

“Votes for Ladies” - The women's suffrage movement in Britain.



National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies



Women's Social and Political Union



Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst



Hierarchy of the WSPU



“We want our women to walk in step and take their instructions like an Army.”

**Christabel was the official leader
of the WSPU**



“The Houses of Parliament shall be more impressed by the demonstrations of the feminine Bourgeoisie than of the feminine Proletariat.”

“a working woman's movement is of no value; working women are the weakest position of the sex; how could it be otherwise? Their lives are too hard, their education too meager to equip them for the contest. Surely it is a mistake to use the weakest for the struggle. We want picked women, the very strongest and the most intelligent.”

The WSPU campaigned for the vote for women on *equal* terms to men. Whether a man could vote depended upon a property qualification.



Critics claimed this was not
“Votes for Women” but “Votes for
Ladies”.

Dora Montefiore, Adelaide Knight and the Canning Town Branch



“They have broken their
promises to working
women.”

Adella Pankhurst – the “Black Sheep among organisers”



Teresa Billington-Grieg



Opposed the undemocratic organisation of the WSPU and founded the Women's Freedom League.

“It has cut down its demand from one of sex equality to one of votes on a limited basis. It has suppressed free speech on fundamental issues. It has gradually edged the working class element out of the ranks. It has become socially exclusive, punctiliously correct, gracefully fashionable, ultra-respectable and narrowly religious.”

Many radical female chartists distanced themselves from the suffrage movement because it was seen to be very middle class.

Suffragettes imprisoned in Holloway jail



Encounters with the police



They were campaigning to be recognized as being as strong, responsible, mature and worthy of respect as men, and then undermining it by playing on the patriarchal perception that women were frail, helpless creatures who had to be treated with greater care and special consideration.

Hurst Park Racecourse – Suffragette Arson Attack 1913



“Our members are absolutely single minded; they concentrate all their forces on one object, political equality with men. No member of the WSPU divides her attention between suffrage and other social reforms.”

Sylvia Pankhurst



The East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS)



The WSPU suspended all its militant activities when war broke out in 1914 began a vigorous patriotic campaign working with the government.



IN A NEIGHBOURHOOD NOTED BEFORE THE WAR FOR MILITANT SUFFRAGETTE DEMONSTRATIONS ! THE PROCESSION IN THE SHADOW OF THE HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT.



The Suffragette Newspaper "Votes for Women" was patriotically renamed "Britannia".

In 1918, in the Representation of the People act, women over 30 who were on the local government register or met the property qualifications previously imposed on men were granted the vote.

The Radical Suffragists



“No cause can be won between dinner and tea, and most of us who were married had to work with one hand tied behind us.”

Helen Silcock raised the issue of female suffrage at the notoriously hostile TUC in 1901 which led to the call for a motion for adult suffrage by the TUC at that very conference.

“It is said that women are sufficiently protected by their husbands. I would point out that not all women are wives. There are in fact 5 million working women in this country who have to earn their own livelihood, some protection should be extended to them, so that by means of the vote they may assist in bringing about legislation which will enable them to live and not merely exist.”

Selina Cooper



Selina became the first working class woman to be elected as a poor law guardian and was chosen to present a petition to parliament on women's suffrage.

“Women do not want their political power enable them to boast that they are on equal terms with men. They want it for the same purpose as men – to better conditions ... make the lot of the worker pleasenter ... We do not want it as a mere plaything!”

For Christabel and the WSPU the movement was the struggle for privileged and educated women to take their seat in their government and represent their class interests.

For Sylvia, the ELFS, the Radical Suffragists and other working class groups, the suffrage movement was the struggle for freedom from want, poverty and oppression and they saw enfranchisement as a stepping stone to social reform.

