open to further amendment.¹⁵² This enfranchisement bill passed a Second Reading on May 5, 1911, with a majority of 167.¹⁵³ On May 29, Lloyd George announced that the bill would be given another Second Reading in 1912.¹⁵⁴ Despite this constitutional delay, the women were not deterred from their effort.

This determination continued in the face of another constitutional challenge in the coronation of a new king, George V.¹⁵⁵ On June 17, 1911 (the Saturday before Coronation Day), a massive procession of women marched along the Embankment to Westminster.¹⁵⁶ The idea behind the procession surprisingly originated with the WSPU when Mabel Tuke, the secretary of the WSPU, invited the NUWSS to join them in a

¹⁴⁸ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 122.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 122.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁵² *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 123.

¹⁵⁵ Fulford, 236.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 237.

procession in March 1911.¹⁵⁷ The WSPU viewed the weekend immediately prior to the new king's coronation as the perfect opportunity to display the women's suffrage cause on an international level and to show the strength of the movement in Britain.¹⁵⁸

However, the NUWSS was somewhat reluctant to join forces with the WSPU at first. In light of the recent competition between the two major suffrage groups, the NUWSS, particularly the London Society that usually served as the powerhouse behind the organization's processions, wanted to remain separate from the militants in a show of its individual power as a constitutional society.¹⁵⁹ The London division eventually gave into membership pressure and agreed to participate in the procession with the WSPU.¹⁶⁰ With the combined forces of the WSPU and the NUWSS, the Coronation Procession gathered about 40,000 participants from twenty-eight suffrage organizations.¹⁶¹

The Women's Coronation Procession is considered by many historians to be the most impressive of the suffrage processions not only for its large attendance but the unusual elements of pageantry within the procession.¹⁶² The WSPU had designed the procession to appeal to the public on three levels: national, imperial, and international.¹⁶³ General Drummond of the WSPU led the procession and was immediately followed by a new organization known as the New Crusaders, a group of women who modeled themselves after Joan of Arc and viewed the current movement for women's suffrage as a type of holy war.¹⁶⁴ Behind the New Crusaders came the Prisoners' Pageant, the first of several new elements in the procession; it was organized and led by Marion Wallace

¹⁵⁷ Tickner, 122.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 122.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 124.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 125.

Dunlop and had a strength of seven hundred women who had been prisoners or their representatives.¹⁶⁵ The Historical Pageant was another popular addition to the women's procession.¹⁶⁶ This part of the procession was meant to show the political power that women had held in Britain prior to the passage of the 1832 Reform Bill by having participants dress as celebrated historical female political leaders, such as the Abbess Hilda, and was designed to emphasize that women's exclusion from citizenship was not a "natural consequence" of their sex but was politically imposed.¹⁶⁷ Finally, the addition of the Empire Car, an elaborately decorated float, and its celebration of the different parts of the British Empire including Scotland, Wales, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia, Canada, South Africa and India were much celebrated in the press.¹⁶⁸

Another crucial element to the Women's Coronation Procession of June 1911 was the inclusion of virtually all of Britain's suffrage societies. Charlotte Despard led the WFL delegation under their banner declaring the motto "Dare to be Free" and Millicent Fawcett led the NUWSS, which included some 10,000 participants.¹⁶⁹ A variety of other suffrage societies were represented ranging from the Women Writers' Suffrage League to the Suffrage Atelier to the Women's Tax Resistance League.¹⁷⁰ The Women's Coronation Process marked the first and only time all suffrage organizations participated in a single march together.¹⁷¹ Overall, this display was well received by both the pro-women's suffrage forces and those opposing such an idea and was greatly admired for its

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 125.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 126.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 126.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 126.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 128 & 130.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 130.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid*, 122.

pageantry, its organizational strength, and the diversity of its participants.¹⁷²

Notwithstanding the wide publicity that the actions of the WSPU received during this period, the WFL and other constitutional societies were still active in their pursuit of suffrage. For instance, the WFL boycotted the 1911 census with the phrase “No Vote No Census.”¹⁷³ Also during this period the constitutional suffrage movement became increasingly associated with religious and professional associations. The WFL in particular worked to establish a connection between religion and women’s suffrage with the formation of the Spiritual Militant league in March 1911.¹⁷⁴ Other examples of religious affiliated suffrage organizations include the Catholic Woman’s Suffrage Society, Free Church League, Jewish League, and the Scottish Churches League.¹⁷⁵ Professional women were also increasingly interested in the suffrage movement as indicated by the formation of such organizations as the Civil Service Society, London Graduates Union, The Suffrage Atelier, and a society established exclusively for gymnastic teachers throughout 1911.¹⁷⁶

A somewhat mysterious suffrage organization known as the People’s Suffrage Federation managed to meet with Prime Minister Asquith on November 7, 1911.¹⁷⁷ In this meeting, Asquith expressed his desire to implement universal suffrage, including a component for women’s suffrage.¹⁷⁸ The WSPU was immediately outraged by Asquith’s intentions, declaring that the principle of women’s suffrage should not be tainted by the

¹⁷² *Ibid*, 130.

¹⁷³ Fulford, 240.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, 240-241.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 241.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 241.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 242.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 242.

simultaneous passage of universal suffrage.¹⁷⁹ Realizing also that the inclusion of universal male suffrage made the passage of a women's suffrage amendment virtually impossible, Emmeline Pankhurst declared the resumption of militancy from her speaking tour in America.¹⁸⁰ On the very same day, a small group of women broke windows at several business and government offices.¹⁸¹ Upon her arrival in England in December, Emmeline Pankhurst encouraged the WSPU to launch a civil war against the government in their quest for suffrage.¹⁸² Within days of Mrs. Pankhurst's speech, Emily Wilding Davison was put on trial for attempting to set a post office box on fire.¹⁸³ Extreme militancy was born.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 243.

¹⁸⁰ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 124.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 124.

¹⁸² *Ibid*, 124.

¹⁸³ *Ibid*, 124.

EXTREME MILITANCY AND A WAR OF THE SEXES: 1912-1914

Extreme militancy changed the suffrage movement from a movement dedicated to female equality in franchise to a war of the sexes, a change brought about by the powerful Pankhurst family.¹⁸⁴ Militancy intensified in this year; in fact, during these final years leading up to World War I the most famous acts of suffrage militancy occurred. On February 16, 1912, Emmeline Pankhurst advocated stone throwing as a political weapon in a local speech: “Why should women go to Parliament Square and be battered about and insulted, and most important of all, produce less effect than when they throw stones?”¹⁸⁵ Also in the same month, disagreements over tactics led to the final break between the militant suffragettes and the constitutional suffragists. At a large gathering of suffragists at Albert Hall, the constitutional societies sponsored a speech by Lloyd George, but several militants present heckled him to the point that he was unable to continue his speech.¹⁸⁶ The action of these militant suffragettes humiliated the hosting constitutional suffrage societies and marked the final split between the two groups of women.

On March 1, 1912, the entire city of London experienced the new power and violence of the suffragette movement. In a highly organized and carefully prepared onslaught, suffragists throughout the city shattered the famously large plate glass windows of London shops.¹⁸⁷ Attacks occurred simultaneously throughout the city and targeted stores in such prominent areas as Piccadilly Circle, Oxford Street, and Regent

¹⁸⁴ Fulford, 246.

¹⁸⁵ Purvis, “Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women,” 124.

¹⁸⁶ Fulford, 247.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 248.

Street.¹⁸⁸ Emmeline Pankhurst and two other members of the WSPU even attempted to break the windows of Prime Minister Asquith's residence on Downing Street.¹⁸⁹ The famous window breaking of March 1 marked the first time in militant history that the WSPU had launched an attack without giving some type of warning.¹⁹⁰

The government responded quickly to this new threat. On March 5 police raided WSPU headquarters with warrants for the arrest of the WSPU leadership including the Pethick-Lawrences, Mrs. Tuke, and Christabel Pankhurst.¹⁹¹ (Emmeline Pankhurst was not included in this warrant as she was already in prison for throwing stones at the Prime Minister's residence a few days earlier.) The Pethick-Lawrences and Mrs. Tuke were arrested while Christabel managed to flee the country for Paris where she would remain until the outbreak of World War I.¹⁹² All four defendants (the Pethick-Lawrences, Mrs. Tuke, and Emmeline Pankhurst) were put on trial for conspiracy beginning on May 15 and sentenced to a nine-month prison term.¹⁹³ With Emmeline Pankhurst's and the Pethick-Lawrences' imprisonment, leadership of the WSPU devolved to Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney.¹⁹⁴ Emmeline Pankhurst and the Pethick-Lawrences participated in a mass hunger strike beginning on June 19 in sympathy with their fellow suffragettes who had been placed as Second and Third Division prisoners; within five days of the start of their hunger strike, Emmeline Pankhurst and Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence were released from their prison sentence for health reasons.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 248.

¹⁸⁹ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 124.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 124.

¹⁹¹ Fulford, 250.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 250.

¹⁹³ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 125.

¹⁹⁴ Fulford, 256.

¹⁹⁵ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 125.

The woman's suffrage movement as a whole suffered another blow when the Conciliation Bill of 1912, quite similar to the one proposed in 1910, failed at its second reading on March 28, 1912.¹⁹⁶ The failure of this bill in the immediate aftermath of the infamous militant window smashing showed that militancy might be actually hurting the women's cause.¹⁹⁷ Asquith, in particular, made an eloquent speech condemning women's suffrage at the second reading of the Bill in which he claimed that "he thought there was no case historically or constitutionally for enfranchising a large class without clear proof that both the class and the country wished it"; it appears that he had taken the many personal attacks by the suffragettes to heart.¹⁹⁸ The militant suffragettes reacted to the defeat of this bill by ramping up their aggression. During the summer and fall of 1912, they threatened physical violence against different targets and tried to assault several of the members of the Cabinet opposed to women's suffrage including Asquith and Lloyd George.¹⁹⁹ In a particularly bold move on September 9, 1912, militants replaced the flags on the king's personal golf course with flags in the suffragette colors of white, green, and purple.²⁰⁰

The WSPU underwent yet another crisis of leadership in June of 1912, following the release from prison of Emmeline Pankhurst and the Pethick-Lawrences. When these leaders of the WSPU reconvened to discuss strategies for the continuance of the suffrage movement, the Pethick-Lawrences began to question whether or not it was a good idea to continue extreme militancy and attacks on property which by now included a proposed

¹⁹⁶ Fulford, 258.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 259.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 259.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 269.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 271.

campaign of organized arson.²⁰¹ This questioning of escalated violence on the part of the Pethick-Lawrences was the beginning of a split between themselves and the Pankhursts.²⁰² By October 1912, it appeared that the Pankhursts and the Pethick-Lawrences could not resolve their disagreement over future tactics of the suffrage movement and, shortly thereafter, Mrs. Pankhurst announced officially that she and Christabel would take over the leadership of the WSPU by themselves and issue a new periodical entitled *The Suffragette*.²⁰³ As if to emphasize the extreme militant approach that the WSPU had adopted, Emmeline Pankhurst closed the meeting with the following phrase, “I incite this meeting to rebellion.”²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, the Pethick-Lawrences continued to participate in the women’s suffrage movement outside the WSPU and still edited the periodical originally associated with the WSPU entitled *Votes for Women*.²⁰⁵ In a gracious gesture to the suffrage movement itself, the Pethick-Lawrences did not attempt to form a rival suffrage group; as a direct result of this, the WSPU was able to maintain its membership.²⁰⁶

Despite several setbacks in early 1912 to the women’s suffrage movement, there were many favorable events that brought the media’s attention to women in a positive light. On the same day that the Conciliation Bill was brought up for debate in the House of Commons, *The Times* published an extremely bigoted letter written by Sir Almroth Wright which contended that militancy was a mental illness based upon sex.²⁰⁷ For obvious reasons, the letter offended many, male and female, and actually gathered

²⁰¹ *Ibid*, 256.

²⁰² *Ibid*, 256.

²⁰³ *Ibid*, 256.

²⁰⁴ Purvis, “Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women,” 126.

²⁰⁵ Fulford, 256.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 257.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 260.

support for the women's movement among the general public.²⁰⁸ In October 1912, The Qui Vive Corps, composed entirely of women and dedicated to female enfranchisement, marched from Edinburgh to London (a distance of some 400 miles) and was warmly received by Prime Minister Asquith.²⁰⁹ Also during the last half of 1912, Mrs. St. Clair Stobart formed the Women's Convey Corps which would go on to serve with the Bulgarian army in the Balkan War of 1912, reviving the impression of the caring and nurturing suffragette.²¹⁰ These events combined to portray the women's suffrage movement in a positive light despite continued and increasingly violent acts of militancy.

In addition to the Conciliation Bill of 1912, Parliament again took up women's suffrage as a serious legislative matter with the proposal of the Franchise and Registration Bill in June 1912.²¹¹ This bill was designed to get rid of plural voting and abolish the property requirement to vote; in addition, the bill had four amendments including eliminating the word "male" from the bill, the equal enfranchisement of men and women, the enfranchisement of all women householders and wives of householders over the age of 26, and the equivalent requirements of the Conciliation Bills.²¹² Even though the bill was initially proposed in June 1912, it did not come up for debate until January 24, 1913; when debate finally began, it was taken extremely seriously by the participating parties.²¹³ The bill was soon withdrawn from debate after Prime Minister Asquith declared that the passage of the bill approving women's suffrage would fundamentally alter the meaning of the bill and therefore violate parliamentary rules as

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 260.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 266-267.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 267.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 272.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 272 & 275.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 276.

interpreted by the Speaker of the House.²¹⁴

The failure of the Franchise and Registration Bill in January 1913 led to the final phase of extreme militant activity, culminating in a campaign of arson aimed at abandoned property.²¹⁵ On February 19, 1913, Lloyd George's unfinished house in Waltan was heavily damaged after one of two planted bombs exploded within the structure; Emmeline Pankhurst, while not participating in the actual act of bombing, claimed responsibility for it and was sentenced to three years in prison on April 2, 1913.²¹⁶ With the militancy suddenly engaged in possible life-threatening violence, the government decided that it was necessary to put an end to suffragettes' ability to escape the full duration of their prison terms due to ill health induced by prolonged hunger strikes and the resulting force feeding.²¹⁷ With this aim in mind, on April 3, 1913, the Prisoners (Temporary Discharge) Bill, nicknamed the Cat and Mouse Bill, was passed under the direction of Secretary of State of Home Affairs Reginald McKenna.²¹⁸ Under this bill, a prisoner could be released for health reasons but rearrested if found to be participating in illegal acts while recuperating.²¹⁹ In surprising sympathy with the militants, several prominent officials of the Church of England organized a meeting to protest the forcible feeding and appealed to the Prime Minister to revoke the Cat and Mouse Bill in late 1913.²²⁰

On June 4, 1913, the suffrage movement finally bore its first martyr through the infamous incident in which Emily Wilding Davison threw herself in front of the King's

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 277.

²¹⁵ *Ibid*, 280.

²¹⁶ *Ibid*, 282; Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 126.

²¹⁷ Fulford, 282.

²¹⁸ *Ibid*, 284.

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, 284.

²²⁰ *Ibid*, 295.

horse at the Derby.²²¹ While being carried off the racetrack, the white, green, and purple colors of the WSPU were found sewn within her jacket.²²² The motivation of Davison in this action has often been questioned by historians; a common theory to explain Davison's behavior is that she merely intended to wave the WSPU colors in front of the horses to create a spectacle.²²³ However, this type of reckless and rash behavior was not uncharacteristic of Davison. Davison was among the first women to respond to Emmeline Pankhurst's call for civil war and lit a post office box on fire in late 1911 without the authorization of the WSPU.²²⁴ Her subsequent imprisonment for this crime revealed her flair for the dramatic and her willingness to sacrifice herself for the suffrage movement when she threw herself off a prison staircase onto a wire cage set up eight feet below to prevent such a suicide attempt.²²⁵ Davison often acted on what she thought was the best course of action against the advice of the WSPU leadership which discouraged her from taking extreme measures that endangered herself.²²⁶ After her encounter with the horse, Davison died four days later as a result of her injuries and was instantly elevated to the status of a martyr for the women's suffrage movement.²²⁷ It seemed that McKenna's words during the debate of the Cat and Mouse Bill had suddenly become all too true: "They no more fear death in fighting what they believe to be the cause of women than the natives of the Soudan feared death when fighting the cause of the Mahdi."²²⁸ This statement by McKenna clearly indicates not only the government's opposition to

²²¹ *Ibid*, 284.

²²² *Ibid*, 284.

²²³ Tickner, 136.

²²⁴ Purvis, "Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women," 124.

²²⁵ Fulford, 270.

²²⁶ Purvis, "'Deeds, Not Words' Daily life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain," 140; Fulford, 287.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, 284.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, 284.

women's suffrage but also its contempt for what it considered to be the savage behavior of the suffragettes in light of Davison's death.

Davison's funeral procession throughout London on June 14, 1913 was accompanied with a great deal of pageantry. Upon arriving at Victoria Station, Davison's coffin was placed in an open carriage and greeted by a small group of suffragettes dressed in black and holding a black WSPU flag.²²⁹ The procession itself was led by Charlotte Marsh, the same suffragette who had served as color bearer in the Women's Coronation Procession of 1911.²³⁰ The long line of suffragettes following the carriage containing Davison's casket were dressed in various combinations of supposedly symbolic colors, reinforcing the political nature of the procession: white for purity, crimson for sacrifice, and purple for loyalty.²³¹ The participating women also represented a wide range of suffrage organizations and many of the delegations carried inspirational banners expressing such sentiments as "She hath done what she could."²³² While this procession was primarily organized to pay tribute to Davison, the suffragettes did have some political intentions in their march through propagandist leaflets passed out to the crowds who had gathered to watch the procession. In fact, the political leaflet distributed at Davison's funeral underscored the WSPU's increasing emphasis on a battle of the sexes rather than women's suffrage, outlining the moral superiority of women over men.²³³ Despite the controversy surrounding the suffragette movement, the funeral procession for Emily Wilding Davison was well received among the London crowds; in

²²⁹ Tickner, 138.

²³⁰ *Ibid*, 138.

²³¹ *Ibid*, 138.

²³² *Ibid*, 138 & 140.

²³³ Fulford, 287.

fact, one witness remarked of the scene: “I should think all criticism must be hushed in the face of such devotion.”²³⁴

The remainder of 1913 and the beginning of 1914 saw no respite in the destructive campaign for women’s suffrage. Numerous arsons and bombings characterized the militant movement of late 1913 and early 1914.²³⁵ New additions to the militant movement’s repertoire included attacks on art galleries, the most damaging of which involved the slashing of the Rokeby Venus by Mary Richardson.²³⁶ Throughout this period, the Pankhursts who had remained in Britain- Emmeline and Sylvia- were seen frequently in public looking extremely weak, accompanied by a nurse, or being transported on a stretcher in order to play up their sufferings in the media as a result of the newly implemented Cat and Mouse Bill.²³⁷ However, Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst were always seen separately in public after early 1914, a clear indication of yet another split within the suffrage movement. In January 1914, Emmeline and Sylvia were called to Christabel’s flat in Paris to discuss the future of the suffrage movement.²³⁸ In this meeting, Christabel asked that Sylvia remove her organization, the East London Federation, from association with the WSPU.²³⁹ Christabel justified her action by claiming that Sylvia was acting “contrary to the policies of the WSPU” in her close relations to the Labour Party and working women.²⁴⁰ News agencies eagerly announced the break among the Pankhurst women upon Sylvia’s return to London hoping it would

²³⁴ Tickner, 140.

²³⁵ Fulford, 290.

²³⁶ *Ibid*, 294.

²³⁷ *Ibid*, 292.

²³⁸ Purvis, “Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women,” 127.

²³⁹ George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 297.

²⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 297.

dampen the ongoing militancy campaign.²⁴¹

The British public, however, won no reprieve from the militant movement. The WSPU turned its attention temporarily to Sir Edward Carson who had made reference to enfranchising Ulsterwomen but then later recanted his promise to do so.²⁴² On April 4, a group of WSPU members led by General Drummond broke up a meeting of Carson supporters in Hyde Park, resulting in a one month prison sentence for General Drummond.²⁴³ Also during the spring of 1914, the WSPU appealed directly to the Church of England. Annie Kenney, one of the WSPU's most prominent suffragettes, attempted to claim sanctuary at the palace of the Archbishop of Canterbury and was arrested for her efforts.²⁴⁴ In a direct attack on the monarch on May 21, Emmeline Pankhurst led a group of women to Buckingham Palace, where their protest was suppressed by mounted police.²⁴⁵ Pankhurst's arrest as a result of this police confrontation is one of the most famous images of the suffrage movement, depicting Mrs. Pankhurst being literally carried away by a police officer.²⁴⁶

As the British public became increasingly frustrated with the militants, the government raided WSPU headquarters on May 23, 1914 in an attempt to discover the source of the organization's funding in hopes of stopping militancy by cutting off its funding; however, this investigation was suspended with the outbreak of World War I.²⁴⁷ Another government raid was conducted at this time in Lauderdale Mansions and resulted

²⁴¹ *Ibid*, 299.

²⁴² *Ibid*, 301.

²⁴³ *Ibid*, 302.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 304-305.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 303.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 304.

²⁴⁷ Fulford, 293.

in the arrest of Grace Roe and Nellie Hall on suspicion of planning to commit a felony.²⁴⁸

To add even more to the public scandal of the raid, Roe was caught while having a drug smuggled into her.²⁴⁹ These governmental raids as well as the suicide of the suffragette Joan Lavender Baillie Guthrie generated a flood of bad publicity for the WSPU in the summer of 1914.²⁵⁰

In response to the poor publicity, the WSPU increased the level of their militancy operations through more frequent vandalism, arson attempts, and continued hunger strikes.²⁵¹ This increased violence led the House of Commons to propose that the income requirement to vote be lowered by £100 on June 11, 1914.²⁵² As McKenna, the Secretary of State of Home Affairs, stepped up to address the House as to how to best handle the suffragettes, a bomb exploded in Westminster Abbey and caused some damage to the Coronation Chair.²⁵³ Continuing with his speech, McKenna gave the House four options for how to address the problem of militant suffragettes: “1. Let the prisoners die. 2. Deport them. 3. Treat them as lunatics. 4. Give them the Vote.”²⁵⁴ Despite his somewhat radical proposals, McKenna advocated “patient and determined action” as the best course of action for handling the suffragettes.²⁵⁵

At the same time that the militant movement was growing increasingly aggressive, the constitutional societies were making great strides towards achieving women’s suffrage. On June 20, 1914, Prime Minister Asquith met with a deputation of six working women and told them that he did not think women’s suffrage would take

²⁴⁸ Dangerfield, 305.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 305.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 306.

²⁵¹ *Ibid*, 306.

²⁵² *Ibid*, 306.

²⁵³ *Ibid*, 306.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid*, 306.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 306.

much longer to achieve; he was confirmed in his opinion by the press the following day.²⁵⁶ Also in the summer of 1914, the National Union of Suffrage Societies participated in a huge demonstration in London and was greeted with a great deal of respect almost in defiance of the continued militancy of the WSPU.²⁵⁷ To give even more strength to the constitutional societies, Lloyd George warned Sylvia Pankhurst the vote would come more quickly with the suspension of militancy.²⁵⁸ When Sylvia informed Christabel of Lloyd George's warning regarding militancy, Christabel completely dismissed the idea of suspending militancy; rather, she now viewed militancy as a war of the sexes rather than a quest for the vote.²⁵⁹ In this war of sexes, Christabel consistently criticized men as being of lower moral quality than women, condemning men's sexual activities as a curse on British society.²⁶⁰ However, militancy reached its peak in July 1914 for reasons that would rapidly change the world in August 1914.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 308.

²⁵⁷ Fulford, 300.

²⁵⁸ Dangerfield, 309.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 310.

²⁶⁰ Fulford, 289.

²⁶¹ Dangerfield, 310.

THE WAR YEARS: 1914-1918

On August 4, 1914, Britain declared war on Germany and thus entered World War I. Britain's domestic uproar stopped for the next four years and all efforts were concentrated on defeating the Central Powers, particularly along the infamous trenches of the Western Front. With the suspension of normal daily and political activities, the women's suffrage movement also fell victim to the all consuming nature of war; however, it was not completely forgotten in the ensuing chaos.

Women belong to the nation as much as men, and they fall as readily into the national attitude. But they were not consulted about the origin of the war, and probably feel that when negotiations begin, their ideas and feelings will be taken into formal account...Not only do they experience the most acute mental sufferings which war entails, but they take the largest part in the physical succour of its victims...The fabric of women's labour usually suffers...The exclusion of women from political life is, therefore, not a smaller, but a greater injustice in times of war...It is therefore, an appropriate time to discuss the great reform on which all the more enlightened nations in the world will sooner or later reconstitute their political systems.²⁶²

The above quotation, an excerpt from the NUWSS pamphlet entitled "The War and Women Suffrage" published in February 1915, provides the most prevalent view of suffrage throughout World War I—the belief that women, as a result of their participation in war work and in their role as patriotic citizens of the nation, would be granted suffrage as a logical result of the social restructuring brought about by the war.

²⁶² Angela K. Smith, *Suffrage Discourse in Britain during the First World War* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2005), 17.

However, this emphasis on patriotism as a means to achieve suffrage was not the immediate reaction of many suffragettes to the outbreak of the war. The WSPU initially welcomed the war, viewing it as an opportunity to overthrow male dominated British society.²⁶³ This continuation of the war of the sexes into World War I is best expressed by Christabel Pankhurst in the August 7 issues of *The Suffragette*: “As I write a dreadful war-cloud seems about to burst and deluge the peoples of Europe with fire, slaughter, ruin- this then is the World as men have made it, life as men have ordered it. A man-made civilisation, hideous and cruel enough in time of peace, is to be destroyed.”²⁶⁴ Despite her eldest daughter’s somewhat disconcerting views on the war, Emmeline Pankhurst officially suspended militancy among WSPU members on August 12, 1914, in light of the outbreak of the war.²⁶⁵ In the same manner, publication of *The Suffragette* was stopped.²⁶⁶ Following the first military engagement of the British Expeditionary Force at Mons, the WSPU turned its full attention to patriotic support.²⁶⁷

The WSPU developed a basic wartime strategy of full heartedly supporting Britain in the ongoing conflict; however, it also viewed the war as an excellent opportunity to continue the suffrage movement in a lawful manner and hoped to gain governmental support for their cause by the suffragettes’ patriotic support of the nation in a time of crisis.²⁶⁸ With this new attitude established among the leadership of the WSPU, Christabel Pankhurst, having returned immediately to Britain with the outbreak of the war, outlined the WSPU’s war policy in a speech delivered in September 1914.²⁶⁹ In this

²⁶³ *Ibid*, 21.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 21.

²⁶⁵ Purvis, “Emmeline Pankhurst (1858-1928) and Votes for Women,” 129.

²⁶⁶ Wingerden, 156.

²⁶⁷ Smith, 21.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 25.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 25.

speech, Christabel placed a great deal of emphasis on the home front and the correlation between success on the home front and the battle front.²⁷⁰ The conclusion to her speech is eerily correct in its prediction of the war's impact on the women's suffrage movement: "Sooner or later this war will end in victory, and when that day comes women who are paying their share of the price will claim, will insist upon being brought into equal partnership as enfranchised citizens of this country."²⁷¹ With a strategy developed from the beginning of the war, the WSPU put into action a campaign designed to support the British nation at war.

The WSPU addressed wartime issues in a number of ways. Beginning in April 1915, the WSPU began to publish *Britannia*, a patriotic periodical with continued emphasis on the suffragette movement.²⁷² This periodical was one of the main methods in which the WSPU got across its new views regarding current war issues. One of the first issues the WSPU tackled during wartime was the question of women laborers; not surprisingly, the WSPU was a major proponent of female labor and argued that allowing women to work in war industries would free more men to fight in the war.²⁷³ In light of the munitions shortage of 1915, the WSPU called on the government to open industry jobs to women in order to relieve the shortage; in fact, the WSPU even joined forces with Lloyd George to petition the government to allow women to enter wartime industry.²⁷⁴ On July 15, 1915, the WSPU, with the support of Lloyd George, organized the Great Procession of Women or the Right to Serve March, the biggest single event in the

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁷² Wingerden, 156; Smith, 27.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 29.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

campaign to get women in the workforce.²⁷⁵ Surprisingly, Lloyd George and the WSPU became close allies throughout the remainder of the war; this relationship would be a crucial factor in women's achieving the vote in 1918.²⁷⁶

The WSPU also took up more ideological causes related to the war, specifically strong opposition to pacifism and Bolshevism. Christabel Pankhurst especially denounced pacifists as traitors to Britain and called for the complete destruction of Germany in the post-war society, calling for a "No Compromise Peace" that was similar in nature to the Treaty of Versailles.²⁷⁷ The WSPU was also highly suspicious of unionism and saw it as being detrimental to the war efforts because it decreased wartime productivity.²⁷⁸ The WSPU's distrust of unionism only increased with the rise of Bolshevism in Russia in 1917.²⁷⁹ Even with the addition of these new causes, the WSPU still promoted women's suffrage and hinted at the war of the sexes. For example, Christabel Pankhurst often described the war itself as a war of sexes, with the German masculine culture attempting to ravage the more refined feminine cultures of Britain, France, and Belgium.²⁸⁰ However, the primary focus of the WSPU throughout the war years was the organization's contributions to the war with the suffrage movement being of secondary importance. Because of this approach, the WSPU experienced a significant loss of membership when two splinter groups left the main WSPU to form two organizations- the Suffragettes of the WSPU and the Independent WSPU- in order to focus on the suffrage movement during the war years.²⁸¹

²⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 29.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 29.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 27.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 30.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 30.

²⁸⁰ Wingerden, 157.

²⁸¹ Smith, 28.

Like the WSPU, the constitutional suffrage societies did not immediately embrace the war. These societies adopted a pacifist stance in the crisis leading up to the outbreak of the war; in fact, the International Woman Suffrage Alliance (of which the NUWSS was a member) issued an International Manifesto of Women protesting what appeared to be an impending war and women's inability to have an impact on the government's actions to prevent it.²⁸² This Manifesto, developed prior to the outbreak of the war, was delivered to the British embassy and other major foreign embassies in London on July 31.²⁸³ To follow up this pacifist stance, a Women's Peace Meeting was held in London hours before Britain declared war on August 4.²⁸⁴

Following the official announcement of the war, however, Millicent Fawcett of the NUWSS revoked the pacifist stance of her organization and advocated directing the organization's resources to alleviating the suffering that would inevitably be inflicted upon the civilian population as a result of the war.²⁸⁵ However, many members were not satisfied with Fawcett's abandonment of the suffrage campaign, and the NUWSS split into two factions in early 1915 over the question of supporting the war. Half of the NUWSS executive council resigned from the main organization to support pacifism and women's suffrage on the international scale.²⁸⁶ The remaining half of the NUWSS, under the leadership of Fawcett, continued its full support of the war and maintained that the suffrage movement was not inconsistent in supporting the war. The war, much like the women's suffrage movement, was a question of principle.²⁸⁷

²⁸² Wingerden, 155.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 155.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 158.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

In a similar manner to the WSPU, the constitutional suffrage societies played a major role in the British war effort. Like the Pankhursts, Millicent Fawcett of the NUWSS saw the war as an opportunity to have women put forth their best efforts in contributing to the war effort while, at the same, proving themselves deserving of the vote.²⁸⁸ The NUWSS went to great lengths to help women contribute to the war effort in meaningful ways, especially indicated by the development of the Women's Service Bureau.²⁸⁹ The Women's Service Bureau served a number of functions including employing women in all sectors of the workforce and providing women with technical training in preparation for work in munitions factories.²⁹⁰ While the Women's Service Bureau focused on women in the war effort, it still retained an emphasis on women's rights and the non-militant suffrage movement. For instance, the Women's Service Bureau insisted that women be paid appropriately for their labor; in one situation, female welders were even able to obtain payment equal to that of their male counterparts.²⁹¹

Powerful examples of suffragettes' contributions to the war effort were not limited to participation in the traditional suffrage organizations. For example, formerly militant suffragettes found an outlet for their spirit through the Women's Police (WP), an organization established by Margaret Damer Dawson and Nina Boyle of the WFL in 1914.²⁹² These women police officers were primarily concerned with so-called "women's issues" and handled such matters as prostitution, loiterers in public places like army camps, serving as assistants in civilian air practices, and guarding munitions factories

²⁸⁸ Smith, 71.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid*, 72.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 73.

²⁹¹ *Ibid*, 74.

²⁹² *Ibid*, 75.

primarily worked by female war laborers.²⁹³ Also important to the home front efforts was the Women's Land Army, established in 1917 to address the food shortages caused by a lack of men to work the fields.²⁹⁴ In addition to contributing on the home front as industrial laborers, women police, and agricultural workers, women had the opportunity to join organizations that would allow them to work on the European continent near the battlefields including the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps established in 1917 or Women's Royal Naval Service and Women's Royal Air Force Service developed in the later part of the war.²⁹⁵ Finally, women had the chance to serve on the front lines in two different capacities- the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry (FANY) or nursing. The FANY trained women to gain the more technical skills of driving and mechanics, both skills which often took women to the frontlines.²⁹⁶

Despite the huge female contributions in non-traditional roles, women continued to have an enormous impact on nursing, typically considered a traditional role for women both in wartime and during times of peace.²⁹⁷ Many nurses were in favor of women's rights and participated in the suffrage movement prior to the outbreak of war; in fact, the participation of nurses in the suffrage movement had lent a sense of respectability to what was often considered an unrespectable cause in early twentieth-century Britain.²⁹⁸ World War I provides the first example of female doctors near the front lines.²⁹⁹ Dr. Louisa Garrett Anderson and Dr. Flora Murray, both suffragette members of the WSPU, founded

²⁹³ *Ibid*, 76.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 77.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid*, 77.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 77.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 78.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 78.

the Women's Hospital in Paris in September 1914.³⁰⁰ This hospital near the front lines proved to be so successful that the British government gave the two doctors complete control of a major military hospital in London.³⁰¹ The doctors, as well as the nurses who worked for them, were true to their suffragette roots and wore the distinctive purple, white, and green badges of the WSPU while caring for the wounded in the military hospitals.³⁰²

While many women- both suffragettes and non-suffragettes- made significant contributions to the war effort, many suffragettes took a firm pacifist stance or strictly continued the suffrage movement. These pacifist suffragettes had generally condemned the violence of militancy before the war.³⁰³ Their main protest against the war was that it was a result of the breakdown of a male dominated government; these pacifist suffragettes argued that, had women been given the vote prior to the war, they would have been able to prevent the war from starting.³⁰⁴ This pacifist argument was revolutionary in suffrage rhetoric in that it not only criticized the government for preventing women from having an active role in government but questioned men's ability to use their political rights in an effective manner.³⁰⁵ In this manner, pacifist suffragettes saw the war itself as the best possible argument in favor of women's enfranchisement.³⁰⁶ There was also a small group of suffragettes who continued to focus solely on the suffrage movement without contributing to the war effort.³⁰⁷ These women justified their actions saying that the essential question of justice behind the suffrage movement was of

³⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 79.

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, 78.

³⁰² *Ibid*, 79.

³⁰³ Wingerden, 158.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 159.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, 159.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 159.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 165.

greater importance than the war.³⁰⁸ These women were highly criticized by other suffragettes for their actions and it is often believed that these uncompromising suffragettes actually did more harm to the suffrage movement than anything else.³⁰⁹

Women's suffrage became a parliamentary issue once again in 1916.³¹⁰ The question of women's enfranchisement was brought before Parliament at the same time as the question of franchise extension to sailors and soldiers currently serving in the British navy and army who would be prevented from voting in the next general election by a residency requirement.³¹¹ In August 1916, the government officially proposed to revise the Parliamentary Register to allow servicemen to vote. Asquith then suggested women should also be given the vote based on their outstanding contributions to the war effort: "they cannot fight in the gross material sense of going out with rifles and so forth, but they fill our munitions factories, they are doing the work which the men who are fighting had to perform before, they have taken their places, they are the servants of the State, and they have aided in the most effective way in the prosecution of the war."³¹² Reaffirming the government's endorsement of women's suffrage, the Conference on Electoral Reform agreed that women should be enfranchised in their decision published in early 1917.³¹³

Acting upon the decision of the Conference on Electoral Reform, the House of Commons passed the Representation of the People Act upon its introduction in May 1917.³¹⁴ The bill was then passed in the House of Lords in January 1918. On February 6, 1918, the Representation of the People Act became a law, enfranchising all women thirty

³⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 165.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid*, 165.

³¹⁰ *Ibid*, 165.

³¹¹ *Ibid*, 166.

³¹² *Ibid*, 167.

³¹³ *Ibid*, 167.

³¹⁴ *Ibid*, 170.

years of age or older, householders or wives of householders, those women who occupied property with an annual rate of £5 or more, and graduates of British universities.³¹⁵ This act enfranchised approximately 8.5 million women.³¹⁶ British women had finally achieved the right to vote!

³¹⁵ *Ibid*, 169; Purvis, “‘Deeds, Not Words’ Daily life in the Women’s Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain,” 150.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 150.

AFTER THE VOTE

After the introduction of the Representation of the People Act in the House of Commons in May 1917, the suffrage movement slowly ceased to exist. The NUWSS renamed itself the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), turning itself away from the suffrage movement to promoting equal female citizenship.³¹⁷ The new organization championed female equality with men in all aspects of life, especially in education and the work force.³¹⁸ Likewise, the WSPU changed its name to the Women's Party in November 1917 and adopted a new motto of "Victory, National Security, and Progress."³¹⁹ Following the formal passage of the Representation of the People Act in early 1918, the Women's Party encouraged women to vote in such a manner that would change society.³²⁰ The newly established organization also promoted equal rights for women and had a strong anti-German, anti-Bolshevik mentality.³²¹ The reorganization of the two most prominent suffrage organizations following the enactment of the Representation of the People Act in 1918 clearly marks the abandonment of a defined suffrage movement in Britain.³²²

The three major leaders of the suffrage movement- Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and Millicent Fawcett- also removed themselves from the suffrage movement following the passage of the Representation of the People Act. Following the end of the war, Emmeline Pankhurst moved to Canada for six years, where she participated in a speaking tour promoting moral hygiene on behalf of the National Council of Combating

³¹⁷ Wingerden, 172.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, 172.

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, 173.

³²⁰ *Ibid*, 173.

³²¹ *Ibid*, 174.

³²² *Ibid*, 176.

Venereal Diseases.³²³ After a failed attempt at a British tea shop in France, Emmeline Pankhurst moved back to Britain where she ran for a Conservative seat in Parliament in the 1928 election.³²⁴ However, she died during the campaigning period only weeks before suffrage was granted to women on an equal basis with men.³²⁵ A memorial statue of Emmeline Pankhurst was dedicated in Victoria Tower Gardens in 1930 next to the Houses of Parliament.³²⁶ Christabel Pankhurst ran for Parliament in election of 1918 but lost by a small number of votes.³²⁷ She withdrew from politics following the collapse of the Women's Party in 1919 and converted to Second Adventism, the religious movement to which she dedicated the remainder of her life.³²⁸ She was named Dame Commander of the British Empire in 1936 for her work with the women's suffrage movement.³²⁹ Sylvia Pankhurst remained politically active in the years immediately following World War I and joined the British Communist Party from which her membership was later revoked for her belief in personal freedoms.³³⁰ She moved to Italy with a lover with whom she had a son in 1927; and dedicated the remainder of her life to aiding people in fascist countries including Italy, Spain, and Ethiopia.³³¹ Millicent Fawcett retired from the presidency of the NUWSS in 1919 and became a government appointed magistrate in 1920.³³² She was given the title Dame Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Dame Grand Cross of

³²³ *Ibid*, 176.

³²⁴ *Ibid*, 176-177.

³²⁵ *Ibid*, 177.

³²⁶ *Ibid*, 177.

³²⁷ *Ibid*, 177.

³²⁸ *Ibid*, 177.

³²⁹ *Ibid*, 177.

³³⁰ *Ibid*, 177.

³³¹ *Ibid*, 177-178.

³³² *Ibid*, 178.

the Order of the British Empire in 1925 in recognition of her contribution to the suffrage movement.³³³

Despite the abandonment of the formal suffrage movement, women continued to make strides toward voting equality with men over the next decade. In November 1918, a bill allowing women to run for the House of Commons was passed; in fact, one woman was elected in the election held in December 1918.³³⁴ Women were finally granted equal voting rights with men on July 2, 1928, after which all women twenty-one years of age and older were allowed to vote.³³⁵

The British women's suffrage movement, made famous by its strength and violence, had achieved remarkable results for women in both 1918 and 1928. The suffrage movement of the early twentieth century is a true testament to the power of the masses and the vital importance of enfranchisement in a democratic society. Britain was the first of the Allied countries of World War I to grant its female citizens the right to vote, setting a powerful example of female enfranchisement that women throughout the world would strive to follow in the remaining part of the twentieth century.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 178.

³³⁴ Fulford, 305.

³³⁵ Purvis, "'Deeds, Not Words' Daily life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain," 150.

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